

# THE BLACK HAND

A GUIDE TO THE TAL'MAHE'RA



20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

VAMPIRE  
THE MASQUERADE

# THE BLACK HAND

A GUIDE TO THE TAL'MAHE'RA



20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION  
VAMPIRE  
THE MASQUERADE

### **Choice is an illusion. There are only the chosen.**

I stood in front of the painting and tried to remember what it was like to cry. Some muscle

memory of the sensation still remained in the muscles around my eyes, the tight and stinging

feeling, how it deepened in the chest and made it hard to breathe and hard to talk. It used to bring

heat to my skin and the feeling of moisture in the form of tears and mucus was familiar as it was

frustrating. The release of tears brought relief and shame. Now I rarely felt either of those things.

The art of William Blake used to move me. I was named after him, Blake. My parents were art students in South America decades ago and they gave me, their only daughter, this name in the hopes it would help me assimilate better to the mainland. Instead it just confused everyone. One of the things that enamored me to my sire, before I knew what her intentions were to me and before I was Embraced, was how she never asked me about my name. Where it came from, why it was chosen for me, why I kept it. The day I saw her for what she was, I knew she was old and had heard so many names given and chosen, seen the trampling and coalescing of cultures and languages time and time again. It wasn't curious. It was a given. And when I awoke, the shock of empty veins rattling hollow within my body, I knew names didn't matter either. Just blood. It's promise and fulfillment.

The William Blake Exhibit had come to New York City and as it was winter, I was able to visit the museum for hours at a time. Days were short and the time I could walk among the rest of humanity was longer. The city reeked heavily of progress, especially in this edifice which held tombs of long dead rulers. I knew many individuals older than the pieces in the museum, but I still enjoyed going whenever I could, especially in the winter. I knew children came here in the mornings, lively and excited from school, their energy bouncing from wall to ceiling. Evening at the museum was mostly adults, some families with small children.

They came to feel the stretch of time, to reach back with their eyes into the depths of humanity and see the beauty which had been wrought over the years. They came to compare themselves to those societies and cultures of old, to see what was good back then and compare it to now. To become inspired. To laugh at the nudity. This last one is true, I would never pretend otherwise. I saw them.

I went to try and be moved. To be moved by these relics of time and passion and see what I could do. I looked at the careful line work, the way the paint soaked into or lay on top of the canvas, observed the cool hardness of marble and the austere gleam of fine metals. I tried to feel more like those observing the art on the pedestals and behind the glass and less like the objects. I watched people talk about the pieces.

Holding hands. Excitedly chatting. Mouths open, in awe.

When I would go to the museum, I was often not the only one of my kind there. New York City is a metropolis in every sense of the word and my fellow Kindred and other creatures, both bearable and deplorable, often crossed my path as I walked the hallways. It was neutral ground. So I wasn't at all surprised when another stood beside me the eleventh time I went to go to the exhibit.

"You like his art a lot, don't you?" I'd seen her in the museum before, but never spoken to her. She was dressed for the cold weather, not for her needs, as was I. I remember her gloves and I thought maybe she had just come in from the cold, but now that many years have passed, I know better.

"It's a compulsion," I said with half a smile. In those days, I could manage to be endearing, or at least thought I was liked.

"And what compels you to come to this exhibit eleven times in the last twenty days?" I remember being surprised she knew that. It took me a while to answer her as I tried to think of what to say.

"I just really like his art," I said, smiling, my hands in my pockets. "And I'm named after him."

"William?" she asked with a cocked eyebrow. Her brown eyes were so cold, like all of us. She joked, friendly.

"Blake," I answered. I waited a few seconds before I asked. "And may I know your name?"

"It's Anahita," the woman replied. "You come here so much, but I always see you stand for an hour at one plate. Tell me, why do you?"

Another vampire watching me without my noticing alarmed me. The fact she didn't say it as a threat surprised me. It was a question of curiosity from an elder vampire caught me off guard yet again. I knew which piece she was referring to. I gestured for her to follow me.

"It's this one," I said. I pointed to it. She stood in front of the plate and furrowed her brow.

"It's rather plain compared to his other work, isn't it?"

"It is," I asked. "But the words are what I like. "If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot.""

"You sound like a lot of others of our kind," she said with a grin. I could see her teeth.

"But then there is this," I said, walking over to the next plate. ""The desire of Man being infinite, the possession is infinite and himself infinite."" I looked at the image, reaching up towards the heavens William Blake had depicted.

"What does it mean to you?" Anahita asked me. I knew she would. I shrugged, even though I knew the answer to her question.

"That I'm not just here to eat until they're all dead," I murmured. "Despair may be my eternal lot, but that does not mean I do not share something with these people who come here as well. Desire. It is something I still feel, and not just to be sated. And it elevates me beyond this life I lead. Eternal is not the same as infinite." I stared at the image on the wall again, thinking about the words.

"Do you wish to be infinite?" Anahita asked. She was still smiling, and I thought she was maybe making fun of me. "Does your sire know you speak like this?"

"She does," I laughed. "She asks me not to go on about poetry too much, as my understanding is, as she puts it, infantile."

"A common complaint among sires, I can assure you," Anahita said. "While I am not a fan of Blake per se, as I have issues with certain artists who came after him, I must admit that I do have a favorite piece." She motioned for me to follow her and I did, looking back over my shoulder at the pieces we had just examined before we entered the next room. Humans moved out of our way as we walked, parting like schools of fish as we cut through the crowds. I followed behind her, wondering if my sire knew her and if this would be the last time I would see her.

Anahita slowed and crossed her arms over her chest, a smile curling at the corners of her mouth. "I like this one."

"Enoch," I said. I chuckled slightly, looking down at the floor.

"What's funny?" Anahita asked.

"It's just always interesting when things repeat," I said, looking to the side. "I and many others speak of stretching on and yet here is the name, Enoch, again and again."

Anahita stands close to me. If she had warmth, I would have been able to feel her heat. Instead I just smell the familiar smell we as Kindred have, of hot hunger turned cold, and her perfume, which smelled slightly of myrrh and saffron.

"I heard someone say that William Blake was part of the Black Hand."

"Really," I said, raising an eyebrow. "William Blake? And which line did he belong to?"

"Depends on who you ask," Anahita replied with a slow shrug. "If he was even one of us. There are some who say his wife Catherine was a member, and she kept him safe during their years together before he died, as she couldn't bring herself to Embrace him. And that there are secrets about the Black Hand in his work."

I laughed out loud. Anahita looked amused. "Why do you laugh, young one?"

"The Hand, if it's real, is old." I said, looking at the print. "But the secrets are in something so fresh, so new? I can almost smell the wet ink on these."

Now she laughed, putting her gloved hands together and nodding. "So you say. Tell me, where would you look for clues for their existence, what they want, what they are doing?"

I thought about the question as I started at the image Anahita had picked and the figures therein, both human and beyond human.

"Nothing we have is new," I said. "I'd look back. I know the elders believe. I would ask those who believed."

"And what if they all had different answers, as to whether it was real and what it was? Many of us are old and our fear of what is new has stretched back to color what is old."

"I wouldn't expect to hit on the answer right away," I replied. "It's not the kind of answer one receives. It's the kind of answer which must be excavated and revealed."

"True enough," Anahita said, nodding slightly. She then smiled and held her hand out for me to take in hers. I wondered if she wanted me to shake her hand or kiss it. "It was a pleasure speaking with you, Blake. If I see you in the future, I hope you would not mind my engaging you in conversation again."

"Who am I to refuse you?" I said, taking her hand in mine. I kissed the soft, brown leather, felt her slender yet strong fingers within the glove.

"You know your place well, young Blake," Anahita laughed. Her eyes almost sparkled when she said it. "You know full well already there is no choice. There are only the chosen." She leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. Her lips were dry under her lipstick as they pressed against my own cold cheek. "Until we meet again."

I only nodded and watched her go, dressed in her outdoor clothes to some other part of the museum or perhaps to leave. I told myself I might see her again in the museum as I strolled through the entirety of the Blake exhibit several times and then wandered out, past the European art, Asian art, African art, and finally found my way to the Middle Eastern section. I always wished the art was broken up in a different way.

The sarcophagus is what draws me, the hulking stone, dark and formidable, kept safe behind glass and velvet ropes. The carvings, barely worn by time, run along the side in a continual loop so that the viewer cannot tell where the inscriber started and ended. At the head of the sarcophagus is a figure, sculpted in relief, protruding slightly from the rest of the surrounding stone.

"And in her Hand, Lilitu holds the keys to Enoch, and she shall open the door with her Black Hand. The chosen shall enter and know." I read it out loud, quietly.

## Credits

**Authors:** Maggie Carroll, Matthew Dawkins, Tanya Coen Diaz, Danielle Harper, David A Hill Jr, Daniel Lanman, Marianne Pease, Neall Raemonn Price, Myranda Sarro, Malcolm Sheppard, Tristan Tarwater, Steffie de Vaan, Filamena Young

**Developer:** David A Hill Jr

**V20 Line Developer:** Eddy Webb

**Editor:** Renee Ritchie

**Artists:** Sam Araya, Mark Kelly, Drew Tucker, Borja Puig Linares, Vince Locke, Michael Gaydos, Bryan Syme, Aaron Acevedo, Rachel Kahn, Ken Meyer Jr.

**Front Cover Artist:** Michael Gaydos

**Art Direction and Design:** Michael Chaney

**Creative Director:** Richard Thomas

## Special Thanks

Thanks to the original crew of Dirty Secrets of the Black Hand. You taught us what **Vampire** is capable of. You pushed the limits. You made us ask questions. You made us talk. Storytelling games are about the conversation, and you've made for so much awesome conversation.

I'm not saying it was aliens. But it was aliens.



© 2016 White Wolf Publishing. 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, World of Darkness, Vampire the Masquerade, and Mage the Ascension are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing AB. All rights reserved. Vampire the Requiem, Werewolf the Apocalypse, Werewolf the Forsaken, Mage the Awakening, Promethean the Created, Changeling the Lost, Hunter the Vigil, Geist the Sin-Eaters, V20, Anarchs Unbound, Storyteller System, and Storytelling System are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing AB

All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing AB.

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.

Check out White Wolf online at <http://www.white-wolf.com/>

Keep up to date with Onyx Path Publishing at <http://theonyxpath.com/>

# THE BLACK HAND

## A GUIDE TO THE TAL'MAHE'RA

### Table of Contents

<b>The Dark Conspiracy: Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>	<i>Themes</i>	37
<i>What's In This Book</i>	12	<i>Moods</i>	37
Lexicon	12	<b>The Hand Concealed: Activity and Ideology</b>	37
<b>Chapter One:</b>		<i>The False Hand</i>	38
<b>Black as Hell, Dark as Night</b>	<b>19</b>	<i>Taken by the Hand</i>	38
<b>The Ages Past:</b>		<b>The Hand Revealed</b>	39
<b>A History of Darkness</b>	19	<i>The Palm</i>	39
<b>The Two Hands</b>	20	<i>The Fingers</i>	42
<i>The Eastern Hand (800 BCE)</i>	20	<b>Character Creation</b>	48
<i>The Western Hand (650 BCE)</i>	21	<i>Building the Beast</i>	48
<i>East Meets West (500 BCE)</i>	22	<i>Step 0: Level of Play</i>	48
<i>The War of the Betrayers (450 BCE)</i>	23	<i>Step One: Concept</i>	49
<i>Caine Ascendant (200 BCE)</i>	24	<i>Steps Two and Three: Attributes and Abilities</i>	50
<i>The Long Night (1100 CE)</i>	24	<i>Step Four: Advantages</i>	50
<i>The Revolt (1400 CE)</i>	24	<i>Disciplines</i>	51
<b>The Other Black Hand</b>	26	<i>Virtues</i>	51
<i>The Fall of Enoch (1600 CE)</i>	27	<i>Step Five: Final Touches</i>	51
<i>Reunification (1725 CE)</i>	28	<i>Tal'mahe'Ra Preludes</i>	51
<b>Modern Nights</b>	29	<i>Elder Beasts</i>	52
<i>The Hand Opens</i>	29	<b>Hand Paths of Enlightenment</b>	53
<i>The Hand behind the Curtain</i>	30	<i>Via Hyron: The Path of the Hive</i>	53
<i>The Hand behind the Sabbat</i>	31	<i>The Path of the Scorched Heart</i>	55
<i>The Other Black Hand</i>	32	<i>The Path of Self-Focus</i>	58
<i>Rumors and Lies</i>	33	<b>Chapter Two:</b>	
<i>The Hand Unaligned</i>	33	<b>Bahari – Cult of the Dark Mother</b>	<b>63</b>
<i>The Hand in Anarchy</i>	34	<b>The Bahari Mission</b>	64
<i>The Hand in Motion: Modern Affairs</i>	34	<b>The Way of Lilith</b>	65
<i>Special Relations</i>	35	<i>Doctrines of the Bahari</i>	66

Sects of the Bahari	68	Ghosts	143
<i>The Azicithra</i>	68	<b>Idran: The Fallen Necromancers</b>	144
<i>The Red Midwives</i>	68	<i>Duty and Living Death</i>	145
<i>The Thorn Garden</i>	69	<b>Modern Idran</b>	146
<i>The Lilin Witches</i>	70	<b>Itarajana Sorcery</b>	147
<i>The Nightshade Path (Necromancy)</i>	70	<i>Foundation: The Dharma</i>	147
<b>The Path of Lilith</b>	73	<i>Pillars: The Lokas</i>	147
<i>Rise like the Mother</i>	73	<b>Awakened Blood</b>	151
<b>Apocrypha of Lilith: The Analect of Names</b>	78	<i>Embracing a Magus</i>	151
<b>Thaumaturgy Path:</b>		<i>Ghoul Magi</i>	151
<b>The Blessings of the Great Dark Mother</b>	86	<i>Sorcery and the Curse of Caine</i>	152
<b>Chapter Three: The Dark Below</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>Blood Familiars</b>	152
<b>Infernalism: The Long Crusade</b>	92	<i>Using Blood Familiars</i>	153
<i>A Brief History of Damnation</i>	92	<b>Archaic Sorcery</b>	154
<i>This Means War</i>	94	<i>Creating an Archaic Sorcerer</i>	154
<i>Weapons in the Fight</i>	97	<b>Spinning the Wheel of Sorcery</b>	155
<b>Dark Thaumaturgy: The Devils' Brew</b>	99	<i>Creating the Spell</i>	155
<i>The Archdukes of Hell</i>	100	<i>Casting the Spell</i>	155
<i>The Children of the Outer Dark</i>	101	<i>Resisting Spells</i>	156
<i>Wells of Sacrifice</i>	102	<i>Quintessence: The Blood of Creation</i>	156
<i>Countervailing Forces:</i>		<i>Spell Aspects</i>	156
<i>Dur-an-Ki and Koldunic Sorcery</i>	104	<i>Success, Failure, and the Scourge</i>	158
<i>Dark Thaumaturgy within the Tal'Mahe'Ra</i>	105	<b>Apprentice Blood Familiar</b>	159
<i>The Denizens of Hell and</i>		<b>Kindred Lineages</b>	160
<i>Other Sundry Spiritual Realms</i>	106	<b>Harbingers of Skulls</b>	161
<b>Asakku:</b>		<b>Nagaraja</b>	163
<b>The Fevered Curse</b>	108	<b>Old Clan Tzimisce</b>	165
<i>Whispers from Afar, Whispers from Within</i>	108	<b>Maeghar</b>	167
<i>Andeleon's Folly</i>	109	<b>New Disciplines</b>	169
<i>Children of the Loyal Angels</i>	110	<i>Koldunism (Koldunic Sorcery)</i>	169
<i>Two Millennia of War</i>	111	<i>Necromancy</i>	174
<i>The Corrupted Way</i>	114	<i>New Necromancy Ritual</i>	176
<i>The Path of Asakku</i>	115	<b>Merits and Flaws</b>	177
<b>The City that Caine Built</b>	118	<i>Physical</i>	177
<i>The First City</i>	118	<i>Mental</i>	177
<i>Necropolis Enoch</i>	120	<i>Social</i>	177
<i>The Black Citadel</i>	126	<i>Supernatural</i>	178
<i>The Forgotten Necropoli</i>	127	<b>Diablerie and Golconda</b>	180
<b>The Aralu</b>	129	<i>Diablerie</i>	180
<i>Nosferatu, Toreador, and Ventrue</i>	129	<i>Possession</i>	180
<i>The Lilin</i>	130	<i>Seeking Golconda</i>	181
<i>The Baali</i>	131	<b>Chapter Five: Stealing the Dead</b>	<b>187</b>
<i>The Nephilim</i>	132	<b>Introduction</b>	187
<i>The Unknown</i>	132	<b>Backstory</b>	187
<b>Chapter Four: Dirty Secrets</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>Chronicle Map</b>	188
<b>Those Among the Damned</b>	139	<i>Hook – Antoinette's Task</i>	188
<i>Abominations</i>	139	<i>Scene 1 – The Crash</i>	188
<i>Fae</i>	142	<i>Scene 2 – Entering Enoch</i>	188

<i>Scene 3 – Meeting the Del’Roh</i>	189	<i>The Labyrinth</i>	192
<i>Scene 4 – Antoinette’s Contact</i>	189	<b>Cast</b>	192
<i>Scene 5 – Encountering the Idran</i>	189	<i>Sample Characters</i>	201
<i>Scene 6 – Bahari Ambush</i>	189	<b>Hook – Antoinette’s Task</b>	203
<i>Scene 7 – Bahari Instructions</i>	189	<b>Scene 1: The Crash</b>	203
<i>Scene 8 – Working with Pietro (Optional)</i>	189	<b>Scene 2: Entering Enoch</b>	205
<i>Scene 9 – Contacting Allies</i>	189	<b>Scene 3: Meeting the Del’Roh</b>	207
<i>Scene 10 – The Getaway Car</i>	190	<b>Scene 4: Antoinette’s Contact</b>	207
<i>Scene 11 – Palace Heist</i>	190	<b>Scene 5: Encountering the Idran</b>	209
<i>Scene 12 – Race to the Byway</i>	190	<b>Scene 6: Bahari Ambush</b>	210
<i>Scene 13 – Aftermath</i>	190	<b>Scene 7: Bahari Instructions</b>	211
<b>The Slums of Enoch</b>	190	<b>Scene 8: Working with Pietro</b>	212
<i>Safe Haven</i>	191	<b>Scene 9: Contacting Allies</b>	213
<i>Bahari Stronghold</i>	191	<b>Scene 10: The Getaway Car</b>	214
<i>Idran Stronghold</i>	191	<b>Scene 11: Palace Heist</b>	215
<i>Order of Moloch Stronghold</i>	191	<b>Scene 12: Race to the Byway</b>	217
<i>The Dread Palace Ghemal</i>	191	<b>Aftermath</b>	219
<i>The Entrance to the Catacombs</i>	192	<b>Characters</b>	220





"I think someone is following me."

It was five years after my first encounter with Anahita. I was sitting in the parlor of my sire, Ophelia, laying on my back on one of her many couches with my legs up in the air, leaning against the wall. My head hung upside down and I was watching her make a flower arrangement of dark red sunflowers and black irises. She continued to cut the stems, measuring the flowers against the vase she put them in.

"I think you have been spending too much time with Pallas," came her reply, dry as my mouth.

"I don't spend enough time with Pallas," I said.

"I don't think you should publish her unremembered words in any form," Ophelia said. The sharp sound of a scissor cutting across vegetal membranes makes her words sound more final.

"You told me this already," I said. "I don't care about Camarilla favor. And I'm not stupid to put my name on it. I know how to remain hidden. And Pallas' words are interesting. I'm sure we can make a bit of cash off of it."

"The wrong person is bound to find it, and fame is often short-lived," she said, placing the flower in the vase. "And while I know you're smart enough to get away with it, someone older than myself may not. You know how we get in our old age."

"I know," I said, like an adolescent to her parent. "Still, I think someone may be following me and I don't think it's Pallas rubbing off on me, Ophelia." I turned and sat upright on the bed, placing my feet on the floor and leaning back against the wall. I could feel it, the tacky velvet wallpaper Ophelia liked through my thin shirt.

"What do you want me to do?" Ophelia asked, turning her head to look at me. She shook her head. "You're hungry, so you're growing paranoid. If you eat, you won't make excuses. Go find something to eat."

"This is beyond excuses," I sighed.

"You're not important enough for anyone to follow, Blake," Ophelia laughed. My face must have betrayed my bruised feelings because she laughed again. "Oh, my poor baby, did I hurt you?"

"No," I lied.

"You can't be special all your life, Blake," she said, a grin starting to curl the corners of her mouth. "You were special to me and you still are, but unlife is complicated enough without being some chosen one. Though I do choose you to go get me more flowers." She took some cash from the pocket of a jacket draped over the chair, and held it out towards me. "Go to the

flower shop on Third Avenue please, not 6th Street. The flowers aren't as good."

"I know," I said, again, like an adolescent. I pushed myself off the couch and took the money from her, shoving it into my pocket. "Anything else?"

"A pack of batteries. AAA," she said, not bothering to look up from her flowers.

"Yes, Ophelia." I walked to the doorway and slipped on my boots, tying them on quickly before I slipped out the door, letting it close quietly behind me. Ophelia hated when I slammed it.

It was autumn so it was cold outside. If I had a breath, it would have steamed when I breathed out but everything about me was cold and dry. I walked down the empty street, listening for others out this late at night.

I knew which route to take. All Kindred have their paths and sections, places we are allowed, lines we do not cross. I could walk on the east side of the avenue while the other side was hostile territory. My head down as I walked, I noticed someone walking on the opposite side of the street. I squinted and then held back a snarl.

I knew this one. Agda. Older than me and an enemy. A young, drunk, and dirty human walked behind her like a puppy dog. I could see the glint of something metal in Agda's hands and saw they were handcuffs. Agda turned and glanced over her shoulder, and when she caught me in her sight, she grinned, her teeth gleaming white and sharp. She could smell how hungry I was, so she stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, turning to her quarry.

No one was on the street besides us. I stopped for a second, thinking standing there and watching might stop her. But Agda waited as the youth who followed her approached. The vampire reached out and placed her arms around her victim's neck, like a lover might. I could feel how hungry Agda was. Not as hungry as me. The handcuffs dangled from her thumb, behind her prey who had followed her down the street, where I could do nothing. Agda winked at me before she opened her mouth.

A pop went off. Both bodies jerked. I jumped, startled by the sound, and looked around, trying to see where it had come from. Footsteps across the street spun me around and I saw a hooded figure reaching down, a short, downward motion ending Agda's unlife. Whoever was in the hood looked up and set their eyes on me before turning and running into the alley.

The human moved. I could smell the hot thickness of her blood, spreading across the filth of the concrete

sidewalk and I swallowed hard. She would bleed out on the sidewalk. I could get her help. Where had the shot come from? What if one of Agda's tribe was waiting for me to cross into their territory? The smell of blood grew stronger and the human groaned. I looked around to see if I could locate the shooter. After one more glance for the sake of safety, I shot across the street, scooping up the victim, rushing back to my side of the street, and mapping the way to the closest hospital in my mind.

She was a girl, probably a runaway, sixteen at the oldest. The blood still flowed from the wound, but from the smell and flow I could tell a major artery hadn't been hit. I ran, thinking I heard footsteps behind me, thinking I saw shadows on rooftops bend and fold and stare. I clenched my teeth as I shoved the thought of my mouth on her blood down, into my stomach, which was never satisfied, never filled.

I concentrated on the lights of the hospital emergency room before me, blocks ahead, rushing as her body grew lighter and lighter in my arms. I stopped when I knew I was within earshot of the closest human.

"I found this woman on the street!" I yelled. It wasn't a total lie. "She's been shot! I think she's a runaway."

"Wait right there!" the nurse said.

"Okay!" I lied. As soon as the nurse approached I took a step back. As soon as I knew he was headed towards us, I turned and slipped into the shadows, hurrying off without a sound. I watched from the corner as the nurse lifted her body and yelled some code at the others waiting in the parking area.

I walked back home, smelling the blood on my clothes and the drugs which laced the red liquor. I brought the collar of my shirt up to my mouth and gently sucked on the cotton, pulling the blood from the fabric. It was still warm. I walked to the flower shop and got the flowers without a word, leaving the money on the stand. I walked home and entered Ophelia's house and dropped the flowers on the table before I headed to my room.

"No batteries," she called after me.

"I know," I yelled back. "I got thrown off course."

"Smells like it." I heard the snip of the scissors as I pulled my shirt off over my head. "Maybe someone really is following you," Ophelia called.

I looked up to the ceiling in a gesture of incredulity. "Thank you," I said, instead of what I wanted to say.

"None needed," Ophelia purred, placing another black iris in the vase.





# The Dark Conspiracy: Introduction

*"I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma,  
a harmless enigma that is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth."*

– Umberto Eco

Welcome to the Black Hand. The Tal'Mahe'Ra. The True Hand. The *Manus Nigrum*. A group that shares a unique and intricate role in **Vampire: The Masquerade**, and indeed the **World of Darkness** at large.

Here, we're walking a whole lot of tight ropes. We want you to walk with us.

First off, we're following on a twenty year legacy. The first full treatment of this conspiracy, called **Dirty Secrets of the Black Hand**, is one of the most well-known supplements in **Vampire** history. It's renowned and reviled, depending on who you talk to. How do we please everyone with such divided opinions? Well, we try really hard, and we approach it with love. I hope you love this book as much as we loved writing it.

Second, we're sharing a conspiracy with you. How much can you peel back the curtain before you lose all mystery? How little can you pull back the curtain and still make the conspiracy sexy and scary and cool? We're walking that line. We want to give you the tools to make the Hand a great element for stories, but we don't want to answer every question, because the answers at your table will fit your stories better than if we hold your hand.

Third, this is the Jyhad at its rawest. In Enoch, the ghostly stronghold of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, some of the eldest known vampires pull strings. The vampires of the Black Hand wield

deadly sorceries that would frighten even hardened Archons and Templars. And that's just the vampires, to say nothing of the sorcerers and mummies and greater abominations in their ranks. We're handing you a bomb. You can use it to build tension, or to lay waste to a chronicle.

Finally, the Black Hand has a weird history in publication. It had different treatment across different editions. We can't accommodate all those treatments. For example, in **Vampire: The Masquerade Revised Edition**, the Hand doesn't exist. They fell victim to a spiritual nuclear weapon. Every last one of them gone forever. This book assumes that didn't happen. After all, it'd be weird filling pages with information about a completely eliminated cult. Instead, we're going to showcase the Hand, to give you the tools to use them and some hooks to make them work in your story in different ways.

We're erring on the side of giving you more mysteries, more options, and more leeway. We're going to introduce and present things that might go against other **Vampire** chronicles, and even other **Vampire** products. Perhaps more than any other book, we're presenting a variety of options that may or may not be true for individual chronicles. But we're not going to show you something, then step aside and tell you that you're a bad person for using it in your game. The Black Hand has a far reach within the **Vampire** mythology. It should feel that way.

## What's In This Book

We've got five chapters and an appendix ahead. It's a little more disjointed than your average **Vampire** book. The Tal'Mahe'Ra isn't one faction; it's a series of fingers and hands, each operating toward similar goals. So there's not one unified "mechanics" chapter. Each section has game terms and concepts blended in with topical setting information. Here's what you can expect:

### Chapter One: The Hand

This is your introduction to the Hand. We talk history. We talk right now. We talk ideology, rituals, and practices. Then, we give you the tools to make Black Hand characters, along with rules for the Black Hand's unique Revenant families.

### Chapter Two: Bahari – Cult of the Dark Mother

Next, we broach the Bahari, the worshipers of Lilith among the Black Hand's ranks. We provide apocryphal texts, alternate fictions, and a variety of philosophical approaches to the Dark Mother. Then, we offer treatment of the Path of Lilith, and both Necromancy and Thaumaturgy Paths unique to the Hand's Lilith followers.

### Chapter Three: The Dark Below

Infernalism is a complicated topic in the Hand. To some, it's a powerful tool for bringing forth the apocalypse. For others, it's a disease that needs rooting out. Here, we offer Dark Thaumaturgy, infernal rites, and a new treatment of Vicissitude. Lastly, we close out with some treatment of Enoch, the first city, lost forever in the Shadowlands.

### Chapter Four: Dirty Secrets

Next, we talk about the types of characters you might find in the Hand that fall outside the Kindred norm. We offer ideas and rules for portraying mummies, werewolf Abominations, and other monstrosities among the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

### Chapter Five: Watch the Hand

Lastly, we provide a sample chronicle you can jump right into, which showcases the moods and themes we wish to communicate with the rest of this book.

## Lexicon

**Aralu:** (Ghemalish: *sleep*) four mysterious beings whose crypts rest in the heart of the catacombs below Enoch. The majority consensus holds them to be the torpid bodies of Antediluvians.

**Bahari:** (Swahili: *sea, ocean*, singular: *Ba'ham* alias: **Lilitu, Lilins**) disciples of the Dark Mother Lilith. As their name infers, Bahari engulf everything in their path. Most members of the Tal'Mahe'Ra count themselves among the Lilins. In the past three centuries, the cult has become the bedrock that the Sect rests upon.

**Blood Familiar:** a magus enslaved to a vampire, either by spells or Discipline use.

**chatterling:** (alias: **quli**, Arabic: *say*) the mortal servants of the Hand, whose name grew out of an insult derived from their propensity to tremble when speaking to their masters. Chatterlings provide a ready supply of slave labor and nourishment for the vampires of the Sect. A small percentage are abducted during infancy, then trained from a young age to be ghouls or prospective childer.

**Del'Roh:** (Ghemalish: *to serve*) the title of the supreme governor of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Anadja, the current Del'Roh, earned it by being the sole vampire capable of approaching the Basalt Throne since the rediscovery of Enoch in the lands of the dead. Her lack of need for rest, and evident immunity to the negative effects of the Underworld upon other Kindred, are attributed to mystical properties granted by the Throne.

**dominion:** a captain and field marshal of the Black Hand.

**Eastern Hand:** (alias: **Right Hand**) the half of the Sect who remained localized to Enoch, the Middle East, and India after the War of the Betrayers. In the Modern Nights, membership in the Eastern Hand denotes focus upon scholarly pursuits.

**Elioud:** (alias: **Shadow Crusade**) Hand members tasked to investigate, track and exterminate Asakku. Named for the grandchildren of the Nephilim in Abrahamic lore.

**Enoch:** (alias: **The First City**) a city purportedly built by Caine, the progenitor of all vampires. Thought destroyed, its dark reflection was discovered in the Underworld and subsequently requisitioned as the capitol of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. One unpopular theory posits that the city's current purpose is to act as a prison for the Aralu, placing them as far away from the mortal world as possible.

**False Hand:** (alias: **Lost Tribe**) members of the Sabbat Black Hand unaffiliated with the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Their practices center on the teachings of the Weeping Master and his pupil Anosh.

**Ghemalish:** the original tongue spoken in Enoch and etymological root of the Indo-Dravidian, Egyptian, Sumerian, and Mixe-Zoque languages. Ghemalish is named for the tower of Ghemal in Enoch, where inscriptions of the language were first discovered. Enochian is a phonetic

transliteration of Ghemalish leaked to the mortal world by an abandoned ghoulish previously enthralled to a Noddist domitor that met Final Death.

**Guarded Rubrics:** an ancient library entrusted to the Tal'Mahe'Ra by the being called Inauhatan. The Rubrics is the most complete collection of vampiric history in existence.

**Idran:** (proto-Tibetan: *sower of dust*) the founding cult of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. These Himalayan necromancers broke off from the Chakravanti predecessors of the Euthanatos, and include *Itarajana* magi, *Nagaraja* vampires, and others who study the Path of the Bones.

**Itarajana:** (pre-Sanskrit: *the others*. Sanskrit: *ordinary man*) mortal magi, specifically heirs of the Idran sorcerers.

**kamut:** (ancient Egyptian: *wheat*) the basic unit of Black Hand operations, whose name implies a cultivated crop. Formed and led by dominions, kamuts are impermanent and vary in size. Dominions assemble partnerships of two to strike teams consisting of a dozen agents, based on mission parameters. After achieving their objectives, the kamut disbands. **Columns** are kamuts whose missions require ongoing or indefinite investment.

**Kaymakli:** (Armenian: *Monastery of the All-Savior*. Old Form: **Enegup**) an underground city carved into the mountains of Anatolia. For centuries, Kaymakli was a prison to the Cappadocians entombed within. Once freed, the Harbingers of Skulls offered the city between worlds, gateway to the Deadlands, as a gift to the Tal'Mahe'Ra upon joining the Sect.

**Marijava:** A revenant family that has served the Tal'Mahe'Ra as spies and assassins. Some believe that a cadet family of the Marijava also serve the Ravnos and Setites.

**Molochim:** descendants of the Baali Methuselah Moloch (called Adramelech by his flock), Molochim are among the most effective infernalist hunters in the Black Hand.

**Nergali:** (alias: **infernalists**) Nergali are Baali offspring of the Methuselah Nergal and other vampires in allegiance with demonic entities.

**qadi:** (Arabic: *judge*, plural: *qadis*) an interpreter of law who, with other qadis, adjudicates the policies of the Sect. When capitalized, the Qadi refers to the entire group as a whole.

**rawi:** (Arabic: *reciter*, plural: *ruwat*) a scholar of the Tal'Mahe'Ra who, with other ruwat, protect and study of

the Guarded Rubrics. When capitalized, the Rawi refers to the entire group as a whole.

**seraph:** the generals of the Tal'Mahe'Ra who answer only to the Del'Roh. Named for the highest division of Christian angels, they oversee entire continents, enemy Sects, and regions of particular interest to the True Black Hand.

**shakar:** (Sanskrit: *beneficent* or *bringer of bliss*, plural: *shakari*) the professional assassins, guardians, and hunters of the Black Hand.

**Tabula Adversa:** (Latin: *slate of the adverse*) an index of vampires marked for destruction by the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

**Tal'Mahe'Ra:** (Ghemalish: *Hand-Without-Sun*. alias: **True Black Hand**, Latin: *manus nigrum*) a Sect of vampires that originated as a death cult. Now, the Tal'Mahe'Ra is a global organization of interconnected factions unified by common purpose: reverence for the Antediluvians, the ushering in of Gehenna, the elimination of Asakku and infernalists, and the stewardship of humankind and vampires alike.

**Tyndarids:** an epithet for the founders of the True Brujah, named for the Greek twins Castor and Pollux. Both are said to be hermaphrodites and sun worshipers who allow pinholes of light to etch scarification patterns upon their bodies as they rest during the day.

**Underworld:** (aliases: **Shadowlands**, **Deadlands**) the spirit plane of the dead on the edge of nothingness, composed of ghostly echoes from the material world.

**wazir:** (Arabic: *minister*, plural: *wuzara*) the seraphim, yamasattva, and the Del'Roh. The wuzara determine the Sect's direction and monitor the development of its long-term goals. When capitalized, the Wazir refers to the entire group as a whole.

**Western Hand:** (alias: **Left Hand**) the portion of the Sect who made Europe their home when the Tal'Mahe'Ra was divided. The Western Hand fosters members whose specialization revolves around worldly pursuits.

**Yamasattva:** (Sanskrit compound of *death* and *purity*) an immortal magus whose soul is bound to their animated dead body through powerful magic. Three yamasattva from the Idran serve on the Wazir, devoted guardians of Enoch who predate the foundation of the Sect. Younger vampires sometimes refer to these sorcerers as "liches".

"Pim!" I called excitedly, waving my hand in the air. He waved back, the crowds parting as he walked toward me.

"Blake," he said, his words almost warm. "I am sorry I am late. I was picking up my friend at the airport so she'd be here in time for her set. I hope Ophelia won't be too cross with me."

"You've seen the dance before, and she'll do it again," I said, playing with the stem of my wine-glass. Ophelia's set consisted mostly of her slowly undressing while submerged in a large aquarium full of water, flower petals swirling around her as she shed her clothes and danced like a mermaid might. It was very popular, especially among those who didn't know she didn't need to breathe. I often played Hamlet to her Ophelia, dressed in black and dancing with her before she was submerged in the rather expensive set piece. Someone always stood close by with an axe, to give the illusion it could go wrong at any moment. It never did. I shrugged at Pim. "She'd rather have you here and late than not at all."

"And why are you here?" Pim asked, setting into the lush booth. "I thought for sure you'd be backstage, getting out of your costume."

"Pallas played Hamlet today," I said with a smile. "We've been trading back and forth."

"And who will play Hamlet to our drowned starlet when you are both gone?" Pim asked.

"So, you heard about our trip?" I said. "That was fast."

"Ophelia learned how to use a computer, finally, so I've learned all kinds of things," Pim replied. "You and Pallas. A trip on Malkav's whim. I thought you were smarter than that."

"It's important to Pallas, and there are some people Ophelia wants me to meet on our trip," I said, picking up my glass. Blood, thick and room temperature, and what I need right now, sloshed around the inside of the glass as I swirled it carefully, sticking to the glass. I sucked in a mouthful and held it against my tongue and the insides of my cheeks. Wet. Rich.

"Be careful, young Blake. There are monsters in the Old World the likes of which you never dreamed of in your yesteryears," Pim said. He turned in his chair and looked towards the door before looking back at me. "And here comes one of them. Ana!" he called, waving his hand.

I peeked over his shoulder to see who he was speaking of, and the smile from my face dropped. Anahita, the woman from the museum. I still remembered her and our strange conversation. How Pallas began speaking on Enoch and Nergal shortly thereafter and we published it under a fake name. Anahita walked over to us, wearing the long black robes the performers wore.

"Blake," she said, her dark eyes falling on me. "I didn't think you were the one Pim spoke of. Surely there are more Blakes in the world than you."

"You know each other?" Pim asked, pouring himself a glass.

"I met her years ago, at the museum," I said. I was staring but Anahita didn't seem to mind.

"I was so enamored by this one who had no idea who I was. I thought it was charming. We spoke of monsters under the bed," she laughed.

"So young," Pim said with a sigh, pouring our guest a glass as well. "And yet Blake thinks she needs to leave the nest."

"It's not a need, Pim," I said. "It's something to do. And a favor to a friend. I'm watching my friend Pallas."

"I've heard people say Malkavians don't have friends. They only have distractions." Anahita shrugged her shoulders, the dark fabric slipping over her skin as she did. "But I'm sure your friend is different."

"Pallas is a good ally. I trust her. And we are looking into her latest... whisperings." I said. "Who knows, maybe we'll find the monster lurking within every Malkavian's head."

"I love the young," Anahita said, taking the small, golden goblet in her fingers. "They bring a new way of looking at things. The old would be wise to put their paranoia aside and have congress with those whose eyes can see the present with clarity and understand it, see the patterns. What the young really lack is self-control. They think they know what want is. A few years of hunger pangs and they seem to think they know the scope of need, of longing. They haven't been through enough to know what true abstaining and measure is." She took a sip of her blood and licked her lips, looking right at me. "Find me a young Sabbath who knows restraint and I'll show you one chosen for greater things."

"Self-control isn't innate, it's cultivated," I said, sitting back in the booth. Anahita drained her small goblet and tilted her head to the side, looking at me.

"Did you find out if your namesake or his wife was part of the Black Hand?" she asked me, plainly. Pim gasped, an old habit. I looked her in the eye.

"I didn't," I said.

"I thought you were more persistent than that, Blake," Anahita said, pouring another glass for me. She leaned over when she did and I smelled her saffron and myrrh perfume again.

"If the Black Hand is real, I have more to think about than if William Blake was in it," I laughed. "He's not here, not now, and neither is his wife."

"True," Anahita said, standing up. "I think it's my turn soon. I'll go backstage. If Ophelia comes out, please tell her I want to catch up with her after the show."

"Of course," I said. She nodded in farewell and headed towards the door that led backstage, past the other attendees who tried desperately not to watch her go. Pim shook his head at me "What?"

"I wish you wouldn't leave with Pallas," Pim said. "It's not safe. Ophelia and I didn't sire you in the New World for you to die in the Old World."

"When you say Old World, you sound very old, I hope you know that," I said.

"I don't care how it sounds, Blake. You're going out with a Malkavian on a wild goose chase. In the hopes that you'll what? Find out who is speaking to Pallas?" He leaned in closer to me, as if someone could possibly be listening to our conversation. "You know who they say it might be, and if you do find them, it will be your last night on this earth, if you are lucky. If anyone even lets you get that close to them."

"Pim, this 'they' you are speaking of, they're not even real."

"Even if they are not, there are those who believe they are," he whispered. "And if they think you are getting close to where they are, to uncovering something, they will try to stop you. We are a very paranoid people, Blake. You know this. Maybe you should cultivate a bit more fear."

"What are we talking about?" Ophelia sat down next to Pim, placing her hand on his knee. "Are you admonishing Blake? You've only just got here and you're already telling her no."

"If you told her no more often, I wouldn't have to," Pim said. He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek, a chaste gesture. They were friends, as much as two of our kind could be, and my sires. Ophelia may have provided the necessary fangs in my story, but Pim had the more direct influence as a would-be sire should. "I am sorry I missed your set."

"You've seen it before and I'll do it again," Ophelia said. "But we have a guest today, so we should be polite and watch her performance." Ophelia winked at me before turning in her chair.

"Blake!" Pallas came barreling across the floor and she plopped in next to me, wrapping her arms around my neck. I poured her a drink and she managed to unwrap herself from around me enough to take the cup we shared as the lights dimmed. The MC came up, a Nosferatu many thought was just a man in makeup. He introduced the next performance: Lilith and her Children.

"You did a good job, Pallas," I murmured, watching the stage as Anahita floated onto it. "I think you're a much better Hamlet than I am. Maybe you should do it from now on."

"You know I can't do that," Pallas said, chugging her drink. "I can't. I'm not good every day. But when I'm having a bad day, you're there, aren't you? Till I get to the end of the bad days?"

"Always," I said, squeezing her hand. Her skinny hands felt like bird bones in my grip, though I knew her hold was strong. The music began to play, louder, the lights starting to shine and spin as Anahita danced.

"Did she come with the other four dancers?" I asked Pim. I didn't recognize them from the venue."

Pim just shrugged and I watched Anahita dance in the center, the other four dancing around her. As the children danced, I felt Pallas' hand wrap around mine. The longer it went, the tighter her grip became. The five dancers spun and danced. Fire sparked and flared at their feet and they didn't flinch.

"Pallas, you're hurting me," I whispered. Pallas looked up, her eyes wide and red.

"Oh, Blake, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I just—" She shrugged, as she often did, and settled in next to me, leaning her head against my shoulder.

"It's fine, Pallas. I know you didn't." I watched as one by one the dancers left the stage, gesturing



farewell with their dance before they left. The last one held onto Anahita's hand, lingering longer than the rest until eventually they let go and danced off, leaving Anahita alone, the stage all to herself. The music slowed, mournful in tempo and tone as she keened on stage, her pantomimed grief filling the room. The music seemed to drift towards a somber end, and Anahita stood in the middle of the stage.

With a thump I could feel in my whole body, the music shouted up, the tempo fast and lively as Anahita danced, filling the whole stage with her moves before she stood triumphantly in the middle, alone. When she stomped her foot, fire rose. The music drove faster and faster, louder. Pallas put her hands over her ears. I watched, mesmerized, until the final crashing note which seemed to shake the whole venue. Anahita stood center stage, proud, triumphant, and alone. The crowd rose to its feet and applauded her, enthusiastically. I clapped from where I sat, not wanting to disturb Pallas.

Ophelia said something to Pim, but even I couldn't make it out over the thunderous applause. I watched as Anahita took her bows, curtsying once to the audience before she turned and left the stage.

"I'm going out with Pallas," I said, standing up. Ophelia nodded and waved us off, moving out of the way so we could go. I pulled Pallas up and nudged her towards the door. We pushed past the other patrons, bumping people as we went.

"You alright?" I asked Pallas. Outside it was cold and wet, a mist falling from the purple, clouded sky. "You seemed kind of... off in there."

"Yeah, I'm fine, Blake," Pallas said. Arms crossed over her chest, head down, feet shuffling back and forth. Not fine. "It was just really crowded in there, I could hear a lot, and that dance with the Lilitu, I just don't really know what to make of it. I mean, why would she come here, to walk in front of us, I mean, it's just us, Blake. We're not worthy" —

"Pallas, stop," I said. "Slow down. Do you want me to get my notepad? I can write this down, in case you don't remember this later."

"A lack of memory of what she sees. What a blessing." I wheeled around. Anahita stood behind us, still in her dancer's garb, her black stage robe fluttering open. "Who is your friend, Blake?"

"Pallas," I said. "Pallas, this is Anahita, the dancer. I met her years ago."

"You told me about her," Pallas said. "You told me, at the museum. And the sarcophagus. You told me."

"Right," I said. "An old friend."

"An acquaintance, really," the older woman said, with a sly smile. "Don't you worry, pretty Pallas." She stepped closer to Pallas, past me, and I could feel something like warmth come off of her. It was inviting. Why hadn't I noticed it before? "I hear you are going on a trip, little Pallas. Maybe I will run into you."

"Do you not live in New York?" I asked, knowing the answer before she gave it.

"I am, as Pim would say, of the Old World. Old indeed. If you are going to follow Pallas' road, then, we will meet again, I'm sure of it. I have many friends of her blood."

"But you said" —

"I know what I said," she interrupted. "People say all kinds of things. Some say the door to Enoch is a physical one. Some say The Black Hand is not the true hand. Some say all Malkavians hear one voice, and there is a unity in all their words, if one would just listen. One has listened, I hear, and made a testament."

"You mean me, and the book we put out?" I asked. "It was just a project, to try and see if we couldn't sort it out over time, see if others wouldn't do the same."

"Have they?" she asked.

"No," I replied. "Not yet. It may take a while," I said, watching Pallas walk towards the sidewalk. "I've got time."

"So you think," Anahita said. "So we all think." She pulled her robe around her more closely and watched Pallas as well. "You should keep an eye on her. Where did you find her?"

"In the park," I said. "She was just there, rambling one night. I came across her and we started talking, when she came to." I shrugged and looked down at the ground. "I kept seeing her, so we got to become friends."

"Do you pity Pallas?" Anahita asked.

"Sometimes," I said, watching Pallas stop short, staring up at the street light. "Though she tells me the same. She says she feels bad for me."

"Does she?" Anahita said with a smile. It was a smile that knew something I didn't. "Does she say

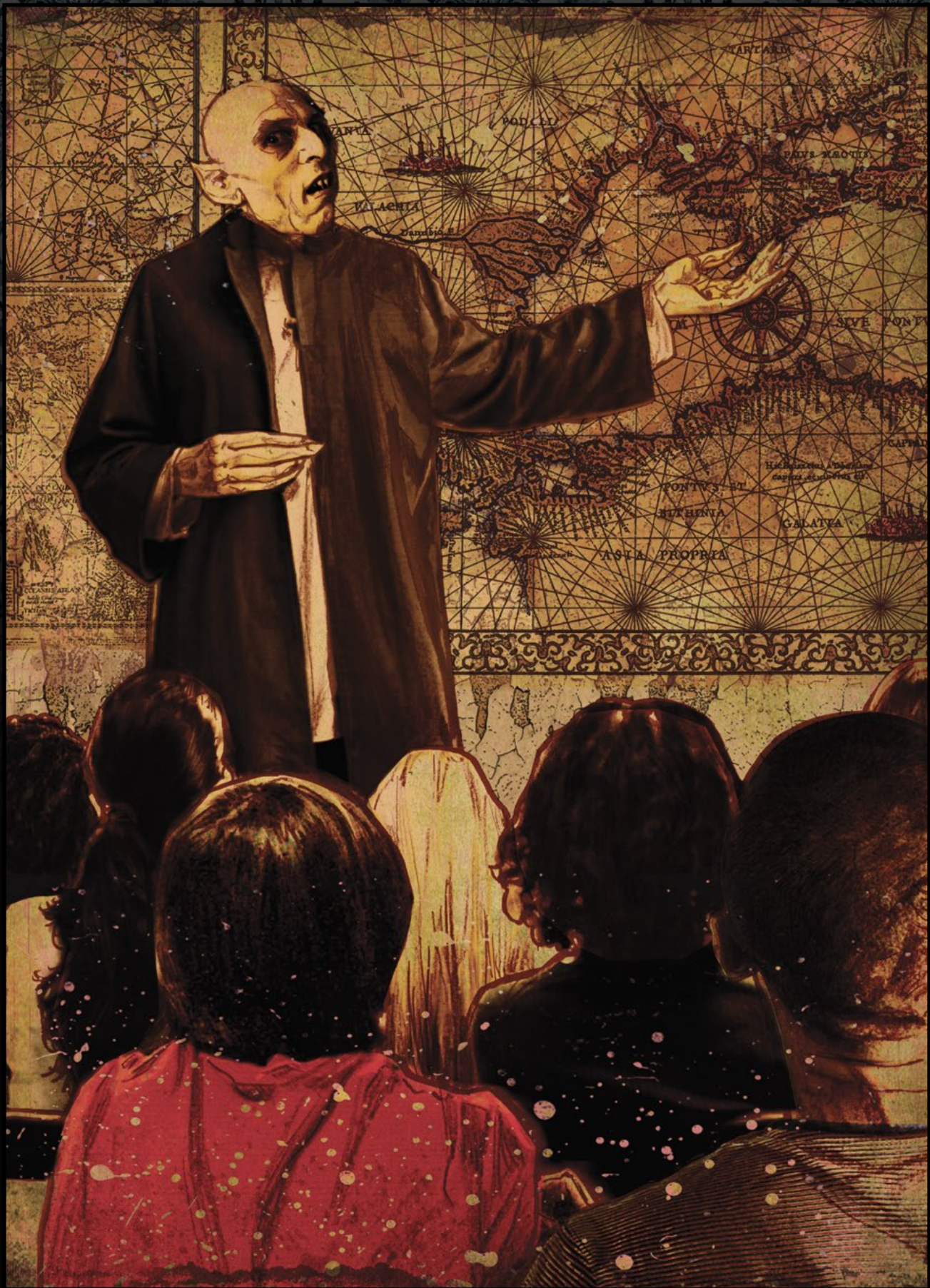
she's sorry you'll never know, Blake? You'll never see what she sees."

I paused. Bought some time. I didn't have words, but I wasn't ready to let the moment go. "Yeah," I said. How did she know? Anahita flashed another perfect white smile at me and turned to go back into the club.

"Blake!" Pallas called. "Blake, come on! I want to leave now." Pallas walked backward down the street, her eyes wide and wild. "We should go now."

"Pallas, turn around! You're going to trip." I trotted up, trying to catch up to Pallas before she could hurt herself. As she walked backward she tripped, one foot catching on the other and she fell, head over heels, banging into a car. The car alarm went off, loud and whooping. I ran and helped her to her feet. She was laughing, so I started to laugh as we scrambled up, running down the street arm in arm while people stared at us.





# Chapter One: Black as Hell, Dark as Night

*"The deed is everything, the glory nothing."*

— Johanne Wolfgang von Goethe, *A High Mountain Range*

For centuries, two great ideologies warred for the withered soul of the Caine's brood. An open secret amongst the Clans claims that virtually all believe in the existence of Antediluvians — much of their sense of self stems from tales of their forebears, in fact — yet to openly acknowledge this would be to acknowledge the fact that their progenitors are prophesied to rise up and consume them.

The Camarilla shrouds itself in denial, upholding Humanity while hiding behind it in a grand and elaborate Masquerade. They fear the coming of Gehenna, the judgment of the Antediluvians. The Sabbat, by contrast (for the Sect is, even in these nights, an organization in contrast) seeks to shed the pretense of being human. They too advocate hiding within humanity, but as camouflage until the time comes for them to consume their dread progenitors. They relish the coming Final Night.

But they are not the only ideologies that contest for hegemony over the night.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra, the True Black Hand, claims a lineage older than any modern Sect, access to mortal magics long forgotten by the living, and a mandate of pursuant apocalypse. They seek Gehenna as well, for they hold that the Antediluvians will consume all and then perish. The Blood of Caine will vanish from the Earth, and the Children of Seth will be free.

**Come, shravaka, and read of our history. Come, koldun and Molochite and antitribu, and read our words in the wisp-lantern light of our sunless city. You bear scars of knowledge without injury, the marks of the moon without having seen the sky.**

**You are one of us now.**

— *From the journals of John Sidestorm*

## **The Ages Past: A History of Darkness**

No single finger, no faction, can be said to have founded the True Hand. The True Black Hand has no Tyler, no Hardestadt, no Vykos. The Hand stands tonight as a band of disparate groups who have aligned by common interest and shared goals. There are those still in the

Hand who knelt before the immortal Inauhaten in the days of antiquity, but these survivors rarely speak of the experience in these nights, and the True Hand has little relation to their ancient needs and desires. Those few are only a small fraction of the Hand as we know it.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra, however, has a definitive origin, with a cult of mages 3,000 years ago during an age of war and magic. They came to the Middle East, strangers in a strange land, seeking secrets they glimpsed behind the shroud of death. They found enlightenment not in death, but in the pit. An Egyptian immortal, greatly impressed by their knowledge of necromancy, led the mages deep into the Underworld, promising the cult deathless enlightenment and power over their enemies. But he denied them access to his Spell of Life unless they adopted a sacred charge along with it. A long, perilous journey brought the cult to a secret that required immortal stewardship: a grand, sunless city soaring defiantly above the end of all things.

Those who controlled the city would control that end.

**You wouldn't know it from their modern incarnation, molded as they are to the whims of the yamasattva and the Nagaraja, but the Idran were battle-mages of the highest order. Death magic makes for fearsome assassins, dread revenants who know no pain crossing the field of war. If you want to be technical about it — you're scoffing, dear reader, but pedants like me go far in the Ruwat — Tal'Mahe'Ra refers to the renamed Idran cult after their adoption of Enochian Eschatology, while the Black Hand refers to the Cainite Sect that carries out that cult's aims. You may have heard the terms used interchangeably, and that's more or less how it's been since the Nagaraja's ascendance. The Idran have been our arms for far longer than we were ever theirs.**

— From the journals of John Sidestorm

This was not a city for them, but it had power and purpose aligned with their own. Inauhaten gave them the *Guarded Rubrics*, the distillation of necromantic praxis over the course of millennia. Their topics touched upon some of the *Books of Nod*, and even contained much of the same text, but possessed an overall eschatological bent that eclipsed the accounts of Caine. The *Rubrics* did not record the beginning of existence, but they precisely detailed the end, and one of the signs was the brood of Caine coming home to Enoch.

After Inauhaten's departure, one thing became clear: the *Rubrics* were more than a duty. They were an all-consuming, essential quest. They who controlled Enoch controlled the course of the apocalypse. The path illuminated by the *Rubrics* was set. Only those touched by both life and death, beyond both, could seize the course of destiny.

## The Two Hands

The *Guarded Rubrics* said the blood of Caine would become the instrumentation of judgment, bringing about the end of the world. The method was unclear, though. Charged with defending Enoch, the newly-empowered Idran sought allies back in the living world, attempting to defend the city against great threats: demon-worshippers who sought to bend the world to the powers old and dark, and the Followers of Set, who knew of Enoch's potency and that the First City could bring about a throne of eternal night for their dark god. Neither group would bring a clean apocalypse, but one of filth and degradation.

The Idran — the Tal'Mahe'Ra, as they styled themselves — needed allies, and they needed knowledge. They reached out to the *devas* of their religion, those who styled themselves heirs to the blood of Caine.

## The Eastern Hand (800 BCE)

From their weak foothold in Iraq, Tal'Mahe'Ra made overtures to the closest Cainites they could find: the get of Saulot and Haqim. Both Clans considered themselves guardians of that dark lineage, and responded poorly to the idea that they could bring about Gehenna.

Both Clans did continue to fight off the Followers of Set, and Gehenna was at the least a name, a myth of destruction that had come after the First City sank into the Underworld. Ranging further outward, the Tal'Mahe'Ra contacted the bloodlines that would form the Western Hand: the Old Clan Tzimisce, the True Brujah, and a lineage of disenfranchised Ventrue later called the Danava. More circumspect this time, the cult claimed they sought other

sorcerous allies to check the blood sorceries of the Setites, and those of martial prowess and nobility to defeat the Setites' pawns and politics. It was only to the most subtle and scheming elders that they revealed their view of the bloodlines as fulfillments of prophecy, instruments they would manipulate to engineer apocalypse. Discarding their religious prohibition against consorting with *devas* was difficult, but they contrived elaborate compromises to accommodate.

### **The Serpent Kings**

When the Tal'Mahe'Ra made contact with the Clans of Caine, they did so as peers. A bloodline, young and powerful, emerged from the shadowed lands of the dead, created from stolen blood and sorcerous cleansing. The Nagaraja were ghoulish, but immune to the ravages of the Underworld, and they fit – however poorly – into the Cainite need for categorization. Masquerading as an exotic bloodline from the Indus (which, technically, they were), the Nagaraja Embraced more of their kind outside Enoch, sending the neonates to garner allies and resources for the cult, and indoctrinating the neonates into the mysteries of necromancy and the Underworld when they matured into seasoned and worldly ancillae.

### **The Devas**

Even in the earliest days, the Idran and the Ravnos following the Eastern Path of Paradox were cordial and polite to one another, both accepting a form of the Great Wheel and the other's place. With the creation of the Nagaraja, the Tal'Mahe'Ra was able to interact with the great society of Caine in the East. Even then, they found sympathies and allies with Ravnos neonates, disenfranchised by the entrenched Danava. Of all the fingers of the Eastern Hand, the Ravnos were perhaps the most sympathetic to the cult's goal of turning the Wheel, though they likely imagined themselves sufficiently outside of it to survive Gehenna.

### **The Western Hand (650 BCE)**

Closer in proximity to Inauhaten and the original site of Enoch, the Western Hand joined the Tal'Mahe'Ra's earliest machinations against the childer of Caine. The Western Hand was (and is, to these nights) comprised of three disparate fingers – the True Brujah, the Ventruer childer of Marcus Verus, and the Old Clan Tzimisce.

### **The True**

For centuries, the True Brujah – childer who predate the diablerie of Brujah by Troile, though even the Clan differs on which progenitor sired them – were Byronic

*Much later, they'd add a decidedly iconoclast faction of the Baali bloodline to their ranks, through the Old Clan's shared membership in a pseudo-infernalist group called the Order of Moloch. Five fingers of a hand, with various antitribu making up the odd sixth digit. Just be careful not to mention those pesky rumors of Troile being Moloch's lover. Could start a finger war.*

*The Western Hand has always been the temporal might of our thing, more connected to the world of warm blood than the lands of the dead. We're all bound by a shared realization of the true nature of our condition, but the division between West and East has root in disagreement about the best way to go about it.*

*– From the journals of John Sidestorm*

brooders long before Lord Byron's birth. Scholars and recluses, they ironically – or, perhaps, appropriately – made the acquaintance of several mummies and the Lazarene Cappadocians of Egypt. Grecian and Carthaginian, they were the first to encounter the Eastern Hand and identify the points of philosophical unity between the bloodlines. More than that, they identified with another bloodline that shared distaste for their progenitor's fate.

### **The Old**

Vicissitude was the domain of the Eldest, and the innovation swept through Clan Tzimisce on a wave of blood and molded flesh. A few refused to partake of the Discipline, preferring to forge their own path of innovation rather than relying on the strength of the Eldest. They saw the main Clan subsumed into the Eldest's essence, becoming tools rather than fellow artists. More troubling still was the continued association with the bound Kupala, slowly but surely corrupting the Clan. In disgust, they venerated the being the Eldest was, rather than the pitiful creature he became and his embodied tools in the form of the main Clan.



## The Blooded

Judgment of the race of Caine in the purview of mortals fell to the Salubri, but judgment of the race entire had always been the pride of Haqim. While the leaders of the Clan slept away from Alamut, no few grandchilder of Haqim – Izhim ur-Baal and his get chief among them – chose to join with the nascent Tal'Mahe'Ra. The Blood had been judged and found wanting.

## The Gardeners

As the Ventrue Camilla slowly came to power in Italy, only one of his Clan dared to check the upstart's power: Mithras, childe of Vedddhartha himself. Even then, Mithras considered himself like unto a god, demanding worship and obeisance as was his due. Through his Grecian childe, Cretheus, Mithras suborned worship of the god that was his namesake, slowly warping the legitimate religion into a Cainite death cult. Yet he commanded his childe to also learn the sorcerous might of other Clans, and thus the worldly Cretheus came to believe that Cainite nature itself was corrupt and venal, snakes in the garden.

## East Meets West (500 BCE)

In the lands of Xerxes, a chill wind whipped across the region that would one day become known as the Armenian

plateau. The assembled vampires – none native to the region, but all knowing the land to be singularly neutral and a convenient waypoint for all – huddled within a fireless fortress overlooking Lake Van. Three of them weren't vampires at all, but yamasattva, undead sorcerers of terrifying power.

"The Eldest consumed the rest of the Clan, and made them his tools," said one of the Old Clan.

"The Blood of Brujah runs in the veins of a stolen Clan," said a True childe of Brujah, "and their anger will sweep across the world."

"The garden of Caine runs rampant with weeds," said one childe of Cretheus, himself childe of dread Mithras.

"The lands beyond the turning of the Wheel are not for those such as we," said a Nagaraja vampire, in a language all spoke.

All knew that the signs of Gehenna were upon the world. It was clear to the *voivodes* and scholars that they could not rule over humanity, could not coexist, could not triumph. All had a deep grudge against a society that had struck against their forebears; all had seen their progenitors dead, diablerized, or transformed beyond recognition.

Did the Western elders of that gathering harbor some ambition to survive the Wheel's turning, to survive the

fires that would ravage Caine's get in Gehenna's sunlit vale? Did their childer hold that hope close to their dead hearts? Certainly, that fear precipitated the Schism in the minds of the Nagaraja, but if it were so, none spoke of it. The Black Hand was born that night, though the Idran continued to rule over the Tal'Mahe'Ra for long years to come.

## The War of the Betrayers (450 BCE)

The War of the Betrayers was not a war in the truest sense, nor was anyone truly betrayed. It was a single event, a hammer blow to long-standing cracks in the nascent Sect.

Only a scant few decades had passed, but while the Mithraists who'd broken with their cult grew closer to the Old Clan and the True Brujah, the Idran refused to consider them equals to the Nagaraja. Enoch was theirs, and while it could serve as a rallying point of nihilistic unity, the city remained in their sacred charge by Inauhaten's express command. Only the most proven and potent were allowed access to the First City – the barest trickle.

"We are in the world, and of it," came the impassioned plea from the childer of Cretheus, spoken in a dozen different ways. "Allow us to walk in the streets of our grandsires."

"They will not," came the rejoinder from the True Brujah, expressed on vellum and by oratory flourish. "We are tools, not the hand that grasps them."

Besides being denied Enoch, the Western Hand considered politics and machinations to be the superior method for engineering the destruction of all Caine's brood, while the Nagaraja insisted on pursuing the signs of Gehenna and manipulating Enoch (for they alone had unrestricted access) as a means to bring about the end of vampirism.

The Great Schism, as it later came to be called, was touched off by what could charitably be called a street brawl. A number of Idran, blood-bound to the Western Hand, opened the way to Enoch, followed by a small group of Assamites, True Brujah, and Bahari. The Idran and Nagaraja answered the challenge, though they refused to profane Ubar, the most ancient parts of the city, with the Disciplines of Caine. The challengers complied (though the True Brujah simply left to visit their namesake's library), resulting in a fist fight until the Idran could expel the invaders with sorcery. With that, the Idran forbade any others but the Nagaraja from visiting Enoch.

The Schism rocked the small society of the Black Hand, splitting it along neat lines. By the middle of the fifth century BCE, the Eastern and Western Hands (the *Manus*

*Nigrum*, as they termed themselves) had largely parted ways, preferring to work towards the shared goal of imminent Gehenna by their own means. Only the shared link of Hellenistic culture, sprawling from the Seleucid Empire to the Ptolemaic Kingdom, allowed the disparate fingers of the Hand a cultural bridge between East and West, remaining in contact despite the Schism.

*From the start, the Lilin were a part of the War. Actually, if you ask me, they were really the catalyst that made the whole thing happen, though you'd never get the Nagaraja to admit it. Despite (or maybe because of) our admitted bias, we Bahari are Noddists without peer. The Dark Mother's got a cross-Clan appeal, and not to put too fine a point on it, but orthodox Lilin scripture doesn't have Caine coming off too well. Despite this, the Tal'Mahe'Ra didn't reach out to us, not at first. The early Bahari cults were hidden well, but even after we revealed ourselves to the Idran, they never truly welcomed us. We made several attempts to gain a permanent foothold, and ended up fighting with more orthodox Noddists, which didn't endear us to the Tal any further. The War of Betrayers ended up seeing us all expelled. Took us years to get back.*

– From the indoctrination pamphlets of Amanda Ruof-Jones

For nearly 1500 years, the two Hands worked apart. The Western Hand tended to its own troubles, while the Eastern Hand sought to carve out a place in vampiric society to pursue its vision of Gehenna. Entire generations of Nagaraja were sired without hearing of the Tal'Mahe'Ra or visiting Enoch. Modern Ruwat and *wuzara* lament this period as a grievously lost opportunity. Gehenna could have been engineered had the Western Hand had access to Enoch, had the Eastern been convinced more of the promise in strengthening human society rather than weakening vampiric society.



*John – Couple of amateur Noddists got inspired by Aristotle's book, found this in Solomon's Tomb. Checked out the site after I took it from 'em. Pretty well hidden. Had some Templar markings over it, no Salubri stuff. Guess they wanted to keep it buried too.*

*Enjoy!*

*KAZ"*

**T**he blood ran to our ankles in the street roads. We fell flat on our bellies, drink shimmering flames reflected in the go we saw the figures, walking not through the river as we did but atop it, wearing robes of white that were not stained, so pure they strode through a font of cess and remained clean. Five we saw, in the firelight, walking into the catacombs neath the city.

**I** say with conviction that Malakai's tomb likely does lie neath Jerusalem, but I say now with conscience that her brother's likely does as well, for only his madness could whip those mortals into a frenzy so like our own.

## Caine Ascendant (200 BCE)

Be it fate or karma, the Nagaraja grew to rule Enoch. Unlike the Schism, no one event symbolized the blood of Caine eclipsing the power of the magi, how the Idran came to serve the Nagaraja rather than the reverse. The power of the Nagaraja grew with each passing century and expanded with each Embrace, while the yamasattva stagnated, and the Idran were slowly molded in service to the Dead City. The necromancers worked their magics to mold the city to their liking, which the yamasattva watched from the Palace.

One night (or one day, as no sun exists in the Dead City to mark the passage of time), a Nagaraja elder dared to sit upon the Ivory Throne of Caine in the Dread Palace Ghemal. Blood familiars became a common occurrence, whereas they had been mere theory before, a gift to those who were considered like unto the yamasattva.

## The Long Night (1100 CE)

For centuries, the Eastern Hand sought to improve Enoch and find the lore of Nod, while the Western Hand waged a quiet shadow war against the disparate and myriad Cainites. The *Manus Nigrum* would stand for none interfering with human affairs during the Long Night. Again and again, the far-flung and disparate nature of Cainite society worked against the attempts of the *Manus Nigrum* to seek the signs of Gehenna and drive the Clans to annihilation.

The Hand sought to strengthen mortal institutions that would rebel against vampire meddling, and at times made common cause with Clan Salubri. Before Saulot's diablerie, his Clan focused on gathering the lore of Nod and shepherding humanity, pursuing Golconda such that vampires and humans could live in peace. That Clan's destruction robbed

the Western Hand's moderates of any arguments as to the necessary destruction of the race of Caine. The Salubri shared the follies of Chorazin and Carthage – and like the cities, their destiny would be to be consumed, their fate inexorable.

The fall of the Silk Road cut off easy access to the West, leaving the Nagaraja stranded in their homeland. While they had access to the vast treasures of Enoch, it was a prize that required a great deal of resources to maintain, resources the bloodline had no inherent access to. Though they checked the power of the Followers of Set – and the Western Hand, despite philosophical differences, continued to do so as a matter of taste and course – they refused to rejoin their wayward cousins unless granted access to Enoch. Many new members of the Sect refused to believe the First City was anything more than allegory, preferring instead to keep faith with the idea that Cainite society was fatally flawed.

## Wolves in the Fold

The lack of organization wasn't the only thing that stymied the Western Hand. Adherents to the Cainite Heresy – who believed that Caine was not cursed by God, but blessed – worked against the *Manus Nigrum* during the Long Night. The *Manus Nigrum* considered the Church one of its best tools for rooting out vampirism, while the Crimson Curia sought to suborn the Church and establish direct rule over all mankind, as it was in the days of Nod.

## The Revolt (1400 CE)

Fury gripped the Blood of Caine in the latter half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a frenzy that flowed upwards towards the ancients. The Anarch Revolt sundered all of Kindred society, spurred as it was by the gradual tightening of the natural leash of Generation.

Heed the lessons of the seven joined twenty and fivescore years  
Beware the Cainite who forgets his curse as to dream of mortal harmony.  
For all his cities will become ash and all his dreams scattered to the winds  
A new enemy attends him now, the childer of his arrogance  
Twice born, thrice reborn, hungry for death  
Nurtured on devoured souls, savoring war as substance

The Guarded Rubrics are shockingly different when they diverge from perfect parity with the various versions of the Book of Nod. The above passage, which we've filtered into modern Noddist scholarship via the False Hand, is commonly cited by the Sabbat as evidence of the Camarilla's (seven Clans, five-hundred year history) impending doom. This serves the True Hand's goals, since it keeps the Sects at each other's throats and lets the Sabbat do the heavy lifting of searching for more lore to support our apocalyptic thesis. The True Hand, comprised as we are of postcognitive scholars and sorcerers who think in geological time, know that signs of prophecy can apply to many different events. While that passage could apply to the Camarilla — and no few True Hand members have come from the False — most of we Ruwat believe it to apply to Saulot's Clan, who rumors suggest members only seven insane elders. Tremere magics bolstered the war efforts of the Camarilla in the meantime. That lone passage went far to bridge the Western Hand's differences with their Eastern counterparts during reunification, though. While the Eastern branch never faltered in their ideals, it let them know the West had done their homework and finally gotten serious about the whole "ending the world" thing.

— From the journals of John Sidestorm

*We lost a great deal of our influence with the Inquisition, though we're making inroads even these nights with the Society of Leopold (they're real suckers for the blood bond, as it turns out). The Heresy cost us a lot of ground in the Middle Ages, and it also continues to occasionally rise to our notice, just as it periodically plagues the Sabbat. Mithras himself asked for our aid, through Coethus — a calculated insult on the part of the Ancient — back in 1892, when some of his cults were converted over to the Heresy as a mixture of Mithraism and homegrown Victorian gnosticism.*

— From the journals of Kazimir Savostin

From the start, the False Hand had fingers in the Anarch Revolt, and so did we. Both Hands, East and West, saw the Revolt as the single biggest event in Cainite history. The Fall of Carthage, the Usurpation of the salubri, the War of Princes: everything paled in comparison to the chaos of the Revolt. It rocketed from one end of the world to the other.

— From the journals of Yazid Tamari

In theory, it was what the Hand worked towards for a thousand years: the blood of Caine, turning against itself. In practice, the prospect of being consumed terrified both Hands, and in the chaos they could find no purchase. An agent of the Eastern Hand, Roderigo al-Dakhil, returned to Enoch with startling news: a cabal destroyed and diablerized the Lasombra Antediluvian. Worse, many of those who participated in the crime were associates of the Hand, spurred on by Hand ideology. Thrust into the crucible of the consequences of their beliefs, the Idran were paralyzed by indecision.

Then Roderigo spoke. “We must command them, and shape them,” he said. “With ourselves among them in ways we never could be among the Inquisition, let us chain this rabid dog rather than put it down, and unleash it upon our foes. Those savaged by the dogs of war will shrink away from us all the more quickly, easy prey for our blades in the darkness.”

The yamasattva assented. “Let us forge of them a sword, with its hilt firmly in our grasp,” came the proclamation from the Ivory Throne of Caine. Thus were the shattered remnants of the Anarchs plunged into fire, tying the fate of the *Manus Nigrum* to the nascent Sabbat.

## The Other Black Hand

It still came as an utter shock when Roderigo al-Dakhil, now a *rawi* of the Eastern Hand, returned again to Enoch reporting the formation of a Black Hand within the Sabbat. Roderigo claimed credit for the name and the subject’s creation, as was his nature. Now, he said, the Sect no longer needed to act indirectly. They could conduct revanchist campaigns and seek the lore of Nod openly, paying lip service to Sabbat ideals.



Roderigo himself personally oversaw the insertion of many members of the True Hand into the False Hand. Besides Karnof — officially the liaison between Enoch and the forces within the False Hand — there's Izhim ur-Baal, who has the lineage and the power to convince the Lost Tribe he's on their side. Izhim assumed the title of Seraph after the First Sabbat Civil War, and to this night, he's the only vampire to hold the same rank in both Hands. Izhim's protégé, Djuhah, is also a Seraph of the False Hand, but his relationship with his mentor and the Del'Roh has long since soured. He reserves the loyalties of his kamut for himself, and by most accounts fails to fully induct his recruits into the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Yet even with Djuhah's dubious loyalty, fully half of the False Hand is influenced — directly and indirectly — by the True.

Karnof's influence was always second to Roderigo's, sad to say. After the initial chaos of Enoch's revanche, Karnof seldom ventured back to the waking world, preferring to play the chess master from Enoch. Like so many chess masters, an impersonal view made events seem directly personal. Every piece moved in the Jyhad was a personal affront. He certainly took it personally when Roderigo managed to make the False Hand an occult matter, and therefore the domain of the yamasattva. I had to personally take a hand in saving Karnof from Final Death at the judgment of the Ivory Throne. It was one hell of a Tuesday, let me tell you.

— From the journals of John Sidestorm

Yet while several Tal'Mahe'Ra associates were rapidly inducted into the paramilitary subsect under the guise of being True Sabbat, Roderigo was deeply troubled by the startling similarities between the Sect's practices of identification. Even a variant of the crescent tattoo (albeit of a distinctly non-magical nature) adorned Caine's Chosen. A decade's investigation revealed that the subsect's core cadre was largely a cover for a cult of heretical Assamites known as the Lost Tribe, Zillah-worshippers who believed they formed a covenant with Caine against the Antediluvians, and had thus aligned themselves within the Sabbat. By that time, the two Hands were clasped too tightly to be severed without grievous cost. Ultimately, it was irrelevant. The Lost Tribe's association and familiarity with the True Hand's rituals provided a lightning rod for enemies of the latter Sect. Any actions attributed to the "Black Hand" were presumed to be the work of the Sabbat and not the Tal'Mahe'Ra, an idea that continues to comfort well into modern nights.

## **The Fall of Enoch (1600 CE)**

Acknowledgement of hubris only comes after great loss. With the turn of the 17th century, a titanic years-long hurricane assaulted the Underworld, permanently transforming dead skies into storm clouds. Even after the storm subsided, the former oceans of the Underworld mutated into an ever-squalling Tempest. A warlord of the dead empires set his sights upon Enoch, which remained a lone, strategic bastion in the storms.

Legions of ghostly marines swarmed into Enoch through cannon-made holes in the famed walls. The city blew apart into chaos, as wraithly magics proved equal to the task of navigating the city's hostile geometries. Worse still, said geometries were used to project pyre-heated shot against Ubar itself. Buildings constructed in a dark and distant epoch shattered to dust under green-hued cannonballs. Only a bare handful of the Eastern Hand escaped.

The neonate agents caught sight of the pair of fangs I wear around my neck. They assume it's a trophy. Know, dear reader, that they are indeed a memento, but of defeat, not triumph.

We had no warning as to the fleet's emergence. The Maelstrom battered Enoch's spires for the better part of the decade, leaving our agents in the dead empires without means to contact their superiors. We learned later that they had been tortured, our cells rooted out one by one, but the first sign that our isolation had been compromised was the frigate that coasted into our tranquil bay. In the dim rains beyond, we could see bobbing lights, glittering out of sync with the ghosts who keened far above our heads. A fleet!

I was young, barely into my life as one of the Kanien'kehá:ka before my sire took me. I'd only seen such ships briefly, in Massachusetts' cold bays. A great cloud of smoke bloomed outward from the side of the huge wooden beasts. My sire turned to me, words of command half-formed in his mouth. Then his head was gone, torn clean off his shoulders. He had survived the Crusades, fought skirmishes against inquisitors, escaped Anarch fires, and was a sorcerer and yamasattva beyond compare. In an instant, he was gone.

Years later, I found the remnants of his skull in the impact of the cannonball that killed him. It broke open a hidden section of Brujah's library. I think my sire would've liked that.

— From the journals of John Sidestorm

## Reunification (1725 CE)

The reconquering of Enoch lasted three years (1723-26), and was immensely costly for the sect. Yet it proved vital and necessary for the Black Hand, in the end. East and West met for the first time as peers and allies, their schism forgotten under duress of the holy city's siege. In later nights, many introspective neonates would consider the dead's assault to be a good thing — without that impetus, the Hand would have remained impotent until Gehenna, their work going uncompleted.

For years, the Western Hand had established temporal holdings deep within the lands of what would become Germany, and eventually *der Land von Kohle und Stahl* — the lands of Coal and Steel. Even in modern nights, Claudia Schoenect — Prince of Düsseldorf — manages telecommunications for the Sect, while Karl Weissmont — Prince of Essen — handles much of the Tal'Mahe'Ra's economic holdings. Both are by appearances loyal, if slightly inept, members of the Camarilla, though subtle attempts to depose them inevitable fail. In those nights, however, the Ruhr Valley was a site of open praxis for the Black Hand, the source of the modern chatterling families born and bred as footsoldiers for war. With the might of East and

*Finally have a name for an enemy we didn't know we had. Royal Order of Edenic Groundskeepers. Ostentatious, no? The cultist I interrogated was a Ventrue ghoul. Caught him outside Lisbon, trying to find the agent who gone torpid in earthquake. He was old for a ghoul — old enough to watch the Camarilla grow from idea to execution. His domitor traces his lineage back to Cretheus, that old traitor. Cretheus. He was knowledgeable enough. So I showed him my crescent, tried to play it off like I was False in case he got away. He responded in Ghemalish right off, tried to parlay. Got what I needed from his mind when I used the hot poker.*

*1645. That's at least how far back this goes. If I'm right — and I am — these licks have been going at it for a century without us even noticing. I have a feeling that they might go as far back as the Western Hand's Turkey meeting. Second I get confirmation, I'm heading straight to the Ivory Throne. See if we can't add another finger to our Hand.*

Karnof — July 10, 1756

**From:** karnof@darknesshand.yu

**To:** john.sidestorm@srmt-nsn.gov

**Keep calling me paranoid, John. Dastur Anosh ain't dead.**

Fifteen separate factional conflicts over the course of the century, flaring up like a sandstorm, dying down with our people ashed. They keep sparing the Tribe's members except as collateral damage, while TMR takes the brunt. Once is an accident, twice a coincidence, fifteen times a legitimate fucking conspiracy. The idea that the founder of the False Hand is still around and still trying to purge us from his Tribe terrifies me. Should be terrifying to skull-faced son-of-a-bitch Roderigo.

Jalan-Ajav has noticed. Made the mistake of tasking Djulah's columns to hunting down instigators. We're lucky Djulah and Yazhid are loyal and savvy enough to recognize an existential crisis. Forensic techs pieced together sand-scoured pages from the ruined cell. Computer printouts. Same demagogic fire Dastur used to spout, leaving breadcrumbs for us to follow. Hubris, thinking the First Seraph would die easy.

Follows a pretty predictable pattern for a 3,000-year-old grandchilde of Haqim. Impossible to detect giving away we know he's still walking. Picks a random Cainite, mind-whammies the lick into thinking Dastur is his childe, gets noticed by False Hand to be re-inducted. Waits around to ferret us out. Engineers some factional flare-up between two columns we control. Kills both sides in a single night before either of them know what hit. Walks off into the night laughing at us. Laughing at me.

Roderigo's acquiesced to the idea that someone doesn't like us wearing the False Hand like a glove. He can't believe that Dastur Anosh would be so brazen and believe we wouldn't notice. Roderigo's not an Assamite like you, John. Just doesn't get their thinking.

Noticing is the point. That there's nothing we can do is the point. A powerful elder is pulling us from fertile ground one bloody root at a time and we cannot bloody stop it.

West reunited, the Hand elected a war leader. Their choice was a woman named Anadja, her lineage lost to time, chose her title from old Ghemalish – *Del'Roh*, "to serve".

Over a course of three years, the campaign to retake Enoch was a strong and startling success, proof of the feats achieved with unity. The first was merely scouting and reconnaissance actions, while the second year required the subversion and occult displacement of certain elements of ghostly society. The actual retaking of Enoch lasted only two nights – the *Del'Roh* did not lift martial law for many long months, hunting down roving bands of stragglers and fighting the hordes of hostile, maddened ghosts who boiled up from the depths upon which the city sat. Only when they were defeated did she call an end to the conflict and approach the Basalt Throne of Caine, the only vampire to do so and still retain sanity and unlife.

## Modern Nights

After the Fifth Maelstrom, the Tal'Mahe'Ra stagnated. As the world matured, it became increasingly isolated and time-lost, a curious oddity of an era now passed. Its prized exclusivity and stringent membership requirements became its Achilles' heel: as the Camarilla and Sabbat

grew, the Tal'Mahe'Ra's influence dwindled until the Sect stood on the brink of irrelevance.

Agents embedded in the Camarilla and Sabbat submitted constant reports of thriving Clans, growing numbers of thin-blooded vampires and the renewing cycle of intersect hostilities. Elders and seraphim ensconced in positions of power had surprisingly less influence than expected to stem the tide. Despite their alliances with outcast Kindred, disaffected mages and their thriving families of revenants, Tal'Mahe'Ra vampires remained somewhat ineffectual.

Unwilling to allow their Sect to wither and die, the seraphim gathered in conclave and evaluated the feasibility of their master plan in the cold light of reality. Their conclusion was unwelcome, but simple: abolish the policies that restricted recruitment to a handful of select Clans and Bloodlines, and actively recruit all but the Tzimisce and the Followers of Set.

## The Hand Opens

As word of the seraphim's decision spread, an outpouring of dissent came from almost all of the younger members. Actively recruit Brujah? Giovanni? *Tremere*? As more voices joined the clamor protesting the decision, it seemed the Tal'Mahe'Ra would destroy itself with

**From:** Ms. Aisling Sturbridge, Master Quaesitor and Head Josian

**To:** Mr. Jan Pieterzoon, Praetor, Josian, Head of E division, Archon to the Inner Council,  
Child of the Camarilla,

It has come to our attention that active agents of the Gehenna cult, known as the Tal'Mahe'Ra, still pose a threat to the Camarilla. As you're already aware, we've yet to corroborate reports of a former fortress stronghold held by the cult in the Shadowlands, assuredly due to the conflicting nature of the tales and unlikeliness of their veracity — why would Kindred seek to haven in the one place where nourishing vitae is impossible to acquire? It is assumed that these tales are meant to reinforce a narrative that justifies the cult's goals to low-level initiates, making it seem a more potent force than reality suggests. It certainly is convenient that evidence to the claims of this tale no longer exist, if they ever did.

For over a decade, no signs of activity from the cult had manifested. We thought it shattered due to internal friction and an inability to sustain the hubristic foundations the cult relied upon to maintain its limited internal cohesiveness. Two years ago a memorandum published by E Division on the activities of The Way of the Ancient Lawgivers was released internally to the Inner Council and elected Justicarate. This memorandum was compared through ██████████ to previous files composed by the Josians on the Servitors of Irad. A striking parallel between information on senior members of both cults was discovered (see attached file: BOGEYMAN). It is these findings which illustrate a deeper connection and sophistication attributed to the Tal'Mahe'Ra than was previously surmised.

██████████ further hypothesizes data collected from the Tal'Mahe'Ra agent captured in 1997 claiming Vicissitude as a spiritual disease shows no evidence of veracity. ██████████ deduced that said targeting of Vicissitude by the Tal'Mahe'Ra was an attempt to ostracize and isolate the Tzimisce from their peers for as yet unknown reasons — most likely a counter-intelligence ploy to fanaticize lower level members and implant false leads.

It is the opinion of the Josians that measures be taken to re-evaluate and scrutinize all information on the Tal'Mahe'Ra held between branches of the Archons. Please compile all relevant data from E Division for a meeting to be organized in New York City no later than January of this coming year.

squabbling. Surprisingly, the voice of reason came from the Harbingers of Skulls, who for reasons of their own almost unanimously stated that they didn't give a rat's ass about the Giovanni anymore, and neither should the rest of the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

With strong vertebrae removed from the backbone of their argument, the loudest Kindred backed down from outright rebellion. It took several more years before recruitment officially opened, and the first non-traditional Clan member, a Tremere *antitribu*, was inducted into the Sect.

Opened recruitment remains a sore point for many elders of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, however. The Harbingers might have decided to be apathetic towards the Giovanni, but the True Brujah have no love for their bastard cousins, and it's laughable to expect any Kindred to welcome the Lasombra with open arms. The Old Clan Tzimisce does not hate its bastard cousins; it simply pities them. Though there are more prospective members on the docket for recruitment, several of those have been challenged by elders, and none are likely to have an easy induction or probationary period.

By and large, the Sect moved on. Elders argued, but only so far. After all, isn't the desired end game, the result, all worth some compromise? Many potential recruits were young enough to have no idea of the truths behind their grandsires' past offenses.

## **The Hand behind the Curtain**

The Camarilla is both the easiest and the most difficult Sect to infiltrate, and Tal'Mahe'Ra agents enjoy varying degrees of success in their missions. In all the ways that count, the Camarilla is the bastard love-child of meritocracy and aristocracy, and the Tal'Mahe'Ra have become masters of gaming the system to achieve power within the Sect's political structure.

Several seraphim sit as Princes of entire cities, and elders hold a variety of positions as Primogen, Sheriffs, and other minor roles, but they didn't gain those positions easily or quickly. Each Tal'Mahe'Ra agent infiltrated the Sect at the lowest level, and spent decades or centuries working their way up the ladder to achieve their power



legitimately. One seraph in recent years has achieved the pinnacle of success, and now sits on the Inner Council of the Camarilla as a Justicar.

Tal'Mahe'Ra agents carefully monitor the Camarilla dismissal of the Antediluvians as fairy tales and urban legends. What to do about it remains a point of contention within the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Some agents sow seeds of doubt in their cities, attempting to entice Kindred to the cults. They seek an end to Camarilla abuses by attempting to topple the corrupt Sect from inside, using its own members. Other agents foster Camarilla ignorance, nurturing and reinforcing the disbelief. The Antediluvians will have to feed when they wake, after all. What better feast than a population of weak-minded, strong-blooded vampires caught unprepared?

No matter what their agenda, all agents within the Camarilla work to maintain maximum conflict with the Sabbat. Though the Camarilla grew independently of Tal'Mahe'Ra influence, it is an important tool in maintaining a delicate balance in the eternal war between Sects. This means that agents within the Camarilla must move very carefully, lest their actions tip their enemies off.

At least three times in recent decades, the Tal'Mahe'Ra has had to burn agents due to overreaching ambition

and slips of attention. Despite these precautions, several Princes and two Justicars have become suspicious enough to begin investigations. To date, no evidence of a grand conspiracy has surfaced, but it may only be a matter of time before something incriminating comes to light.

## The Hand behind the Sabbat

If the Camarilla is a sword to the Tal'Mahe'Ra, the Sabbat is their iron club. Not all Sabbat vampires are reveling shovelheads, but there is a definite lack of constraint found only within these ranks. The Tal'Mahe'Ra was instrumental in the formation of the Sabbat centuries ago, and has infiltrated the Sect at all levels of power and influence, including at least two Archbishops and a Cardinal.

The Sabbat consists of over a dozen Clans and bloodlines, but the two backbone Clans of the Sect make navigating the politics far trickier. Tzimisce and Lasombra do not outnumber the Brujah and Gangrel *antitribu*, or the Caitiff for that matter, but are far more influential than any of the other lineages. The Tal'Mahe'Ra has long loathed both Clans for past sins and their base natures. The Lasombra are unapologetic and patricidal; at present, only their *antitribu* – those who protested and stood against






## A Note on Thin-Bloods

One of the chief concerns of the Tal'Mahe'Ra is the weakening of the blood, each successive generation producing less powerful vampires. The Tal'Mahe'Ra disdains the creation of any Kindred greater than Tenth Generation, believing weak vampires are poor pawns and have no use even as an *aperitif* for ravenous Antediluvians.

Camarilla agents often seek to reduce or restrict the creation of childer within their cities. At least one Prince has banned siring entirely, forcing the Kindred of his city to travel to nearby towns to embrace childer. Several more withhold permission to sire as a reward for the most loyal, and only bestow it on Kindred of sufficient Generation.

Vampires of Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Generations are regarded as a sign of Gehenna by the Tal'Mahe'Ra, especially when said Thin-Blooded are also Caitiff. When they believe they can do so unnoticed, seraphim and dominions attempt to purge such abominations from their cities. The Hand wishes the eldest Generations to rise. Since most prophecies suggest the Thin-Blooded will bring that about, the Hand recognizes the value of the youngest, even if not welcoming their membership. Further, this hostility is not just a social construct; the servants of the Antediluvians are instinctively aggressive toward the Thin-Blooded, as if something within their blood boils and demands they be culled.



their Founder's destruction, and which the Lasombra mercilessly hunt into extinction — have proven worthy of Tal'Mahe'Ra induction. The Tal'Mahe'Ra is very strict on diablerie; those Tremere responsible for the destruction of the Salubri, elder Giovanni who diablerized their Cappadocian kin, any who took part in the diablerie or destruction of an Antediluvian, or those who regularly commit unjustified diablerie are forbidden membership. More than anything, the Hand's regulations on diablerie have seen only a scant few Sabbat gain True-Hand membership — there is a distinction between reclaiming the blood of traitors and the unworthy to strengthen loyal members

and unrestrained bloodlust. The most dangerous of the Sect's enemies are listed in the *Tabula Adversa*, a catalog of information secured in Enoch. Members of the Sabbat make up a full two-thirds of the list, with elder Tremere, Giovanni, Followers of Set, and certain Brujah responsible for the Anarch Revolts filling out the rest.

Recruitment from Sabbat Cainites should be easier to manage, but recruiters often have just as difficult a time identifying suitable candidates as their Camarilla counterparts. Kindred collect bad habits as they move through the centuries, no matter their personal ideology, and the Sabbat's view of humanity as cattle to use and abuse at whim is one of the larger deterrents in candidate selection. Some within the Tal'Mahe'Ra sweep this fact under the rug. After all, when it comes to the apocalypse, the ends justify the means, right? Critics say that the Sabbat may be a useful tool, but its behavior towards mortal stock could prove a detriment after the inevitable drop in population after the End Times. These critics note that the Sabbat could be a boon, but plans must be in place to eliminate them once they've outlived their usefulness.

The saving grace for the Tal'Mahe'Ra is the freedom to seed twigs and branches of their main cults throughout the Sabbat. These groups are small, comprised of loyal and pious agents, who present diverse public faces to the Sabbat. Some are doomsday prophets, warning of the inevitability of Gehenna. Some are cults of philosophy and introspection, promulgating the Path of Death and the Soul and the Path of Lilith. One tiny, heretical cult teaches of the unification of Bloody Mother and Dark Father. Others are philosophical or political groups, targeting those who question and doubt the status quo, enticing them into debate and rhetoric. No matter how they appear on the surface, every cult spread throughout the Sabbat has the same mission: to ensure they have fingers in the enemy camp. The Sword of Caine seeks to make war on the Antediluvians. When Gehenna arrives, the Sabbat will undoubtedly prove the main force of opposition.

## The Other Black Hand

The existence of the False Hand within the Sabbat is an open secret of Kindred society, but little else about it is known. Even most members of the Sabbat remain in the dark about its doctrines and policies. Because of this, Sabbat leaders are wary of it, and some seek its destruction.

Tal'Mahe'Ra members of the False Hand surreptitiously nurture this wariness into fear and paranoia. This way, the Sabbat keeps a check on the False Hand, the False Hand keeps a check on the Sabbat, and the Tal'Mahe'Ra is free to move unimpeded. The best place to hide is

in plain sight, and the False Hand is a vital tool in the Tal'Mahe'Ra's arsenal.

Despite the True Hand's precautions, some of the more powerful non-Tal'Mahe'Ra members of the False Hand suspect and actively seek spies and manipulators in their midst. Circumstantial evidence has surfaced that the half-dozen newest packs within the False Hand may be more than they appear. Several particularly perceptive Cainites have reported the packs for unusual attitudes or actions that seem a trifle off-kilter; being the Sabbat, these reports are normally dismissed, but not all are so easily fooled by appearances and coincidences.

On the surface, these packs appear nomadic, but each one is comprised of five of the Tal'Mahe'Ra's most fanatical members, all sworn to the dictates of one True Hand seraph gone rogue. The activities of all these packs are off-the-record, and tracking them individually will prove fruitless. However, if observed as a whole, the irregularities show instances of overall Cainite strength in a region waning in the long-run by the presence of these packs in a territory. When scaled, what seems arbitrary and random at the municipal level hints at an inter-connectivity and tactical strategy that, if investigated, the Tal'Mahe'Ra fears may hit a little too close to home.

## Rumors and Lies

The Tal'Mahe'Ra maintains its concealment within the False Hand by disseminating half-truths and outright lies to their False Hand pawns. The eldest dozen of the True Hand agents have performed damage control so often over the centuries that it has become a rote formula. There is no length to which they will not go, and no option they will not consider: their past scapegoats have included one of their own zealous packs willing to die for the cause, a Red List fugitive, and an inconvenient rival implicated by planted, fabricated evidence and falsified witness statements to Sabbat Inquisitors.

No matter how they choose to eliminate the threat to their secrecy, the Tal'Mahe'Ra does it from a distance through proxies and dupes, unwilling to risk being caught in compromising positions. While this is the safest and least risky position, it can carry unintended consequences. It is very easy to lose control of misinformation, and each rumor grows wilder and more speculative as it spreads. These allegations are very hard to squash once they are widespread, and each one serves to reinforce the suspicions of traitors in the Sect.

To date, none of the most viral rumors target the Tal'Mahe'Ra in particular; virtually all of them cast doubt on the allegiance and ambition of the False Black Hand. Some of the rumors are outlandish and bizarre, accusing the Black

Hand of everything from being comprised of Camarilla agents intent on destroying the Sabbat to being a secret police for Inconnu overlords, or a cabal of fanatical infernalists. But others – notably those speculating the Black Hand is far larger than it appears, has a secret city in the spirit world, or controls powerful and influential vampires of the Camarilla as well as the Sabbat – hit much closer to home.

They will deny it to their last drop of vitae, but the agents of the Black Hand are neither perfect nor flawless. There are many Kindred with varying degrees of certainty that an overarching conspiracy exists: incautious revenant spies, necromantic interrogation of ghosts, and careless agents all have the potential to blow the whistle on the depth and breadth of the conspiracy.

## The Hand Unaligned

With no central ideology and code of behavior binding them together, the independent Clans present a unique challenge to Tal'Mahe'Ra spies and recruiters. Each Clan requires a unique approach, based on a complex assortment of conditions including the ultimate goal of the agent, internal structure, history, personality of individual Kindred, and the Clan and personality of the agent approaching them.

### Assamites

Assamite *antitribu* make up a large portion of Tal'Mahe'Ra membership, but the Sect's relationship with the main branch of the Clan is lengthy and challenging. The longstanding alliance between the Tal'Mahe'Ra and the Assamites continues into modern nights, though tension is increasing once again. Two centuries of conflict in the Middle East have slowly chipped away at the ceasefire, and the outright wars in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last four decades have accelerated that deterioration, causing the Assamites to grow ever more insular and xenophobic.

Pragmatic elements within the Assamites and Tal'Mahe'Ra quietly prepare for the day that hostilities will resume. However, optimists on both sides work to bolster the damaged alliance before the point of no return, seeking to turn attention to their common and ancient enemy: the Setites.

### Followers of Set

The Followers of Set seem like an obvious addition to the Sect, as their paradigm does not deviate much from the Tal'Mahe'Ra veneration of the Clan sires. However, the Sect has been engaged in war with the Setites since the earliest days of its history. Originally stemming from competition over Enoch, millennia ago, later conflicts rose from the Serpents proving adept at manipulating both the Tal'Mahe'Ra and the Assamites into conflict.

Though the Tal'Mahe'Ra wishes nothing more than the total destruction of this Clan, they have to proceed carefully. The Setites know a great deal about the Sect and use this information to strategically defend themselves if the Tal'Mahe'Ra moves too openly against them. This forces the Sect to abandon focus on the Setites and concentrate on damage control to preserve their secrecy.

## **Giovanni**

The Tal'Mahe'Ra relationship with the Giovanni is a historically nebulous one. Augustus Giovanni and his childer waged an opportunistic and aggressive campaign against the Cappadocians during the Renaissance, bringing their minor bloodline to the status of full Clan with the supposed diablerie of Japheth by Claudius Giovanni in 1444.

In modern nights, the Tal'Mahe'Ra approaches the Giovanni with cautious interest. Though elders and seraphim are hesitant to permit Giovanni necromancers access to Enoch, the Giovanni have studied death almost exclusively since their Clan founder's Embrace, and almost certainly have gleaned secrets even the Tal'Mahe'Ra's most devoted academics have yet to learn. The exclusivity of their Embracing policies makes the Clan a difficult one to infiltrate, but the Tal'Mahe'Ra has had limited success in placing agents within the Clan's mortal enterprises.

Several individuals have been identified as possible candidates for Sect membership, notably those from the della Passaglia and Pisanob bloodlines, but recruitment of these individuals has yet to become fully active. The Sect's Harbingers might no longer care about the Giovanni, but other elders remember Cappadocius and Japheth with fondness. Those elders are not inclined to forgive any Giovanni for their founder's treachery.

## **Ravnos**

The First, Second, and Third Carnatic Wars in India presented the Tal'Mahe'Ra of the region with a golden opportunity. Elders of the Ravnos Clan had long prevented the Sect from regaining their former influence in their homeland. The continuous invasion of European forces as well as assistance from disgruntled younger Ravnos allowed the Tal'Mahe'Ra ample openings to decimate their rivals' numbers through mortal dupes. When the wars had cooled, the Tal'Mahe'Ra assumed control of India and placed their Ravnos allies in positions of influence and power to smooth the transition.

Though it may have started as an alliance of convenience, the Ravnos Clan (and their *antitribu*) make up a large portion of the Tal'Mahe'Ra in the Middle East and India. Though newer members are watched carefully, those Ravnos who earned membership centuries ago are among the most loyal and devout believers in the Sect's cause.

## **The Hand in Anarchy**

The Anarch Movement has been a thorn in the Tal'Mahe'Ra's side since its inception. Though it helped birth the Sabbat, it is far from a recognized Sect, leading some Hand elders to dismiss the movement as a fad that will soon pass. However, others see the birthing pangs of a Sect in action, and have been quick to get in on the ground floor. With little overall hierarchy, carving out personal areas of influence and power bases is far simpler than in the Sabbat or Camarilla, but the lack of command structure carries drawbacks as well, making it more difficult to infiltrate the power blocs of non-Hand Kindred.

The Anarch Movement is unlikely to produce any viable candidates for recruitment, though agents keep watch on the few individuals with potential. By and large, the Movement is regarded as a fringe-group breeding pit for weak-blooded and Clanless vampires. No one of sufficient power or influence is expected to arise out of it. Still, even the harbingers of Gehenna have their use. Embedded agents plan to use the Movement as a third option to maintain the delicate balance of politics and ideology between the Camarilla and the Sabbat.

## **The Hand in Motion: Modern Affairs**

The Tal'Mahe'Ra keeps itself busy no matter where it goes. Time grows short, and there is still much to do before the Final Nights run out. To an outsider, the Sect's goals and objectives are an insurmountable, confusing mess. Indeed, given their relatively small numbers, the sheer scope and ambition of their plans appears absolutely impossible to accomplish. But the Sect's elders have grown quite adept at multitasking and micromanaging, and ancillae are used to carrying out missions that achieve multiple objectives at a time.

## **The Silent Agenda**

Everything the Tal'Mahe'Ra does is in preparation for the night of the Antediluvians' return. The deepest and simplest of its conspiracies is that it serves the eldest, and the Hand will be richly rewarded for piety and loyalty in the aftermath of Gehenna. These preparations are known as the Silent Agenda. The vast majority of Tal'Mahe'Ra agents do not learn this term, however, as only the seraphim and select elders use it, and only in the privacy of Enoch.

All missions and schemes of the Silent Agenda fall into a combination of six broad categories:

## **Control the Kindred**

Whether it is through carefully manipulating animosity between Sects and Clans, encouraging new or ancient conflict between individuals, spreading disinformation, or destroying the most depraved, the Tal'Mahe'Ra seeks to keep Kindred focused inward, distrustful of their peers and colleagues.

## **Protect the Kine**

The human race is an ignorant child, innocent and unaware of what stalks it in the night. The Tal'Mahe'Ra acts *in loco parentis* with regards to mortals. Whether it is providing a shield between humanity and monsters or assuming control of key mortal institutions, the Tal'Mahe'Ra guides its flock as it sees fit.

## **Purge the Anathema**

There are darker things than vampires in the shadows, and the Tal'Mahe'Ra will stop at nothing to destroy them. Infernalists and demons are high on the list, but they are not the only darkness the Black Hand slays. This category also covers thin-bloods and Caitiff, who the Sect regards as a sign of Gehenna, as well as the most amoral and depraved Kindred. The most dangerous of the Sect's enemies are listed in the *Tabula Adversa*, a catalog of information secured in Enoch.

## **Prepare the Way**

The Antediluvians will return, and the Tal'Mahe'Ra must be ready. The Idran and Bahari promulgate the truth of their faiths cautiously, but devotion is spreading. The Sect continues to cherry-pick suitable recruits from the Camarilla and Sabbat, but the unworthy majority must also be prepared for their place as pawns and fodder in the Final Nights.

## **Seek the Truth**

As ancient and knowledgeable as it is, there is still much the Tal'Mahe'Ra does not know or understand. Whether it is through exploration of Enoch, study of the *Guarded Rubrics*, meditation at the tombs of the Aralu, or total devotion to Paths of Enlightenment, the seraphim require younger members to achieve personal understanding, as well as acceptance and veneration of their beliefs.

## **Conceal the Sect**

Above and beyond all else, secrecy is paramount. The Sect cannot afford to be crippled this close to Gehenna. No matter what the mission or scheme, all agents must take care to cover their tracks and conceal the Tal'Mahe'Ra's existence from the uninitiated.

## **Special Relations**

### **The Eastern Hand**

From the shadows of the Potala and Norbulinka palaces, to the gilt roof of the Jokhang temple, Lhasa is the cultural heart and soul of Tibet, as well as the Tal'Mahe'Ra in Asia. The East has proven to be a difficult region in which to gain a foothold, and the agents dispatched to keep watch over it are so disconnected from the main body of the Tal'Mahe'Ra as to be an entirely different Hand altogether. Though they answer to the will of the Del'Roh, they conceal their rituals and policies from their peers, and only a single seraphim oversees them.

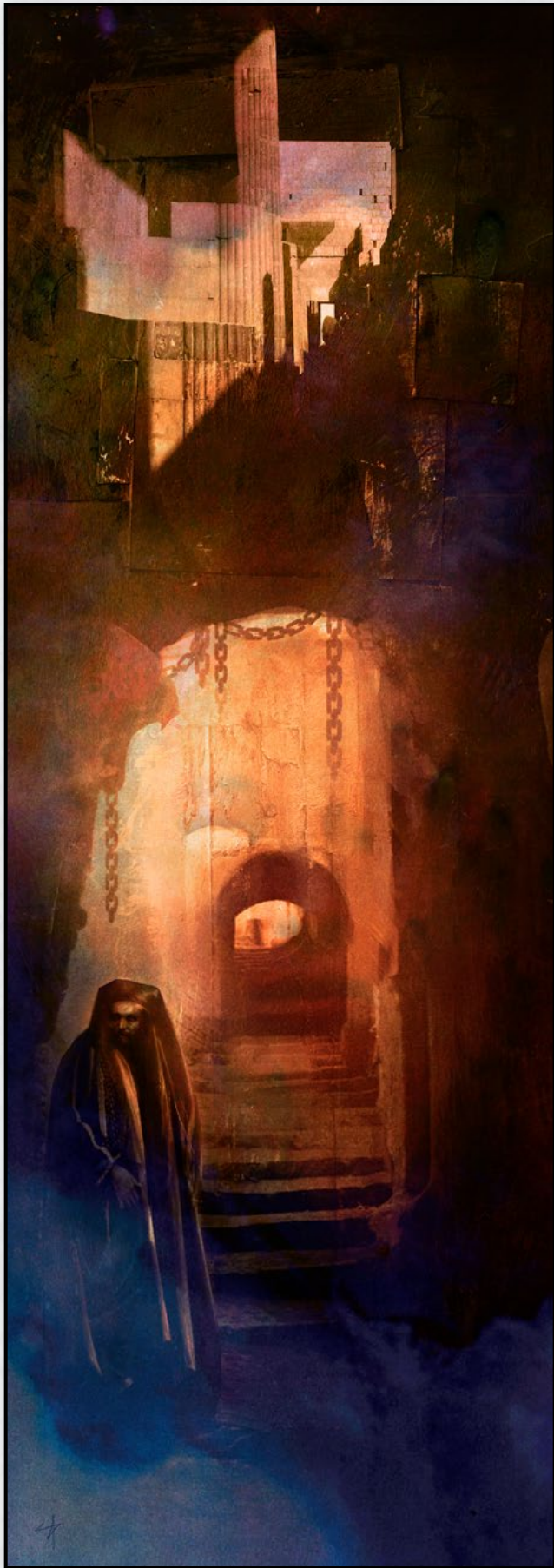
The Asian Hand's hierarchy is rigid, placing less importance on personal gain and more on devotion to the whole. Each vampire within knows their place in the order of things, and those who step beyond the bounds of that place are dealt with decisively.

This division is deeply connected with the mortals of the region, and the Tal'Mahe'Ra take a more active role in the kine's daily lives. The Asian Hand are believed to receive advice from oracles and scholars called Yaoguai. Reports state that they view the Caine and Lilith myths as mostly Western propaganda and largely false; a monomyth, like any religion, using baseless fear as a tool of control and existing as an underlying system of domination to distract younger vampires away from the manipulations of their elders. It's believed they trust that Antediluvians exist, but think them far from anything that fits into a convenient Judeo-Christian mythos with an appendage pantheon to justify Western Clan dominance and groupings.

### **The African Hand**

Like the Hand in Asia, the Tal'Mahe'Ra of Africa is a tiny, isolationist division that does not share its secrets with the main body of the Sect. Some believe one seraph inhabits its ranks, but many know that the Hand in Africa is not overseen by a seraph at all, but a triumvirate of elders who interpret the Del'Roh's will as they see fit.

The main purpose of this division is to keep watch on the Camarilla, Giovanni, and Sabbat presences in Africa, thwart the schemes of the Setites, and to gain information on Africa's mysterious and insular Laibon vampires. Diplomatic relations with the Hand have ever been an unfortunate necessity for the Followers of Set, and no place proves that more than North Africa. In effort to quell the kine and stabilize the region following the Arab Spring uprisings, Followers of Set were forced to make concessions to the True Brujah. To vouchsafe greater Tunisia, the Setites relinquished their toehold



in Carthage in exchange for assistance in pacifying the mortals. The glory days of Carthage are long passed, but nostalgia can be a powerful sedative.

The African Hand does not often take a combative role in the region's affairs, making it the most passive division of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. The loose hierarchy largely leaves its members to their own devices. As a result, many blood cults have sprung up under Tal'Mahe'Ra guidance, which provide a steady supply of blood, retainers, agents, spies, and informants to their masters.

### **The Inconnu**

Despite the Tal'Mahe'Ra's best efforts, there isn't a lot of verifiable information available on the strange, mysterious group known only as the Inconnu. At best, they are limited to the Monitors, who watch without interfering in vampiric affairs. At worst, they are as ancient and unseen as the Tal'Mahe'Ra, manipulating the Camarilla, Sabbat, independent Clans, and perhaps even the Black Hand itself for unknown purposes. While the possibility of the latter being true concerns the seraphim greatly, winnowing out the intentions of the Inconnu is only a minor priority. The seraphim divert personnel and resources to fact-finding missions as opportunities arise, but only where it will not disrupt vital tasks of the Silent Agenda.

### **Mages**

The only true mage the average Tal'Mahe'Ra vampire is likely to interact with on a regular basis is a Tal'Mahe'Ra yamasattva or an Itarajana which shapes their outlook on other kinds of mages. The Sect as a whole is certainly aware of other mages: the Lilin Verbena introduced the concept of blood familiars to the Sect. But the world of the Awakened is largely uninterested in the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and the majority of those with a more sorcerous bent within the Sect are commonly limited to interactions with hedge-wizards of the Rafastio family and the remaining yamasattva of the Idran.

### **Lupines**

With the exception of the pathetic wretches called Abominations, the Tal'Mahe'Ra deals little with the lupines of the wilds. While agents occasionally run into shapeshifters within city limits, they rarely pose a threat. The Lupines' agenda seems entirely separate from that of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and the Sect likes it that way.

### **Wraiths**

The Tal'Mahe'Ra collectively knows more about ghosts than almost any other Kindred agency, save the Giovanni. Agents traveling to Enoch are likely to encounter several in their travels, and it is rumored that several of the blood

cults boast wraithly members. The Non-Aggression Treaty of Neall remains in place in modern nights, and though they are not official inductees into the Sect, several wraiths are on semi-permanent retainer for information and guide purposes.

## **Mortals**

The Society of Leopold is a reminder of a time many elder vampires of the Tal'Mahe'Ra do not usually like to remember: the Inquisition. Though only mortal, many hunters belonging to the Society seem imbued with an uncanny ability to sniff out vampires, no matter where they hide. The Sect has attempted in the past, through Sabbat and False Hand pawns, to destroy the Society of Leopold, but to no avail. Agents are advised to avoid mortal inquisitors at all costs, and flee if avoidance is impossible.

## **Themes**

The Tal'Mahe'Ra is a study in conflicting themes. On one hand, it is a source of ancient, terrible evil and insidious manipulation. It wraps itself in cloak upon cloak of secrecy, hiding conspiracies and truths from other Kindred and even from its own members. It has fomented war, carefully controlled the intensity of hostility between the Camarilla and Sabbat, encourages the purging of the weak, and grooms the unworthy to die on the eve of Gehenna.

On the other hand, the Tal'Mahe'Ra is one of the few forces standing between humanity and the worst depredations of Kindred society. The conflicts it nurtures between Clans and Sects serve to keep power-hungry vampires focused on self-preservation and self-promotion, leaving less time for the worst abusers to inflict themselves on mortals. In addition, it provides humanity protection against more alien and hellish nightmares.

Despite its rich history and genesis, the Tal'Mahe'Ra has grown stagnant at best, and at worst decayed. As the Sabbat falls ever further into depravity and barbarism, the Anarch Movement grows and thrives on an upward trajectory, while the Camarilla endures as the ever-hardening bedrock of Kindred society. But the Tal'Mahe'Ra remains a dinosaur, a prehistoric beast that has only reluctantly begun to evolve. The opening of the Hand may infuse fresh blood into the desiccating Sect, but it's too early to tell if this will save it from total dissolution before the Antediluvians return.

## **Moods**

### **Dissonance**

Opening the Hand may not have been the best idea. An influx of new recruits may save the Sect, but might also damn

it to destruction. Many of the elders are anachronisms, eternally frozen in the customs and mentalities of their bygone youth, and some modern vampires who've not been raised as chatterlings by the Sect find it difficult to connect with their mentors and leaders. In addition, the Del'Roh has not emerged from the Underworld in centuries. The vast amount of change in the past one hundred years alone dwarfs the previous fourteen thousand before it. Elders occluded behind the walls of Enoch have not borne witness to the rise of technological dominance and the rapidity of communication in the modern era, and are not equipped to steer a course away from rocks they can't yet conceive of.

## **Secrecy**

The Tal'Mahe'Ra survives primarily because their existence is clandestine and fanatically protected. The threat of detection is an omnipresent weight, and the Sect must continually guard itself against discovery. The stress of such secrecy exerts a lot of pressure on its agents, especially those deep undercover; paranoia and obsession grows easily. But the paranoia is not unwarranted. Most Clans outnumber the Tal'Mahe'Ra; entire Sects coming for vengeance would mean their almost-instant destruction.

## **Superiority**

The Tal'Mahe'Ra knows that they are the only Sect with the organization, resources, knowledge, and skills to enable the world's survival. The belief in their superiority is ingrained from the first day of recruitment, and this foundation is built on until each agent has a towering edifice of righteousness and arrogance with which to justify their actions.

# **The Hand Concealed: Activity and Ideology**

A conspiracy only functions when the vast majority of its members don't realize they're a part of it.

Ask one member of the Tal'Mahe'Ra how many members exist within the Sect and you'll be told 400, maximum. Ask another and you'll be told over 1,500, and that's not counting mortals in the Hand's service. There's a fine line between the fully aware members of the Hand and its unwitting pawns. Even Kindred holdings titles within the Hand are unlikely to know the whole truth of the Aralu, Enoch, or the upper echelons of the Sect, and so the conspiracy persists. The Hand is at its most powerful when operating in secret, and were all members to know the full truth, it wouldn't be a particularly secret society.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra is a cellular organization, comprised of multiple smaller cults with a nucleus at the center representing the Wuzara, who order the Sect's movements. The majority of these cults have no idea of their connection to the central group, or indeed each other. Some even come to blows due to seemingly misaligned goals. The dominions of the Hand claim to know full well why they manipulate each cult in the way they do, despite the casualties that sometimes occur when cults go head-to-head. To everyone else, the Hand is immense and unknowable in its machinations. That's the impression the Hand wants to give.

## **The False Hand**

To a degree, the Sabbat is a cult of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. While the Hand has less control over the Sect than it desires, the placement of key operatives in positions of power, including among the seraphim of the Sword of Caine, has allowed certain measures of direction to be exerted.

A subsect known as the Black Hand exists within the Sabbat, with approximately 100 of its members holding secret loyalties to the Tal'Mahe'Ra. This is a small figure when compared to the main body of the Sabbat, but within the Black Hand, it represents a powerful minority with ability to sway decisions, target enemies of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and actually weaken the Sabbat through internecine conflict.

The Sabbat's Black Hand, or False Hand as the Tal'Mahe'Ra call it, acts as information brokerage, store of Noddist lore, and paramilitary organization all at once. When Kindred refer to the Black Hand, they refer to the Sabbat's task force of killers and chroniclers, rather than the Tal'Mahe'Ra. The Wazir is quite content for this to remain the case.

## **Taken by the Hand**

A substantial number of recruits for the Tal'Mahe'Ra come from the False Hand, as the Sabbat indoctrinates its subjects with impressive fanaticism and loyalty. Only the best and brightest of the False Hand survive longer than half a dozen operations.

Tal'Mahe'Ra headhunters observe the False Hand at length, recording instances where potential candidates excel in the use of Disciplines, overcome adversity in inventive ways, and most importantly, learn to question. If the recruit does the latter, the time has arrived to extend the olive branch leading to the Tal'Mahe'Ra, often by demolishing the rest of the newcomer's pack to break any existing ties of Vinculum or unnatural feelings of devotion to the Sabbat.

Recruitment is not exclusive to members of the False Hand. Tal'Mahe'Ra agents exist within most Sects and Clans, looking out for potential individuals and collectives. More than a few kamut of the Hand existed as coterie before they were recruited.

Joining the Hand requires more than a simple R.S.V.P. The Sect has its own rituals, initiations, and tests of loyalty to perform, the conditions depending on whether the supplicant is Kindred or kine. The penalty for failing any of these ceremonies is death, although some failures have been blackmailed into remaining double-agents for the Sect or bloodline from which they originated. The rites are many, and the following among the most common.

### **Rite of Katabasis**

During the katabasis, the recruit is shown an entrance to the Shadowlands and then made to step across the threshold. In the case of no necromancer being present to officiate, a more literal descent into deep caverns or catacombs is encouraged.

If the supplicant is a vampire, he is blinded before the rite is enacted, traditionally from a serrated blade being dragged across the eyes. Those undergoing the ritual are forbidden from using their vitae to heal such wounds until the rite is complete. Mortals are merely festooned with a ceremonial blindfold.

The descent into darkness does not have to be practiced in solitude; in fact, the Tal'Mahe'Ra favors supplicants receiving company from similarly blinded companions. The ritual leads the recruits into the unknown, with existing Hand agents and wraiths harrying their lessers with threats, superficial attacks, and ultimately, a terrifying hunt back to the surface.

The ritual typically lasts from dusk until shortly before dawn. Completion of the katabasis proves the recruit's mental fortitude and ability to depend on more than his vision, hopefully showing trust in companions and Sect. Symbolically the rite represents the cycle of undeath, traveling to and from the Underworld.

Frenzy is permitted within the course of the rite, providing the supplicant recovers prior to its conclusion. Flight to the surface before the hunt begins results in failure, no matter the physical or emotional grievance the recruit may be suffering. The officials take pleasure in making this rite as torturous as possible for particularly arrogant recruits, including (but certainly not limited to) heating the dagger before the blinding.

### **Rite of Mortality**

This rite emphasizes the protection of humanity as a pillar of the Tal'Mahe'Ra ideology. The rite is a true test of the commitment and willpower required by one of the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

The recruits choose a mortal before the rite officially commences. They are first tasked with stewardship of that mortal, ensuring that no ill befalls him or her. Such ills are orchestrated by Hand agents looking to test the recruit's capacity in guardianship. The mortal's life will be put in danger countless times, but he or she must never know they are under threat or protection.

After seven nights, the Hand will demonstrate the fragility of the kine by making a violent attack on the mortal. This attack must shed blood and be potentially fatal. The recruit will then be commanded to assist the mortal in their survival, but are forbidden from allowing vitae to enter the wounded innocent, feeding from the innocent, or tainting the innocent in any way with his vampirism.

The rite tests the recruit's capacity to shepherd a dying mortal to somewhere they might receive medical aid, all the while restraining their accursed nature. The mortal represents exactly how the Tal'Mahe'Ra view humanity as a whole. If a supplicant can protect one human from grievous harm, then perhaps he can protect them all.

### **Rite of the Antediluvians**

The most controversial rite, as some within the Hand consider it flouting the curses of Caine, this ritual sees the subject doubly cursed for the duration of a month. The recruit is forced to adopt the curse of the Clan of the Hand agent supervising him.

Clearly this ritual is subjective, as few deny that some Clans and bloodlines suffer curses of greater severity than others. As a result, most Hand recruiters who perform this rite are selected from Clans Malkavian, Nosferatu, and Ventrue, although others exist.

Malkavian recruiters constantly harass their supplicants and restrict them to feeding only from the drug-addled, which typically induces the required effect of madness. Nosferatu mentors will physically scar their supplicants, often with brands and typically upon visible features. Ventrue recruiters closely supervise their supplicants, ensuring they must only feed from one type of kine. They habitually pick obscure vintages.

The manner in which mentors of other Clans impose their weaknesses on recruits can range from the insane to the ingenious. Mentors never supervise Kindred from the same Clan as their own. Thaumaturges within the Hand toil on rituals to enforce Caine's curses. Their cause is not a popular one. This rite forges relationships between recruiters and their supplicants that are invaluable to the Sect.

### **Rite of Sak Yant**

This rite brands the skin and the soul of a supplicant with a yantra, marking them as a member of the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

A grand ceremony involving the sacrifice of a treacherous Hand member or a powerful wraith accompanies the recruit's introduction to the yamasattva, with the yantra tools tipped with the sacrifice's internal fluids. Each recruit is then made to kneel and hold a hand aloft. Through magical means, a yamasattva carves the symbol onto the supplicant's palm: a black crescent moon, spreading outward like the sun emerging from behind an eclipse. The supplicant cannot heal the wounds this mark creates with vitae alone.

The rite ensures that in the world of the living, the yantra is only visible to other members of the Hand. Unlike their Sabbat counterparts, the True Black Hand's tattoo is only visible to others in the Shadowlands. The two tattoos have other differences for those in-the-know; the Sabbat version is simply a black crescent without the details of an eclipse. Some recipients of the marking are driven to frenzy during its application. The yamasattva claim this betrays an inherent weakness of spirit, and the recruit who loses control often becomes the next sacrifice.

The tattoo allows operatives to identify one another readily. However, specters target those who bear the tattoo, and legend holds that the mark renders its bearer susceptible to the yamasattva's control. Neither the seraphim nor the Del'Roh have been seen to bear the marking.

## **The Hand Revealed**

It's only once initiations are completed that recruits begin to learn the Sect's true aims. Even then, few learn the whole truth, being put to use as hands and feet in the field, as spies within other Sects or their own Clans, or sometimes as researchers and chroniclers of the arcane.

### **The Palm**

The ruler of the Hand is the mysterious Del'Roh, who has commanded the Hand for over 250 years. As she spends most of her time in Enoch, her ten seraphim act as lieutenants. The seraphim hold high rank in the Hand due to their influential alternate identities in other Sects and Clans. When not consumed in studying the mysteries of the Underworld, three grossly powerful undead magi known as the yamasattva collaborate with the seraphim to form a tribunal of thirteen. The Del'Roh and this tribunal forms the Wazir, which codifies and disseminates Hand ideology to all members of the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

The Wazir's commands trickle down to the dominions, who act as captains over certain purviews, such as missions against particular groups or infiltration in specific Clans or Sects. The dominions in turn oversee the Cult of the Erinyes, who train



and mentor the chatterlings and act as guardians of Enoch. Alongside the Wazir, the Qadi manages Clan interests within the Sect, and the Rawi holds responsibility for securing and researching antiquities of interest to the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

Finally, the agents and shakari of the Hand make up the bulk of its membership. Ranging in age and experience, the meritocratic organization of the Sect encourages camaraderie among the rank and file. While political brinkmanship and informal rank exist among shakari and other less lethal agents, an individual's ability to fulfill the task at hand holds more weight than on Clan affiliations, Generation, or lineage. Due to the general lack of blood bonding within the Sect, relationships stem from earned trust and companionship.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra is just as much a Sect of uncompromising extremists as it is an organization of the most rational Kindred existing tonight. Just as with the Camarilla, some elders serve for centuries without question or pause. Just as with the Sabbat, some neonates question and desire change from the status quo. The Hand's hard line aims of service to the Antediluvians and destruction of their peers are just that; the hard line. You're more likely to find compromise and active debate in the Hand tonight than at any other time.


Despite the rise in active discourse, the key tenets of the Hand's ideology drive the Sect forward. The Hand doesn't advertise these beliefs, but one of the first questions a new agent is asked is quite telling: "Do you eschew all false progenitors, the mutinous Sects, and their unworthy hegemony?"

### **Revere the Fathers**

Primary among the ideological standpoints of the Sect is the Hand's preservation, protection, and loyal service to the Antediluvians. This view alone separates the Sect from any other. Interestingly, the most closely aligned faction of Kindred to the Tal'Mahe'Ra in this regard are the Followers of Set. However, mentioning this to a dominion is grounds for impalement from anus to mouth as an object lesson in keeping one's imagination from roving.


The highest echelons of the Hand unconditionally swear allegiance to the Clan founders, with a few exceptions. Usurper Antediluvians, along with Sutekh, receive no fealty. The rest deserve full supplication, with the Hand dedicated to the cause of the Clan founders when their time comes to wake. The Hand intends to prostrate itself at that time, begging for divine favor and mercy, while directing the Antediluvians towards its mutual enemies.

This cornerstone of the Hand's ideology garners a great deal of debate among the agents of the Sect. The Antediluvians' favor would be undoubtedly beneficial in any event, but how can their loyalties be guaranteed? The elders seem certain of the Antediluvians' beneficence. They claim



## **Don't Let Your Left Hand Know What Your Right Hand is Doing**

Never forget; while the Hand may possess a shared ideology, this does not stop the difference in practices, individual beliefs, and makeup between the Left Hand and the Right. It's rare indeed for members within one bloc to fully trust one another. When it comes to Gehenna, the Wazir anticipates a flurry of betrayals, and marks well the Hand members most likely of such behavior.



to hear kindly whispers from the surviving Clan founders despite their torpid states, but the younger members of the Hand see no assurance of future Antediluvian philanthropy.

### **Love the Mother**

The Sect's veneration of Lilith and Caine as mother to vampires has become increasingly prominent. The yamasattva' latest studies of the *Guarded Rubrics* resulted in their mooting that perhaps Lilith and Caine are one and the same being, dismissively referring to the Abrahamic interpretation as quite a regressive point of view.

The foot soldiers of the Tal'Mahe'Ra ignore or misunderstand most of the yamasattva' arcane words; the ancient magi aren't even Cainites, and the Hand responds to the dominions and seraphim before they listen to the mistrusted yamasattva. Still, this recent interpretation has given pause to the ever-present ideological conflict between Bahari and Noddists. Many Hand members, predominantly from cultures not beholden to the creation myths of Judeo-Christianity, have accepted the yamasattva' interpretation. The result is an upswing for a third way of thinking.

The three points of view now coexist and fit within existing Hand ideology reasonably comfortably, although ideological incongruities still generate debate. The Throne of Caine is still revered as the throne of the First King of Nod, even by those now using the name "Caine" as a title for the mother of all vampires. The lore Lilith and her cults produced is still sought after, even though some within the Sect see it as supplemental to the word of Caine. Ultimately, reverence and service to the entity

that birthed their kind guarantees the Tal'Mahe'Ra's provenance of the world.

The unification of Caine and Lilith has led to cheer for the more cynical vampires within the Sect. They now have philosophical grounds for hedging their bets. The Hand don't know which vampire came first, but they're assured that whoever it is will return to them and can't judge them for their comprehensive interpretation. A broader church is a more welcoming church, for both parishioner and idol.

### **Pity our Children**

Vampires are rarely seen as altruists, but since their founding, the Tal'Mahe'Ra has advocated a stance of guardianship when it comes to humanity. Where the other Sects use mortals without a care for the consequences, the Hand believes that humanity is worthy of conservation.

Depending on the Hand agent, you may be told this is due to the words of Lilith as mother of creation, or that humanity is to be protected as they are the Earth's true heirs. You could be told that the mortals need to be safeguarded for when the Antediluvians arrive, or that the Tal'Mahe'Ra shepherds humanity in the same fashion as a farmer does with sheep. Whether humane or contemptuous, it's better to keep the kine happy and well fed before delivery to the slaughterhouse.

In practice, the Sect's views vary widely. The Kindred of the Hand are hardly humanitarians, but they do feel conscious of wasted lives. Hand members know the Shadowlands and know what it is for a human to die without settling fetters, unable to move on and forever trapped in a tormented state. This greatly disturbs Hand agents who snuff out lives without considering the consequences. Torment leads to further torment, whether for the individual or for the deceased's loves ones, with the ultimate conclusion being implosion for all. The Hand doesn't want humanity pushed down that road by the other Sects' uncaring policies, and so steps in where it can to empower kine against otherworldly oppressors.

### **Dismay our Siblings**

The ideal the Tal'Mahe'Ra most fervently pursues is disruption for all vampires who do not conform to their views. If Kindred do not observe and acknowledge the truth as the Hand does, hunt the beings the Hand pursues, or share love for the kine, they are doomed to perish beneath the Hand's collective weight.

Some Clans and bloodlines outside the Sect see greater leniency than others, the Assamites chief among them due to their shared enmity for Setites. However, the Kindred outside of the Tal'Mahe'Ra ultimately must be brought






## What Are Demons?

Demons, to the Black Hand, are not one specific thing. They're all things nefarious, monstrous, and spiritual which are not vampires, werewolves, or the other more well-defined creatures of the night. This blanket term can encompass actual demons, quasi-biblical entities, nigh godlike spirits of the Wyrms, vedic spirits, and any number of other oddities.

The Black Hand doesn't draw distinctions. This is out of convenience, not out of ignorance. It's not that the Hand doesn't understand that these things are different; it's that they don't care. In the end, they all serve to unravel the tapestry of our world, and destroying that fabric is unacceptable.



to heel or (preferably) annihilated. The majority of Hand members practice this ideology with enthusiasm, with politically savvy agents interrupting the gears of the Jyhad through humiliation and blackmail and militant agents of the Hand performing assassinations across the globe.

As several prominent members of the Hand speak for the rapid advancement of Gehenna, the Sect's campaign of countering the moves of every other differently aligned vampiric group proceeds apace.

### Respect our Neighbors

Infernalists and demons threaten to undo the work of the Hand, provoking the Sect to extreme measures in order to combat both.

While smaller in number than the broad "demons", infernalists are far more pernicious and resilient. No matter the lengths the Hand goes to in order to destroy them, they always remain – corrupting, insidious, and disruptive to the Hand's aims. A seraph has secretly schooled a kamut of agents in Dark Thaumaturgy so the Hand can start planting Kindred inside infernalist cults. If this information spreads beyond the seraph and the kamut, it could shake the Hand's foundations.

### The Fingers

The Tal'Mahe'Ra doesn't have absolute authority over its cults. The members of these separate organizations have minds and motives of their own. It's only through

the strategic feeding of intelligence, manipulations of preferences and prejudices, the placement of operatives working directly for the Hand, and subtle use of the powers possessed by all Kindred that the Hand so ably steers these cults with any success.

Cults beholden to the Hand vary in size, makeup, and motivation. Some comprise of more than vampires, occasionally being predominantly or entirely mortal, while others dabble with magic, and a rare few even involve shapeshifters. Rumors exist within the Tal'Mahe'Ra of a cult made up entirely of wraiths, the entities within holding domain over one of their utopian Far Shores. Supposedly, it awaits vampires who perish in service to the Hand, but the veracity of the cult's existence remains hotly contested.

Each cult works towards the Hand's goals in small or large ways, knowingly or not.

### Royal Order of the Edenic Groundskeepers

This cult nears half a millennium in age, standing as one of the most successful organizations of Kindred obliviously and almost completely in thrall to the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Armed with neutral territory in over thirty domains, a cavalcade of wealthy Kindred with memberships, and a pretentious title, the Groundskeepers' aim is to resist the Antediluvians.

The cult's name stems from the Order's self-appointed role as vigilant gardeners in the face of an onslaught of parasitic and ultimately destructive pests: the Antediluvians. The cult genuinely sees the Earth as a bounteous place, with plenty of kine from which to feed and little need to war with one another when impossibly hungry monsters are poised to ruin paradise. The Groundskeepers seek the sleeping Antediluvians to destroy them before they wake. Once purely comprising elders, the Order has recently found its membership bolstered by a wave of ancillae and neonates unprepared to accept the historical revisionism forced upon them by their Sects.

The Order resembles a more cautious Sabbat: resistant to diablerie, less prone to infighting, possessed of far fewer fledglings and dedicated towards the auguries of Gehenna. This works in the Hand's favor. The Sect allows the Order to do the legwork in identifying locations of suspected Antediluvians, planting shakari within the cult so any discovered ancients are met and protected by true supplicants.

The cult is not just used for seeking and protecting Antediluvians, but also money laundering. Groundskeepers pay vast fortunes for the most implausible

lore, and that money often reaches contacts within the Hand. The Hand then recycles its own cash through the coffers of the Order. The Hand is happy to fund an exploratory visit into a city ruin or ancient tomb, putting Groundskeepers at risk while they reap the rewards.

The Groundskeepers make the most efficient smoke-screen for the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Were their philosophies not diametrically opposed, the Order would contain Kindred of sufficient age and power to all make for appealing new Hand recruits. The Hand occasionally offers membership to disillusioned Groundskeepers, the Hand recognizing its ideology as offering more than the Order's half a millennium worth of failures.

Not every Groundskeeper is unsuspecting of the ruse. The Ventrue *antitribu* Marcus Verus followed Tal'Mahe'Ra-placed breadcrumbs to the Brujah Antediluvian's suspected resting place outside of Tunis, near the Sidi Salem Dam. A set of ambushes met both he and his coterie on the way. Based on the information Verus obtained prior to his expedition, he suspected some of the Antediluvian's guardians as the culprits, with the assistance of wretched infernalists among them. However, as Verus drew closer to the Sidi Salem Dam, he found that his aggressors knew more about the course of his journey than even his coterie. He'd only informed two elders in the Order of his expeditionary plans.

Verus stopped short of the Dam, suspecting that the torpid Antediluvian likely sleeps beneath it. Disinclined to engage in a war with enemies who know his every move, he currently hides in Testour, contemplating whether to recruit outside assistance, go back to the Order for more support, or reveal his suspicions of duplicity. Not knowing how many of the Order are double agents, nor to whom such agents truly report, gives him pause.

## Way of the Ancient Lawgivers

An immense and intimidating cult of elders, corrupted werewolves, magi, and other ancient immortals, the Way of the Ancient Lawgivers is what the seraphim of the Tal'Mahe'Ra sometimes sardonically call their "front of house." While they remain leery of attaching the name of the Hand to anything the cult says or does, the seraphim can't deny its ability in serving the Antediluvians. It's just shameful how the Lawgivers feel they must do so with excessive sadism and brutality against the kine.

The Lawgivers claim all predators must return to the laws and ways of the First City, where mortals respected those monsters of greater power. They see potential victims as subjects who ought to be thankful for not receiving

outright destruction. Any punishment decided as right by a Lawgiver is unquestionable. Any disagreement would be divergence from Caine's laws.

The Lawgivers openly declare service to Clan founders and primeval entities, believing in a time when such beings will rise and devour all deemed unworthy. Compliance is the only possibility of salvation, and even then, deliverance is not guaranteed. The primordial behemoths slowly stirring know your thoughts as well as your actions, so loyalty to your forebears had best be true.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra utilize the Lawgivers as distractions and blunt objects, with the cult particularly adept at both tasks. The Lawgivers are competent in arranging assaults on the Sabbat, Anarchs, and werewolf packs in particular, seeing such groups as the kind of proud rebels and instigators likely to harm the machinations of the elders and their ancestors. The Lawgivers bring to bear destructive force of the military variety, content to remain in their courts while they command slaves to rain fire upon their enemies. The Lawgivers take credit for the historic inferno that brought down Smyrna, claiming they were routing revolting minions. Much of this is unbridled falsehood, but those who know of the Lawgivers also know not to openly cross them.

The Lawgivers' weakness is in their ability to make enemies. The ancillae and neonates of the Camarilla, Sabbat, and Anarchs despise the cult for its opposition to freedom. In rare instances, members of all three Sects, along with Assamites and Ravnos who buck at such autocracy, have combined resources for short forays against the cult's powerbases. Many cult domains fall within isolated cities, such as the Lawgivers' kingdom in remote La Rinconada, Peru.

The Lawgivers' strength comes from the Tal'Mahe'Ra's constant support. They attribute their survival to divine right, unaware of their sponsors' aid. That support is in danger of fading, as the Camarilla turns their gaze more steadily onto the Lawgivers' unrepentant breaches of the Masquerade. While the Camarilla itself has always had a number of Lawgivers within its ranks, the latest change in Justicars has seen all but one agree on the fate of the cult.

Camarilla attention alone wouldn't see the Tal'Mahe'Ra pull aid from the Lawgivers, were there not also strong evidence that the Followers of Set have been manipulating the cult for just as long as the Hand. A kamut dispatched to La Rinconada to investigate this disturbing possibility sent fellow agents a letter via courier. Wax-sealed and barely encoded, the letter referenced an entity referred to as "*Supay*," to which the Lawgivers pledged their service. The entire kamut vanished shortly afterward.

## A Society of Gentlemen in England

When the Encyclopedia Britannica saw its first edition, it was written under the collective pseudonym of A Society of Gentlemen in Scotland. The cultists within A Society of Gentlemen in England consider their misappropriation of the name quite amusing.

The Society formed within Salisbury Cathedral in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The founder, Sybil, called together her long-splintered coterie for a reunion. Time had been kind enough not to put any members of the coterie to Final Death, but one had become a rawi of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, a fact unknown to her peers.

Sybil had faith that the members would put aside philosophical differences in order to celebrate a new endeavor. She intended to catalogue, file, name, and number every Cainite and Cainite bloodline known to have existed, maintaining this encyclopedia with the assistance of her venerable companions. Such a trove would be invaluable in the perpetual Jyhad, and she had already begun work on her own Clan, the Lasombra.

All members of the Society were intrigued by the possibilities before them and agreed to the creation of an *Encyclopedia Vampirica*. When the rawi returned to her Sect with the news, the seraphs' commands were simple: fill the encyclopedia with discreet lies. The truth was to come to the Tal'Mahe'Ra. The other members of the Society must be fed false information and erroneous updates, and any trace of the True Black Hand must be expunged. The inevitable leak of misinformation would weaken the other Sects and the Hand would be the ultimate recipients of the facts.

The Society began its work in earnest in England and has built up an extensive encyclopedic record, the volumes of which are stored beneath the ruined Iron Age hill fort of Old Sarum. Unfortunately for the Society, much of the information is subtly incorrect. Generations are wrong, sires and childer are recorded in error, and dates are misaligned. More troubling to the cultists are the disasters that seem to befall them whenever they grow close to truth about the Hand.

Sybil is no longer a part of the Society, though still remains active in modern nights. She seems oddly indifferent to the Society's activities, as if she found what she sought and now no longer wishes to play. The other members still pursue information and compile it with zeal, despite their theories of sabotage. The Society has grown as a result of their enthusiasm, with neonates and even ghouls joining, and all sworn to secrecy due to the dangerous material held in the ever-expanding encyclopedia.

The rawi in the Society's ranks has been working on separating the wheat from the chaff for over two centuries and grows tired. The Tal'Mahe'Ra are aware of this, and while they've profited hugely from much of the acquired intelligence, the seraphim are concerned that her grip will loosen and nobody will be able to step in. Replacing her has become a point of contention among the seraphim; while some see her abilities as inimitable, others see her as a threat to the security of the Hand, and one believes she's secretly working for the Inconnu.

The Hand is teetering on the decision to either put more agents in the cult to spy on the Rawi and possibly replace her, or just destroy the whole Society including the Rawi and pick up the pieces. It would be a great loss, but the risk from its remaining active grows nightly.

## The Capuchin

For the last five centuries, the Capuchin has aided the Hand in finding choice intelligence about the secrets of Sects, Clans, and even other entities in the World of Darkness. The information he provides is rarely anything other than precise and immensely rewarding to the recipient, should they survive the dangers to which the information inevitably leads. Despite this, the Sect sees the Capuchin as a frustratingly mysterious individual. He is as comfortable appearing in the audience of the Del'Roh in Enoch as he is at a midnight meeting with agents of the Hand in a Miami strip mall. The seraphim believe the Capuchin to be a servant of their aims, albeit an admittedly inscrutable one.

For his part, the Capuchin refuses to accede to formal introductions. In response, the Hand reasons the Capuchin must have many enemies. Understanding the need for secrecy, the Del'Roh has decreed that for as long as the Capuchin wishes to remain aloof, he can do so. If he serves the Tal'Mahe'Ra, what difference does it make what face he wears or what name he uses?

In this rare case, the Tal'Mahe'Ra are being played.

The Capuchin serves only the aims of three entities; Lazarus, Japheth, and Byzar, who together make up the Cult of the Capuchin.

Lazarus preserved his decimated Clan, marshaling Cappadocians into the Shadowlands upon the destruction of their insane Antediluvian. So few Giovanni question the success of their purge, hubristically not realizing how many Cappadocians merely hid from view, travelling deeper into the darkness. Over the centuries, Lazarus has cemented alliances with both the Followers of Set and the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and appears intent on setting the two against one another. He's not forthcoming over which side, if any, he favors.



## Create Your Own Cult!

At its heart, a cult is a communal religious veneration of a person or ideal. They're not always malicious, nor are they necessarily destructive. However, "cult" is a dirty word these days, often associated with groups such as Heaven's Gate, the People's Temple Agricultural Project, Aum Shinrikyo, and the Order of the Solar Temple, all whose actions resulted in mass murder. The elements these groups have in common with the more populist and successful cults are driving ambition, charismatic figureheads, opinions setting them apart from society at large, and promise of reward or threat of reprisal. The differences are surprisingly few.

Storytellers can create cults to act as antagonists or supporting characters, while players can form their own cults (see p. 50 for the **Cult Background**). If you play as members of the Hand, you could form a cult that genuinely believes in the ideology of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, or one that acts as a cover for your true aims. When creating your cult, you will be looking for the following elements when thinking of the cult's construction.

**To whom would your cult appeal?** Perhaps the disenfranchised, the lost, and the lonely are your target cultists. Alternatively, your cult could appeal to the wealthy, the elite, and the illuminated. Membership could be diverse or strictly regimented; the cultists may be individuals with free will or brainwashed sycophants. Non-human beings could make up its ranks, or the cultists could be mortals simply looking for reason in an unreasonable world.


**For what purpose does your cult exist?** Maybe the members wish to profit, spread the word of their philosophy, or possibly follow an ordained path to salvation. A militaristic cult may wish to reap vengeance against those who wronged them, launch a coup against the establishment, or even speed up the Gehenna clock.

**Who leads your cult?** It could be a supremely charismatic orator, a consortium of hedge magicians, a being claiming to be touched by the divine, or an angry zealot with a megalomaniacal chip on her shoulder. It could even be the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

Cults can be small, localized on a church group, village hall, or boardroom. Alternatively, they could stretch to the levels of global conspiracies.

Not all cults have sinister aims. A cult can form in good faith and become subverted at a later date by powers beyond their understanding.

Most importantly, pick a winning name. Winning cults have winning names.



Japheth has been a wraith for over five centuries since his incomplete diablerie. Some speculate why the diablerie failed; a few assume a vampire who has achieved Golconda is immune to diablerie. Japheth possesses knowledge of the Underworld to rival his fellow ferrymen of the River Styx. A capable navigator of the Tempest, Japheth has seen wonders and horrors both secret and forbidden. He trades some of it, but keeps more for himself. The richest secret of all is how he brought a contingent of Harbingers of Skulls from Kaymakli and to the arms of the Sabbat, where they now make ready for war with the Giovanni.

Byzar, otherwise known as Tiberius, Mahatma, or Sargonnehzad, is the final member of the cult and its architect. He holds a title within the Inconnu along with a host of other organizations and Sects. His loyalties, much like those of his fellow cultists, are purely to the agenda of the Capuchin.

Each member of the cult poses as the Capuchin. If anyone has realized the Capuchin is more than one individual, they've not lived long enough to voice their theory. Not one of the Capuchin personas treats in money, standing fast to the Cappadocian religious associations

with Capuchin monks and (more pragmatically) avoiding using the usurper Giovanni's financial powerbase. The Capuchin deals only in favors and information.

Where the Tal'Mahe'Ra sees the Capuchin as a single powerful cultist, the Capuchin sees the Tal'Mahe'Ra as just another tool. The Capuchin leaks just enough secrets to point the Hand in the direction of sleeping Methuselahs, troves of Noddist lore, or the place where the Camarilla Prince of Pretoria keeps his little black book of Sabbat contacts. The Hand subsequently sends its agents to act on the information. Whether the mission succeeds or fails, the Capuchin moves in to find the true rewards, such as the Methuselah's cache of relics from the Second City, the ancient necromancies buried beneath the Noddist tripe, and the Prince's diaries from his living days. All these things can be traded, or they can be used to further the Capuchin's esoteric goals.

The cult doesn't wish to control the Tal'Mahe'Ra or any other Sect. The fanatical motivations of such bloated and decrepit organizations do little more than highlight their weaknesses. Through the subtle use of their accumulated bargaining chips, blackmail material, and raw power, the trio of vampires desire nothing more than all-out chaos between Clans, Sects, bloodlines, and even magi and shapeshifters. The three ancients spin their web carefully, as the Tal'Mahe'Ra has at times come too close to ascertaining the truth. Lazarus, Japheth, and Byzar wish to see their world reduced to ash and participate in its rebuilding. It will be on their timetable.

## Midnight Circus

The legendary Midnight Circus travels the world with its bevy of freaks and macabre performances. Within the Circus are vampires from a host of obscure bloodlines, a clutch of outcast changelings, mutated shapeshifters, and supposedly a mage calling himself a Nephandus. Whatever the true makeup of the Midnight Circus and wherever they roam, hell follows them.

Presently, the Circus is host to one of the bizarre Maeghar and a Tremere *antitribu*. The Tzimisce ringmaster Zarnovich sees them as particularly exotic spices in his already eclectic freakshow, not knowing that the two are shakari of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Initially, they used the Circus as a cult for the accumulation of intelligence and the means of covert travel to take out selected targets within enemy domains, but lately they have come to believe the recently arrived Zarnovich is an infernalist.

Due to the usefulness of the Circus as a cult, the dominions seek proof before authorizing the destruction of Zarnovich and possibly the entire Circus. The possibility

of infernalists having spread throughout the expansive Circus is high, so the shakari seek further aid from their Sect in their investigations.

## Servitors of Irad

If the propaganda is true, the Servitors of Irad is one of the most dangerous cults loosely clutched by the True Black Hand. The Servitors claim to be working directly for the Antediluvians and have no desire to expand their ranks or negotiate with their enemies. The Servitors are set on a course of absolute sacrifice: killing every other vampire so their Clan founders may elevate the Servitors as chosen childer, accepted and beloved for the murder of their brothers.

Irada was supposedly one of Caine's childer and the most bloodthirsty warmonger of his time. The Servitors see no reason not to uphold their namesake's ethos, calculating that only the strong will survive when Gehenna arrives. The Tal'Mahe'Ra has had agents among the Servitors since their inception, more for the purposes of monitoring than actual manipulation. If the Servitors truly do communicate with the Clan founders, the Hand wishes to know of it. Lately however, those agents, led by Marge Kahn, have gone silent.

Long ago the cult fell to the worship of Nergal. Perhaps they've always venerated demons, but it's now impossible to say. The destruction they seek is parallel to that of the aims of the Baali, and practically every vampire in the cult has some proficiency with Daimonion or Dark Thaumaturgy, including the former agents of the Hand. While the Sect knows the cult is still extant, they have not been able to trace it for some time.

The greatest fear from the Hand is that of Nergal itself. One of the tombs of the Aralu is said to bear the name of Nergal, and the Servitors of Irad worship a vampire or demon of the same name. The ramifications of them being one and the same could unsteady the core philosophy of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. The annihilation of the Servitors of Irad and all information connecting them to the Hand has therefore become a priority.

## Terrel & Squib

Terrel & Squib are a mortal business enterprise specializing in apparently "projecting" mortal souls into the Shadowlands to investigate the intentions of ghosts, disperse dangerous hauntings, and manipulate the dead. The Tal'Mahe'Ra are only just becoming aware of Terrel & Squib's world, but they find the possibilities of mortal servants who can move through the Shadowlands fascinating.

The Hand has made several overtures towards Terrel & Squib with ghouls attempting to find work with the organization. So far, only a handful have been employed,

gaining menial jobs. Supposedly they do not have what it takes to “skim” outside of their body and cross over, but an upcoming drug trial should improve their chances.

The Hand is excited about the utilities available via a business such as Terrel & Squib. Believing it to be an entirely mortal enterprise, they have yet to discover the true nature of Dr. Lionel Squib, or the psychotic spectre inhabiting his corpse. Squib knows ghouls when he sees them, and fully intends to treat these spies to a lethal dose. What he does with their spirits after that is unlikely to be good, but he once spoke to the ghost of an Abedah revenant and increasingly wishes to know more about the city called Enoch. He plans to use the information he acquires against his rivals, the Orpheus Group.

### **Adoptive Childer of Malakai**

A strong current of goddess worship runs through the Tal’Mahe’Ra. Perhaps it’s due to the age of the Sect and its founding members. The worship of masculine deities is a relatively recent trend, when considering the length of human history. The Childer are dedicated to the study and worship of the forbidden Antediluvian Malakai. Such a cult would typically be beneath the notice of the Tal’Mahe’Ra, if not for the Childer’s active hunt for their deity.

Every member of the Childer is suffering a debilitating mental condition. All believe if they can find Malakai, she can unravel their insanities and reveal absolute truth. The Childer see snatches of truth every night, but such images are like the edges of a puzzle. The one clear vision they all share is that the Cainite origins taught to them are unreal and untrue. The Childer believe Caine may have been a founder, but not the only one, or even the first.

The Tal’Mahe’Ra know of Malakai. Scriptures referencing Lilith’s orphans identify Malakai as the twin sister of Malkav; even more unstable and dangerous than her brother. Malakai is said to be imprisoned deep within the Shadowlands, as powerful as an Antediluvian but never a sire to childer. It’s written her madness can warp reality, if she grows close enough to it.

The Hand are concerned by this new cult’s supposed communion with Malakai, especially since Malkavian agents planted within the cult now claim the same visions and the freedom from insanity Malakai offers. If what they say is true, they may be on the verge of discovering an ancient being both tremendous in power and completely uncontrollable.

The one seraph to have heard the voice of Malakai says she reveals truths of the past, present, and future of the Sect, telling of the rebirth of the goddess within the Tal’Mahe’Ra. Whether Malakai is a friend or foe is a matter of debate. The Lilin are especially wary, though they do not say why.





The Hand currently debates whether to permit the Childer entry to the Shadowlands so they can unleash Malakai. After all, they want the Antediluvians awake. Perhaps a test run on this hapless cult won't hurt.

## Character Creation

The Tal'Mahe'Ra has been around for a very long time. The Sect has survived floods, droughts, revolts, revolutions, religious crusades, internecine conflict, and the evolution of a disconnected Earth into a world with a traffic cam on every corner and a smartphone in every hand.

The Kindred of the Tal'Mahe'Ra are not fools. The Camarilla might cling to its petty Jyhad and its façade of rules, and they're welcome to hide like children from boogeymen under the bed. The Sabbat is closer to the truth, but it too is fatally flawed. Revelry and shovels and mocking rituals will not save it from the Antediluvians. Only the Tal'Mahe'Ra prepares for the inevitable end: the waking of the Antediluvians, the coming of Gehenna. It has managed to survive, unbroken and unrevealed, because it is smart, careful, and patient. In the grand scheme of things, it is only a small Sect, but every single member plays a key role in its long-term goals.

And now here *you* are, on the cusp of the threshold. The chalice is nearly to your lips. The secrets are inches from your grasp. A world unlike anything you have ever known spreads before you. Ancient lore so sacrosanct it is only spoken of in whispers. A history so bloody and heretical it means Final Death to any suspected of even knowing a fraction. A depth of conspiracy to which elder Kindred of the Inconnu can only hope to aspire. The Hand is outstretched, offering you fingers slick with blood and shadows.

What makes you so special?

### Building the Beast

This book offers several avenues of play for both new and experienced groups. The Storyteller may wish to begin play with the characters as fresh-made neonates, building their way towards Tal'Mahe'Ra membership. Optionally, the Storyteller can run a game with more experienced characters already established or recruited into the Sect, using the elder creation and maturation rules as detailed in the sidebar in V20, p. 79.

### Step 0: Level of Play

There are four basic levels at which play can begin. Characters may be neonates, ancillae, established elders,

or Sect leaders. At this stage of character creation, the Storyteller decides on the power level for the characters, and players design their characters accordingly.

**Neonates:** The Tal'Mahe'Ra only rarely recruits Kindred of less than one century of age. Almost all neonates in the True Black Hand have been raised within the Sect as chatterlings before receiving the Embrace, and are no higher than Tenth Generation. Most are 50-100 years old. Neonates have not yet chosen or been assigned Sect duties, and must prove themselves worthy of trust and respect. Only a small percentage of chatterlings selected for grooming live to reach Embrace. After being raised to maturity by the Enrathi, chatterling candidates are sent to Enoch and must survive their Bahari tutors in the Cult of Erinyes. Once done, the Erinyes select an appropriate sire from amongst all Hand members, then continue training the fledgling for several years before releasing the neonate into the care of an elder whom they are bound to and whose word they are expected to follow as law. With such close scrutiny, neonates have limited influence and little room to make mistakes.

**Ancillae:** Ancillae comprise the rank-and-file of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Some are former chatterlings who've survived their time as neonates, while others are recruited from outside of the Sect. They can expect supervision, but are not watched quite so closely as neonates. As a result, they have opportunities to pursue personal agendas and goals. Ancilla infiltrators may be unknown faces in the Camarilla or Sabbat, but some have climbed to minor Camarilla court positions, are Sabbat Ducti or Anarch Reeves. Ancillae are expected to carry out missions assigned by their elders and leaders. A Mentor is not required, but some ancillae maintain a relationship with a willing elder, notably thaumaturgists and historians.

**Elders** are normally between Sixth and Eighth Generations, and are over 200 years old. Elders rarely participate in their own schemes, preferring to use ancillae to do their grunt work. All elders are required by the seraphim to take at least one neonate as a protégé during their careers; some elders seize the opportunity to mold malleable young minds and make themselves available as Mentors. Their positions within the Tal'Mahe'Ra are secure, and they have greater freedom to pursue personal agendas. Elder sleeper agents are established and tend to hold positions of importance in rival Sects (such as Primogen, Bishops, or Warlords) in key cities.

**Seraphim** are chosen from those with the strongest and oldest blood. They have spent their many centuries of life obtaining power, and almost all of them hold influential positions within rival Sects. Several have attained the rank

of Prince, Archbishop, or Baron and control entire cities. At least one seraph sits on the Camarilla's Inner Council; another is rumored to hold sway as a Sabbat Cardinal. Others prefer lesser positions within the other Sects to avoid drawing overt attention. Seraphim are the Del'Roh's physical representatives, and it is their responsibility to enforce policy, promote members, and issue reward and punishment. For this reason, a few seraphim prefer to conceal their true rank. It's easier to monitor behavior and loyalty if no one knows you're watching.

## Step One: Concept

Not every vampire is suited for recruitment to the Sect. The Tal'Mahe'Ra has not achieved success by giving into impulsivity. No recruitment decision is made spontaneously. With rare exception, a prospective recruit is vetted over months, years, or even decades by extensive networks of spies. By the time the vetting process is complete, recruiters will know where the bodies are buried, who buried them, how they died, and what they ate for their last meal.

The core concept of a character needs to reflect this process. Characters should fill a role necessary to the goals of the Sect. The fingers of the Hand are in many pies worldwide, and a multitude of concepts are suitable to the Sect: soldiers, assassins, spies, rival Sect infiltrators, loremasters, thaumaturgists, doomsday harbingers, cult leaders, financiers, business managers, and information brokers are only a few that can find a home here.

## Nature and Demeanor

There are no restrictions on Nature and Demeanor, but the Tal'Mahe'Ra is more inclined to choose those of temperate Archetypes. Deviant and Rebel are harder to justify, since Kindred with these Natures may pose a security risk. Penitents might also find it difficult to survive in the Sect, as their apologist personalities may irritate or provoke their fellow Sect mates.

## Clan

The Tal'Mahe'Ra once consisted of a handful of Clans and bloodlines, retaining an exclusive membership that turned otherwise-qualified candidates away. The world has changed greatly since, and the seraphim were forced to take a long, hard look at the Sect's sustainability in the modern world. Under protest from core members, the Tal'Mahe'Ra reluctantly opened its doors. The previously-excluded Clans are still rare to find within the ranks, but they are growing in number.

There stands one hard addendum to this new policy, however. Followers of Set are disallowed membership.

## Bloodlines of the Hand

For much of the Tal'Mahe'Ra's history, membership has been concentrated to a collection of vampiric lineages who belong almost entirely to the Hand. Storytellers wishing to set chronicles in alternate eras may consider restricting Clans and bloodlines to the following:

**Since Inception:** Danava, Nagaraja, Old Clan Tzimisce

**Since Classical Antiquity:** True Brujah

**As of the Middle Ages:** Assamite *antitribu*, Lasombra *antitribu*, Salubri

**As of the Renaissance:** Daughters of Cacophony

**As of the Age of Reason:** Ravnos and Brahman

**As of the Information Age:** Drakaina, Harbingers of Skulls, Molochim Baali, Salubri *antitribu*, Tlaticque

Previous to opening their doors in the modern nights for limited numbers of individuals from any Clan or bloodline, save the Followers of Set, the Western Hand began accepting candidates from certain lineages:

**As of Late Antiquity:** Gangrel, Malkavian, Nosferatu, Toreador, Ventrue, and the *antitribu* kinsmen of each Clan, with exception to City Gangrel

**As of the High Middle Ages:** Maeghar

Though not claiming Hand membership, the main body of Clan Assamite has been allied to the Eastern Hand since Classical Antiquity. Before joining outright, diplomatic relations between the Tal'Mahe'Ra and the Harbingers of Skulls were in place by the Age of Reason.

Brujah, Giovanni, Lasombra, and Tremere characters may be considered for recruitment, but are likely to face hostility from Tal'Mahe'Ra elders as their Clans historically diablerized or murdered Antediluvians. Recruits from these Clans must work twice as hard to earn the elders' trust.

## Steps Two and Three: Attributes and Abilities

These steps are handled the same as they are in basic character creation. Players should keep their character's concept and intended role in mind when choosing Traits. Members of the Tal'Mahe'Ra tend to be more focused in their duties and responsibilities. A soldier isn't likely to deviate from combat-focused Traits, and a thaumaturge is often far too busy to delve into espionage-related Abilities. A rival Sect infiltrator, however, has far more freedom to choose Traits associated with her role within the Camarilla, the Sabbat, or the Anarch Movement.

## Step Four: Advantages

### Backgrounds

Contact with other supernatural denizens in the World of Darkness is more common with members of the Tal'Mahe'Ra than those belonging to other Sects. Supernatural Allies and Retainers take up a dot one level higher than their human versions. The Tal'Mahe'Ra (as well as their Follower of Set and infernalist enemies) frequently utilize Cults (see sidebar).

### Alternate Identity (Required)

The Sect's existence is so guarded, every vampire in the Tal'Mahe'Ra possesses this Background. It is very rare for even neonates to have less than 2 dots. This Background is tied to a character's advancement within the Tal'Mahe'Ra; it is unlikely an ancilla will advance to elder without increasing her Alternate Identity rating. Elders may have additional Alternate Identities, and at least one will be three dots or higher. Seraphim maintain multiple Alternate Identity ratings between three and five dots.

### Generation

Tal'Mahe'Ra do not recruit the weak. Whether through powerful sires or past diablerie, most Tal'Mahe'Ra characters begin play at Tenth Generation. Purchasing this Background can therefore lower a character's Generation to a minimum of Fifth. With Storyteller permission, characters may begin at Thirteenth Generation, but do not gain any additional Background points.

### Herd (2 dots maximum)

The Tal'Mahe'Ra frowns on the cultivation of personal mortal herds. Beyond the difficulty of maintaining larger herds for members who regularly travel to and from the Shadowlands, large groups of kine pose security risks. The

## New Background: Cult

You are the leader or otherwise have control over a cult of your own. Due to their broad membership, Cults as a Background act as a combination of Allies, Contacts, Herd, and Influence, but when called upon are effectively one dot lower in each of those categories (a rating of 1 is effectively 0) and require twice the effort to build or accumulate.

Lastly, members of the Sect have a minimum one dot in True Black Hand Membership, which is mechanically identical to standard Black Hand Membership, though indicative of belonging to the Tal'Mahe'Ra and not Sabbat-specific. The following Backgrounds are restricted or altered for Tal'Mahe'Ra character creation.

Sect prefers its members to feed from communal herds from pooled backgrounds with other Hand members. While it is not strictly forbidden, it may become an issue with the seraphim should the character possess more than 2 dots of this Background. (Restricted to 2 dots maximum at creation.)

Kindred members with the Cult Background, described above, may enjoy the benefit of a higher Herd rating, so long as the Herd is intertwined with the Cult. Mortal cultists are slavishly devoted to the Tal'Mahe'Ra and pose no risk to outside exposure.

### Mentor (Required for neonates)

For neonates, a Mentor is a requirement. The Tal'Mahe'Ra elders guide their new additions in the Sect's policies, schemes and responsibilities. This relationship is akin to sponsorship, though the Cainite assigned to shepherd the neonate is not necessarily the one who proposed his inclusion. Over time, this Background either withers to nothing or converts to Allies or Contacts. Some Kindred maintain the relationship when they become ancillae.

### Retainers

Most ghoulish servitors come from one of the three revenant lines that have served the Tal'mahe'Ra for centuries. Occasionally, a recruit may bring one or two previously bound ghouls with them, provided they pass the Sect's rigorous vetting process.

## Status (Restricted to ancillae, elders, and seraphim)

Neonates may not possess Status (Tal'Mahe'Ra) until they have been deemed trustworthy. They may still retain previously-gained Status in their previous Sect, as well any Status gained prior to Tal'Mahe'Ra recruitment.

Ancillae possess Status at one or two dots. Ancillae rarely achieve three dots before they become elders. Elders possess this rating at three to five dots. Seraphim possess this rating at five dots and up.

## Disciplines

There is no additional restriction on the Disciplines a player may select for his character, with the exception of Vicissitude. It is a tenet of the Tal'Mahe'Ra to shelter and protect humanity from vampiric excess, but Vicissitude has no purpose but transhumanism. The more monstrous or alien your body becomes, the more monstrous or alien you behave. Evolving the vampiric condition fosters a radical disconnect from humanity, allowing Cainites to forget their curse. Some characters may have it, but understand the social implications of the purchase.

For more on Vicissitude, see p. 108.

## Virtues


Tal'Mahe'Ra use Virtues in line with their Path of Enlightenment. Normal Virtues have a free dot. Alternate Virtues begin at zero.



### Agent (1pt. Title)

The covert operatives of the Sect, agents specialize in infiltrating enemy organizations, providing crucial leverage and intelligence for the True Black Hand. Individual agents may never know why they're asked to perform certain actions or get a particular piece of information, but the seraphim who see the larger picture know exactly which strings to pull to achieve the Sect's agenda.

For more information on Titles see the **V20 Companion**. Tal'Mahe'Ra Titles can be found on p. 27.



## Step Five: Final Touches

### Path of Enlightenment

Cainites of the Tal'Mahe'Ra do not follow the Path of Humanity. Alternate Paths of Enlightenment are detailed in V20 beginning on p. 316. Most members follow either the Path of the Bones, the Path of Cathari, the Path of Lilith, the Path of the Scorched Heart, the Path of Self-Focus, the Path of the Hive, or the Path of Power and the Inner Voice. The Path of Lilith has grown in popularity in recent decades, which has led to the decline of followers of the Path of Caine.

Cainites recruited from the Sabbat may follow a variant of the Path of the Bones known as the Path of Death and the Soul. They are mechanically the same.

While no hard rule limits Path of Typhon adherents, it can cause massive bias within the Hand.

### Willpower

Willpower must be a minimum of 5. If a character has less than 5, the remainder must be purchased with freebie points or experience.

### Merits and Flaws

Neonate characters, without exception, possess the Probationary Sect Member Flaw (V20, p. 493). They do not gain additional freebie points from this Flaw, nor does it count towards their maximum allowable freebie points gained from Flaws. When a neonate becomes an ancilla, this Flaw is removed without cost to the player.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra are cautious in their selection of Cainites for recruitment. Serious personality defects are often enough for recruiters to pass on a candidate. However, things do occasionally slip through the cracks; the vetting system is excellent, but it is not perfect. Storytellers may wish to consider limiting selection of certain Merits and Flaws at character creation, notably Amnesia, Diseased, Fourteenth Generation, Fifteenth Generation, Guilt-Wracked, Impatient, Lazy, Lunacy, Narc, Soft-Hearted, Shy, Stereotype, Sympathizer, Thin Blood, True Faith, Unconvinced, Uppity, Victim of the Masquerade, and Weak-Willed.

## Tal'mahe'Ra Preludes

Moreso than most characters, Tal'Mahe'Ra Kindred come with a lot of baggage attached. Their inclusion in the Sect implies a history worthy of not only notice but interest from the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

The Storyteller may choose to explore vignettes in prelude scenes or she may choose to allow players to craft their character's history themselves. Regardless of the method chosen, the players may wish to keep the following in mind, in addition to the standard prelude questions found in V20, p. 354:

**What have you been doing since your Embrace?**

*Have you made allies you can trust? What enemies want you to meet Final Death? Are you on good terms with your sire, or did that relationship die? Do you have any blood bonds or Vinculum ties outstanding? Are you regnant, or are you thralled? Do you owe any favors? Are you owed any favors? What schemes did you put into play? Were you successful? What are your failures?*

**What drew the attention of the Tal'mahe'Ra to you?**

*Are you an influential member of your former Sect? Do you have a powerful or prestigious sire? Are you considered to be next-in-line for a position of power? Do you have a reputation as someone who can get things done? Are you a talented liar? Are you disaffected with Sect politics? Do you have regular contact with other supernatural creatures? Do you delve into forbidden lore, seeking to learn the truth? Did you stumble across the truth and fast-talk your way into proving yourself worthy?*

**What qualified you for membership?**

*In what field are you exceptional? How strong is your will? How strong is your stomach? How entrenched are you in the paradigms of your previous Sect? How did you prove your loyalty? What secrets has the Tal'Mahe'Ra uncovered in their investigations?*

**What are your goals and motivations?**

*How do you spend your time? Where do you see yourself in 50 years? 100 years? 500 years? Are you a big-picture planner, or do you focus more on small details? How do you plan to get yourself there? Do you intend to develop new skills and talents to assist you, or will you rely on your natural ability?*

**What are your beliefs?**

*Why did you turn from the Path of Humanity? Why did you choose the Path you follow? Do you believe in what the Tal'Mahe'Ra stands for? Do you believe in everything it does? What do you disagree with? Are you vocal in your dissent, or do you hold your tongue?*

**What are your activities and ties within the Tal'Mahe'Ra?**

*If you're a neonate, what kind of relationship do you have with your Mentor? If you are no longer a neonate, do you still maintain ties with your former Mentor? Has the relationship*

*soured, or did you part on good terms? Do you have allies on whom you can count, or do you prefer to do things by yourself? What area of the Sect is your focus? What was your first mission like? Did you fail or succeed? Have you ever faced discipline or censure? If so, how do you feel about it?*

## Elder Beasts

Earning and spending Experience is covered extensively in V20, beginning on p. 122. There is likewise an excellent system in place to cover creating elder characters, located in the sidebar on p. 79. However, a Storyteller might want to offer her players an alternate method for creating a more evenly-balanced group. Once the relative power levels have been decided, players should use the appropriate template as listed below. Required Backgrounds are added to the character; they do not come out of the standard points offered for character creation.

### Neonates

**Generation:** Tenth

**Age:** 50-100

**Character Creation:** as per standard rules

**Required Backgrounds:** Alternate Identity 2+, Mentor

**Merits/Flaws:** Probationary Sect Member (effective)

### Ancillae

**Generation:** Eighth to Tenth

**Age:** 100-200

**Attributes:** 8/6/4

**Abilities:** 14/10/7

**Disciplines:** 7

**Backgrounds:** 10 (Alternate Identity 2+, Status (Tal'Mahe'Ra) 1-2+)

**Virtues:** 7

**Freebie Points:** 18

### Elders

**Generation:** Sixth to Eighth

**Age:** 200-400

**Attributes:** 10/7/5

**Abilities:** 17/13/10

**Disciplines:** 10

**Backgrounds:** 15 (Alternate Identity 3+, Status (Tal'Mahe'Ra) 3+, Generation 2+)

**Virtues:** 7

**Freebie Points:** 25

## Seraphim

**Generation:** Fourth to Sixth

**Age:** 600+

**Attributes:** 12/8/6

**Abilities:** 20/16/13

**Disciplines:** 12

**Backgrounds:** 15 (Alternate Identity 5, Status (Tal'Mahe'Ra) 5, Generation 4+)

**Virtues:** 7

**Freebie Points:** 35

## Hand Paths of Enlightenment

The following Paths are available to Black Hand characters, in addition to the Paths found in **Vampire the Masquerade: 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition**.

### Via Hyron: The Path of the Hive

**Nickname:** Abelenes

**Virtues:** Conviction and Instinct

**Bearing:** Justice. Abelenes carry an atmosphere of divine retribution. Their bearing modifier affects rolls to convince others of the righteousness of their actions.

**Basic Beliefs:** As shepherds, Abelenes have been tasked to guide and protect Creation against demonic influences. The true accursed and enemies to all of creation are the children of the Lightbringer: demons, devils, and fallen angels. These ancient intelligences, birthed before the Word of the One Above unleashed Creation, wait in slumber, trapped by the One Above. Should these horrors be awakened, Creation would be flayed of all life.

The blasphemous titles of these entities are tremendously puissant, and each call uttered by infernal tongue rouses them further from rest. To ensure the preservation of this great duty of keeping the sleepers passive and trapped, the Methuselah Moloch developed Via Hyron for his disciples – the ancient ethos of the Baali Clan. To accomplish his work, Moloch consumed one of the sleepers, and it spoke in his soul with the voice of a swarm. The chattering clicks translated by Moloch gave unity to the Baali. He learned the secrets of the sleepers and how to ensure they remain dormant on the edge of existence.

In order to maintain their slumber, the sleepers must be appeased through tireless efforts to flatter their horrendous dreams and desires. Chaos and destruction are the only lullaby that pacifies, and so a requisite balance is struck by the Abelenes: burn half the world or watch all of Creation erupt in flame. Though it revels in demonic trappings and profaning Christian iconography and text, Via Hyron is not infernalistic. Infernalists are believed to be especially dangerous to the Abelenes.

The names of the sleepers fuel infernal power, allowing them to patiently inch their way into Creation by devouring the souls of their supplicants. Therefore, all trace of their names must be erased from Creation. The misplaced faith of those corrupted to follow Lucifer's churches has ever repelled the angels of the One Above and stunted humanity. The recently discovered Abelene Heresy (nearly stricken from the Guarded Rubrics but vouchsafed by the Molochim Old Clan Tzimisce and Baali) enhanced Moloch's original teachings.

The writings contend that when the farmer Caine failed to sate the hunger of the One Above with his offering of herbs, grains, fruits, and flowers, his brother Abel showed him the way. Abel, the shepherd, ceased the beating heart and stained crimson the white coat of the most majestic goat in his flock in blood-offering to the One Above and was blessed for his sacrifice. Caine, seeing the path, wept as he lanced the heart of his brother Abel, sacrificing the first part of his joy with the branch of a pomegranate tree hewn from his unwanted oblation.

The One Above cursed Caine, marking him and his progeny for all time to gain no sustenance from the Earth without sacrificing joy for toil. Revoking the curse of death levied on mankind in Eden, he resurrected Abel to an immortal angel of vengeance, tasking Abel to be his brother's shepherd and cull from Caine's flock to reclaim the blood his brother had stolen from him. Abel's broken heart was replaced with that of the beast Abel had offered. However, the One Above could not heal Abel's sorrow despite the Beast tucked in Abel's breast; the spiritual scar of Caine's spear would perpetually wound him.

Seeing his trickery in Eden undone, the fallen angel Lucifer, bringer of morning and herald of the sun, grew jealous and spiteful that a child from the tribe of Adam was shown immortal favor and station that he himself had lost. He cursed Abel to the night, so the light from the One Above (presaged by the Morning Star Lucifer) would scorch and burn him evermore. Abelenes believe that all vampires are children of the light, shadows cursed to darkness, angels of vengeance blessed by the One Above, shepherding humanity and protecting creation against the Children of the Night.

## Via Hyron: Path of the Hive Hierarchy of Sins

Rating	Moral Guideline	Rationale
10	Failing to ride the wave in frenzy	The heart of Abel's prized Beast was to him by the One Above. Its voice is sacred and unleashing its divinity protects his angels from assault.
9	Failing to staunch the influence of institutionalized religion	Throughout history, the deceiver, Lucifer, has twisted faith and clothed the spread of ignorance, bigotry, delusion, greed, and mayhem in the hypocrisy of religion. It is the duty of the Molochim to shepherd Caine's flock.
8	Feeding on the children of Seth	Reclaim Abel's blood in vengeance from the builders, Caine's children. Those living in harmony with Creation in the wild are not subject to retribution from the One Above.
7	Not actively pursuing safe knowledge of sorcery and the demonic	Know thy enemy. Ignorance is darkness, and darkness is where the infernal hides. Blood sorcery is the sacrament in the arsenal against atrocity.
6	Refusing an opportunity to convert those seeking redemption	The larger the hive, the greater the swarm. Those who have faced the infernal are hornets without a Nest waiting to be saved. Bind them through the blood and release them when they find shelter
5	Refusing to sing a lullaby to the sleepers	The sleepers' dreams are fueled by havoc and devastation visited upon Creation. Without fuel, the sleepers turn their attentions away from dreaming and seek to awaken.
4	Not being selective in a lullaby	Undirected destruction that does not serve as fertilizer for new Creation to emerge is no better than an awoken sleeper. Shepherd Creation by strategic application of violence and suffering.
3	Failing to enslave or extinguish the demonic	The One Above damned Lucifer and his children; their existence is forfeit.
2	Failing to cleanse the infernal	Each utterance of a sleeper's name and soul lost to the demonic stirs the sleepers from dream.
1	Failing to Nest	Independence is the gateway to the infernal; Lucifer preys first upon individuals alone. Unity is the of the hive, isolation weakens the swarm. If leaving a Nest, find another.

### The Ethics of the Path

- Be the Angel of Vengeance. Exact the toll of Abel and retrieve his stolen blood from Caine's children, like a shepherd shearing his flock.
- Combat the authority of religion. Institutional worship and dogma are masks and forgeries for Lucifer's church, including the Book of Nod. Only the Abelenes hold the truth. The Molochim are the shepherds.
- Always be within a Nest. The Nest within the swarm of the Hive is the means of salvation to counter the infernal and demonic.
- Vampires are shadows cast by the One Above. When the One Above shines into a pit of blackest gloom, shadows are the only darkness permitted to remain.

- The Sacred Mission of the Molochim is the sword duty of all Abelenes. Keep the sleepers in dream at the expense of all else.
- Listen to your Beast. The one above bestowed the Beast to his angels for a reason. Heed its counsel and release its fury when enraged.

### History

Via Hyron would have declined into obscurity were it not for the Tal'Mahe'Ra and Old Clan Tzimisce inculcating the Molochim Baali to form the Order of Moloch. In 1998, the demon Kupala awoke from its cage beneath the Carpathians. Molochim Baali flocked to the mountains in an attempt to quell the demon back to slumber. Only a few escaped extinction. Though failing, the Baali were not alone in their assault; Old Clan Tzimisce fought to restrain Kupala as well. The few Baali survivors found much in common with their new allies and pledged themselves to the Old Clan, sharing the Path's sacred mission.

The Path went under serious revision by the Old Clan patrons. Its former ban on sorcerous practice of any kind was viewed as overly cautious and removed. The lack of its employment had crippled the Baali for millennia in their war and almost destroyed them entirely in their battle against Kupala. The Ethics of the Path and its Hierarchy of Sins were reconstituted to adapt the demonological knowledge of the Old Clan and formalize the mythos of the Abelenes Heresy – a controversial 14<sup>th</sup> century Latin document thought to be derived from older sources unknown and considered dubious by the Rawi.

### **Current Practices**

The swarm needs to endure; to endure, the sleepers must remain imprisoned. Disciples of Moloch study demonology as a means to an end, collecting vast amounts of forbidden knowledge to learn the hidden resting places and true names of the sleepers that they may better supplicate them into perpetual dreaming. Abelenes are noted occultists and incredibly skilled blood sorcerers who congregate in Nests, fluctuating groups of three to ten in membership, with no central authority. The Path itself was rebuilt to espouse the precepts of the Order of Moloch and all followers of the Path are, without exception, members of the Order. As it stands, the precepts of the Path are still in flux. A few artifacts from the previous Path still exist, but as its new patrons continue to exert influence, the Path of the Hive could become extinct, evolving into something new.

### **Description and Followers**

Abelenes seem distant and inhuman to those outside of the Path. The needs and demands of the swarm (members of the Order of Moloch) guide the Path's adherents. Followers do not possess a "hive mind," but do focus on issues related to the Path within Nests. Members are demonologists, not infernalists. They do not submit to the powers of Hell or relinquish authority over their own souls. Abelenes strive to acquire the secrets of the demonic and either enslave, eradicate, or steal power from demons. Acolytes of the Path actively seek converts, choosing candidates who have been touched by the demonic and resisted its influence.

### **Following the Path**

Nests of Abelenes support one another and keep each other in check to make sure none on the Path slip into infernalism. Unanimous vote guides the direction of a Nest, regardless of age or strength of the blood held by any member. Any within a Nest who disagree with a course of action chosen by the majority are required to leave. This method of governance guarantees that dangerous undertakings are rarely pursued without the strength of numbers to support a goal. Given the potential risks of

infernalism, the refusal to allow individual leadership limits the liability of more powerful Abelenes from eclipsing their peers, curbing possible infernalists hiding within the Order from rapidly seizing control and spreading their filth throughout an entire Nest.

**Common Abilities:** Those following Via Hyron are expected to be devoted Academics and students of the Occult (with an emphasis on languages, demonology, and apocryphal religious scripture). To assist in the hunt for sleepers and track infernalists, the Path encourages Investigation and intuitive recognition of the supernatural through Awareness, while covering one's motives from suspicion by way of Subterfuge.

**Preferred Disciplines:** Auspex and Animalism are emphasized for their information-gathering capabilities. Animalism, on top of awarding an unobtrusive network of spies, grants power over the Beast within others. Familiarity with any form of blood sorcery is demanded by the Path to provide some defense against the enemies of the Order. The versatility of Daimoinon compliments Abelenes methodology and enhances its tendencies for combating fire with fire.

## **The Path of the Scorched Heart**

**Nickname:** Unforgiving

**Virtues:** Conviction and Self-Control

**Bearing:** Intellect. Unforgiving are not easily swayed by appeals to emotion. Their bearing modifier affects rolls meant to influence them through Social Attributes.

**Basic Beliefs:** Emotion is a flaw that sullies perception and clouds judgment. Facts and hard data earned firsthand are what one can trust. The Unforgiving prize the faculty of reason, objectivity, logic, and observation over all else. The Path originates from a True Brujah whose unique perspective on vampiric existence led him to the conclusion that, since the Beast exercises its control through emotion, all emotion must therefore be tainted by the Beast.

With certainty, the actions of any Cainite not in command of their emotions would surely be governed by their emotions, and therefore the Beast. In order to tame the Beast and find respite, one must first eradicate all trace of emotion by cutting off the mind and "scorching the heart." If a Caintie can resist the Beast, she must resist it, and succumbing to frenzy or Röttschreck is an abject failure on the Path. Few Cainites recall events when in the grips of the Beast, ergo no knowledge, save secondhand, may be gleaned from the experience.





Unforgiving are superb listeners who vigilantly pay close attention to their surroundings, absorbing minutiae and details their peers overlook, which the Unforgiving store away and compartmentalize for later use. Meticulously thorough, they tend to have remarkably long and exact near-perfect memories, bordering on eidetic. As champions of openness and honesty who abhor secrets, the Unforgiving are guaranteed to deliver literal truth, in all things, to any who deal with them.

Though lies are not tolerated, truth itself can be a deceit. Followers of this Path know that perceptions of what constitute wrong or immoral action are not definite. Opinions change with new information – right or wrong conclusions by an observer in a situation are malleable and mutable to the extent of the data used to arrive at a decision. Before undertaking any action that does not require immediate attention, they investigate, learn, and then act on their analysis only when secure enough in the knowledge acquired to do so.

The Unforgiving reveal only what is necessary to achieve their ends; the less an enemy knows, the more likely they are to make a mistake. Threats against oneself, however veiled, must be treated as real until proven otherwise. Loose ends and subtle hints cannot be trusted. The Unforgiving are dauntless and persistent in pursuit of a foe, not because of any petty emotional grudge or fear,

but that the simple logic of self-preservation demands that one avoids any opportunity for an enemy to return and exact unexpected harm.

### **The Ethics of the Path**

- Quench all emotion by drowning it in the frigid waters of reason. Emotion is the sole tool of the Beast, its only avenue of control. Lock the door to starve the Beast.
- Reality can be understood and quantified when not clouded by emotion. Right and wrong are atavistic emotional concepts. Morality is merely an impediment, a conduit for emotion. Favor ethics over morality and know the distinction.
- Trust only what you can verify. Assume nothing. Following a siren singing on the rocks only invites the ship to sink. Unless critically urgent for your survival, draw no conclusion, pass no judgment, and do not take any action without proof. When action is required, act decisively.
- Learn all you can; knowledge is never wasted. Simply knowing will help you predict the actions of others and the unfolding of circumstance.

## Path of the Scorched Heart Hierarchy of Sins

Rating	Moral Guideline	Rationale
10	Failing to acquire knowledge that is safely and readily available	Knowledge is the wellspring of truth; you can never know enough.
9	Committing to any action without purpose	Do not waste effort on what does not enhance you.
8	Sacrificing when you gain less	A victory that costs you more than you earn garners no benefit.
7	Relying on others	Your actions are the only ones you can predict with absolute certainty.
6	Making assumptions	Without clarity, error hides in the fog of unconsidered data.
5	Acting rashly	You cannot learn from indiscriminate action. Observe, think, calculate, consider, then act.
4	Speaking falsely	Truth is a bullet. Without trust, truth has no gun.
3	Falling to frenzy or Röttschreck	Carelessness is dangerous. You cannot control the threats you fail to see when not objective. If you cannot master yourself, you have no defense against others mastering you.
2	Making decisions based on emotion	The urges of emotion are the words of the Beast, not your own. Purge them.
1	Acknowledging your emotions	The Beast feels. You do not. Deny the Beast and it withers.

- Define the nature of all your relationships explicitly. Never presume honesty or loyalty from another; intent is not a reliable indicator of outcome and truth to those with emotion is as subjective as ignorance.
- Be honest in all of your dealings to a fault (with preference to the fault of others, over that of your own). Truth is a weapon, so wield it. Let others deceive themselves by the truth in your words.

### History

The True Brujah Rathmonicus first conceived the Path in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Rathmonicus sought to catalogue and collect every philosophy and stricture made available to him on the topic of quieting the Beast. He compiled and recorded his findings in a codex called the *Book of the Empty Heart*. Though Rathmonicus himself fell to the tumult of the Anarch Revolt, copies of his work saw translations from his native Greek into Arabic, French, Latin, and eventually English. Despite only three verifiable copies of the original book surviving to the present age, unconfirmed English copies are somewhat common in scholarly circles. Path adherents diligently search for any texts to destroy inaccurate or inauthentic translations.

### Current Practices

Students of Rathmonicus' work have always been a rare breed, as those on the Path do not actively pursue converts. Teachers prefer to tutor those who discover the work on their own, see the merit in it, and seize the initiative to seek guidance by finding a mentor to direct them. Practitioners are inclined to organization and open communication with each other. Congregations of those on the Path are not unheard of, as they tend to contact one another when a copy of the *Book of the Empty Heart* appears in a newly opened collection, or on the market. When two or more Unforgiving meet, discourse usually steers to the philosophical and academic observances related to the subject of Rathmonicus' book.

### Description and Followers

Regardless of the Path's inception with the True Brujah, they tend to be fickle in their disposition when it comes to Paths of Enlightenment. Brujah, Gangrel, Malkavian, and Toreador — those Clans most prone to wild emotion and needing to alleviate themselves of the Beast's burden — tend to make up the bulk of the Path's followers. Technology invokes a curiosity in adherents of the Path; even Elders take the time to study and comprehend new devices to serve them. The Unforgiving are unobtrusive,

observant, quiet, and passive, but always alert. When they do speak, they ask clarifying questions and give simple, obvious statements on things that others have overlooked.

## Following the Path

Withdrawn and non-confrontational, the Unforgiving repress emotion utterly and see little benefit in argument – the truth is not up for debate and blatant emotion clouds reasoning. When presented with contrary (false) viewpoints, followers deliver the factual position, ignoring opinion and those who stubbornly refuse to believe otherwise. Killing comes easily and without guilt. They typically have little compunction on the matter; evaluating and analyzing every potential outcome for a situation and striking where and when it proves necessary or advantageous for them to do so.

**Common Abilities:** Honing a refined command of Alertness, Investigation, Expression, and Academics is both respected and expected by followers of the Path. However, it bears noting that if a follower has the opportunity to learn something, she's unlikely to decline.

**Preferred Disciplines:** The more one perceives the more data they gain, so Auspex is nearly universal amongst the Unforgiving. Animalism, by providing a ready means to quell and subdue the Beast, is equally prominent. Dominate as an instrument for coaxing forth the truth is both straightforward and blunt, complementing the Path. Yet, just as with Abilities, those on the Path of the Scorched Heart favor learning, and making any assumptions about their capabilities can prove quite fatal.

## The Path of Self-Focus

**Nickname:** Internalists

**Virtues:** Conviction and Instinct

**Bearing:** Balance. Those around Internalists are relaxed by their peaceful presence. Their bearing modifier affects rolls to avoid confrontation or calm others down.

**Basic Beliefs:** Purpose is an illusion; the universe is a stream proceeding of its own accord and the rock that stands opposed is swallowed. Attempting to change a thing will only change you. Conscious inaction and acceptance of all things is the Path of Self-Focus. Where there is no conflict, the Beast is quiet. To be free of the Beast, one must welcome it or invite misery and failure.

Answers are irrelevant; they are an end and the universe is a way. Questions point to the way. The universe must work through each being. By interfering, one rejects the universe and assumes responsibility. Saving a being from

pain robs the universe of a lesson and the being of a teacher. Actions align with the universe only when spontaneous, natural and the result of the moment.

Planning for the future is foolish, and acting for the past is wasteful. The work is done and then forgotten. And so it lasts forever. Only the ever-present holds the way of things. Focused, undistracted attention leaves no room for angst, passion, or consideration for anything other than the moment.

## The Ethics of the Path

- Exist only in the moment. Pay no mind to what has been or what is to come. Only the now can be affected.
- Nothing is exclusive or separate. The intellectual and the visceral are equal parts of your nature. Know yourself and the Beast utterly.
- To mourn suggests the universe is wrong. When hungry, feed. When threatened, kill.
- It is better to be underestimated than overestimated. The overconfident do not know their limits, and the weak are underestimated by all. Weakness is strength you have not mastered.
- Meaning is an invention of the heart. The mind compromises with meaning through words. Actions are the language of the universe. Meaning is immaterial; words are paint, but actions build a house.
- A being's responsibility is to itself, not others.

## History

Dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, the Path of Self-Focus emerged out of cultural appropriation between Asian and Middle Eastern vampires trading in goods and ideas. Muslim Cainites learned the secrets of manufacturing paper and the philosophies of the Far East, and Zen Buddhism and the mortal teacher Laozi's concept of "Wu Wei" spread amongst the Ashirra courts. However, the foreign precepts were never fully adopted. Were it not for the attention of the Nagaraja, who then nurtured the basic concepts within the Tal'Mahe'Ra, the Path may not have materialized at all. While the Path never gained popularity with the Western Hand's European Cainites, it has a small but dedicated following in the Eastern Hand and a growing interest in the Americas.

## Current Practices

Followers of the Path are renowned for their intelligent introspection and tranquil, balanced nature. The

## Path of Self-Focus Hierarchy of Sins

Rating	Moral Guideline	Rationale
10	Accepting everything	A bowl filled to the brim will spill.
9	Accepting nothing	Oversharpen your knife and it will break.
8	Laziness	An ant on the move does more than a sleeping elephant.
7	Interfering in the universe	In order to lead, walk behind.
6	Restraining the Beast	Struggle creates conflict and moves you out of line with yourself.
5	Failure to treat others as you would be treated Act as your own master.	Even a teacher must be questioned.
4	Allowing the universe to interfere with you	You alone control your actions.
3	Overconfidence	To know strength, harness weakness.
2	Rejecting nothing	Water is gentler and more flexible than anything, and yet nothing can resist it.
1	Rejecting everything	By not changing direction, you always arrive where you are headed.

Internalists' ethical doctrine does not promote evangelizing or a desire to increase their influence inorganically by intention. The Path's pursuits tend to be solitary; outside of mentor-student relationships path adherents rarely have any contact. Age, Clan, or Sect normally do not factor in determining who an Internalist will teach. Internalists commonly spend their time making observations on the "way" and discussions with prospective students who grasp the basic ideas.

### Description and Followers

Many Kindred encountering Internalists dismiss them as slow and passive, but understand all too quickly that the Path's followers are more than capable (and willing) to defend themselves if pressed – a stream, after all, does not have to destroy a rock to engulf it and uses as much or as little force as needed to do so. Patient and perceptive, all seek out new sensations to glimpse the unfolding "way" of the universe in action and would never reject or insult someone based on beliefs or words. Unlike the Unforgiving, Internalists are pure subjectivists – how circumstance relates to them as a whole is what captures their interest, not the minute details therein. Whereas the Unforgiving absorb whatever knowledge they can, Internalists learn skills that complement or contrast their inherent strengths and weaknesses.

### Following the Path

Internalists are introspective in the extreme. New sensations (such as a different method of feeding or suffering a wound from a different source) are always fresh soil for contemplation. Existence is a series of spontaneous and perpetual changes, and to resist will only sow failure. Things must flow forward in whatever way they choose. To Internalists, dichotomies such as life and death, or the Beast and Cainite, are a single thread viewed from different sides.

**Common Abilities:** Anything that assists in "knowing" the universe through oneself (and vice-versa) while avoiding unnecessary stress is popular among Internalists. Empathy, Expression, Etiquette, and Survival offer followers the means to reflect and navigate on experience.

**Preferred Disciplines:** With the ability to drift in the ether, transcending the body through the higher levels of Auspex pairs well with the Internalist philosophy of "non-doing" or conscious inaction. Disciplines that rely on changing the self (such as Protean or Vicissitude) are valued. Most Internalists aspire to Celerity for its day-to-day utilitarian qualities as well as its simultaneous offering of both offensive and defensive uses.

"The names are here," Pallas said. She ran along the wall of the tomb, pointing at the inscriptions on the wall.

I let the guide fall to the ground with a clumsy thud. My mouth tasted like sand and blood, the crunch of grit soothed by the rich metallic taste. Acenath grimaced, but I could tell she wanted to finish what I had started. "Wait for Pallas," I instructed her. She blinked at me in that peculiar way of hers, her eyes changing colors. I didn't know there were fae in Egypt, but apparently, her sire didn't know either. "Pallas, come, eat. You've been running like a dog all day."

"But I'm not hungry," she protested. She was. I could feel what her body needed. Still, her mind kept her from partaking.

"Pallas, if you don't have any, Acenath can't, and then I'll be the only one in their right mind and we can't have that," I said. "Please." Pallas dragged her eyes away from the wall and joined us, plopping down on the stone floor and taking the guide's arm in her hand. She brought his pale wrist to her mouth and bit in, the blood pumping slowly into her mouth.

"I still don't know why we had to kill him," Acenath said, trying to seem disturbed by it. "He was hard to find and didn't overcharge us too much."

"If this place is what Pallas says it is, I hope he really is the only human who knows this is here," I said, leaning back against the wall. "He's lucky it was us who found it and not someone else."

"Like who, the Black Hand?" Pallas said with a giggle. Our trip to the Old World had taken us many places and I had found some of Pim's worries to be true. I learned to keep Pallas close and to make plans at the last minute if at all, as well as keep our plans from people. Now we were in Egypt and met with Acenath, who led us to the guide.

Pallas was becoming more unstable. I wanted to move on, but her spells grew longer, and traveling with her while she was rambling was cumbersome and drew attention. We met with Acenath after a few emails to Pim. Acenath looked to me, her hands folded in front of her.

"Eat," I said, turning away so I wouldn't see her rush towards the body. Their feasting echoed in the stone tomb and I looked up at the wall, studying the images there, hands in my pockets. Whoever was buried here did not die peacefully. Gruesome images adorned the wall, tortures all poured out onto one

individual till the final image depicted their final resting place.

"They aren't dead," Pallas said, pulling her blood stained mouth away long enough to speak. "This isn't a tomb. It's a home."

Footsteps around us made us all jump, Acenath vanishing and Pallas curling into a ball. I alone wheeled around to face whoever approached, only to stumble back as something hit me in the face, knocking me unconscious.

When I came to, I was in a dark, cool room. A single oil lamp lit the room, the crackle of the small flame pathetic against the expanse of the chamber. I winced as I sat up, bringing a hand gingerly to my face. It was torn open, but nothing I couldn't handle. Under my own touch, I could feel my flesh and skin knit back together from the inside out. I could feel someone else in the room with me, someone stronger than myself. And I could smell blood.

"Where are Pallas and Acenath?" I asked, not looking back. I heard the person chuckle, a rasping, old sound like papyrus rubbing against pyramid stones.

I heard the person chuckle, a rasping, old sound like papyrus rubbing against pyramid stones. "Oh, but where are you?" they replied. I heard them shuffle to their feet and then walk over, pulling something behind them. "Don't you care about yourself, little Kindred?"

"Of course I do," I said. I looked over my shoulder and then turned to face the person approaching me, a hunched Nosferatu who smelled of reptiles and fetid mud.

"I've heard it said you put others before yourself," they said. They were dragging a body behind them. I could hear their skin tearing across the hard stones. "They say you have something like compassion in your black, twisted heart."

"I am sure the years will wear all semblance of that away, until I'm just another old, paranoid childe of Caine," I said. I dragged my knees up and wrapped my arms around my legs. The ceiling was low but the room was large.

"Caine, yes, perhaps," the old Nosferatu said. As he drew closer, the reek grew stronger, and I half expected him to have crocodile teeth in his mouth. When he finally lifted his head towards me, I saw his teeth were small and worn down, save the canines. "I am sure in your travels you have heard other stories."

"Other stories make for good conversation around the table, not for beliefs," I said. "Beliefs fuel infighting and, well, what table would we all sit around as a people anyway?"

"You hold on to what your sire told you, like a baby, always believing their mother's words?" they said. "I'm Ziz, by the way."

"You probably know who I am," I said.

"Blake is what they screamed after you were knocked unconscious," he said. I started to move but he held a hand up, freezing me in my place. "No need to make a fool of yourself. Your friends are all right." He laid the body in front of me gingerly, the way a host might set the main dish upon the dinner table. "Now, Blake, do you want to help keep the peace?"

"What do you mean?" I asked. I looked down at the human set before me. His chest still moved up and down, breathing. I hadn't bothered to pretend I needed air in so long. "There is no war. The Camarilla keeps their court, and we have our accords. There are skirmishes, to be sure, and times when the fighting is hard, but there is peace."

"There is war within ourselves, Blake," Ziz said. "You know this. And even among the oldest Kindred who have told themselves yes, Caine is our father and we are Cainites, there are many who wonder if there is something more to the story." Ziz picked up the young man's arm and inspected the hand, looking over the rough fingers and hairy knuckles. "There are those who believe something else, and think if it is true, just in case...we must take precaution. We must protect the secrets, those found and those to be found. And when that terrible day comes, we must be ready to protect the innocent. Those who tried."

"You're talking about the Black Hand," I said, looking around for a door. "I don't know if I believe those stories."

"But you came here, all this way, following your friend Pallas here, all chasing a name. What was it? Nergal?" I looked up and Ziz laughed, the driest sound I had ever heard. It made me thirsty to hear it. "Where is Nergal?"

"In Pallas' head," I replied.

"In Enoch." It was a half whisper, half hiss. He dropped the human's arm and shuffled towards me again. "This is what they say. It is said some can hear them. Some can see them in their dreams, those vampires who still can. They write in old

books with an invisible hand, in unknown blood while no eyes watch."

I might have laughed. If I heard this from someone on the street back in my homeland or read it in an email, I would have laughed. But the way the old Nosferatu said it as he drew closer, his dark eyes bright and the smell of hot decay clinging to me, made me swallow hard, an old reflex. My nails dug into the stones I sat on as I leaned back, the Nosferatu almost on top of me. His face was close to mine, and I could smell the scent of so much blood delicately sipped from nipped open skin on his cold breath.

"Those who believe, they must protect."

"Protect from what?" I whispered.

"There is no choice, young Blake. There are only the chosen." Before I could react, his gnarled hand was at my throat, slamming me back onto the stone. His knee pressed into my chest, pinning me there to the ground as his bulk kept me down. I screamed and flailed, clawing at his already scarred and terrible face, but he only laughed, producing a wooden stake with his other hand and bringing it abruptly to my throat. I could feel the rough wood against my skin, splinters puncturing my flesh.

"You will serve," Ziz said as I flailed, still trying to break free. Every move I made only made him heavier.

"If I won't?" As soon as the words slipped from my lips, he pressed the stake harder against my neck. The feeling of my flesh tearing ceased my struggles. The old Nosferatu sat on top of me for what seemed like hours, smiling down at me.

"I am glad you have calmed yourself, Blake," Ziz said. "It will come in handy. Eat, and then sleep. It is almost day."

"What about —"

"They're fine," Ziz said, shuffling off. He picked up the oil lamp and moved towards where the exit probably was. "Someone will come get you at dusk. Rest well."

I didn't know what to say, so I just watched him leave and then disappear. I thought about following him out, trying to run and find Pallas and maybe Acenath. Of flying back to New York and back to Ophelia and lines on the street one didn't cross. But the body beside me was warm, and the choice had been made for me. I had come looking for answers to a question I hadn't been able to form.



# Chapter Two: Bahari – Cult of the Dark Mother

*“She sends witches around to teach the women spells that keep babies away, and gives them horrible things to eat. Some say she is in league with the Shadows to put an end to the race. At night we hear the queesting beast, and lie awake and shiver. . . There are words that have power to shoo her away, only they do not always work—But here I sit talking, and the beast may by this time have got home, and her mistress be sending the other after us!”*

— George MacDonald, *Lilith*

Lilith’s faithful knew Enoch from ancient days. They often sought it out because according to the *Lilith Cycle*’s “Book of the Owl,” it was the enemy’s city. Caine’s cursed get erupted from its walls to ravage D’hainu, the Dark Mother’s last garden. The First Murderer’s brood feasted on creatures that the world will never see again. In a potent frenzy inspired by the blood of Lilith’s mighty children, they destroyed the last place to be equal to Eden before marching back through Enoch’s gray gates. It was a city to hate, and its throne was worthy of destruction.

The cults of Lilith often sought Enoch out, but it wasn’t in their nature to undertake militant quests. The Dark Mother gave them freedom and a respect for intuition instead of rigid codes to follow, so they studied Enoch’s lore whenever transitory impulses guided them there. The sisters in Lilith known as Bahari might let the search rest a century or more, until other interests faded and D’hainu’s memory returned, giving rise to anger anew. So it went until the death of Alexander, ravager of Greece, Persia, and Asia. By cutting a common culture into his empire, the tyrant made it easier for far-flung Goddess cults to communicate. Thus the eldest Bahari, who had long dwelled in the fertile navel of the West, heard rumors of Enoch from certain Indian vampires. Collaborators among the mortal

witches confirmed them. They remembered confrontations with sorcerers who made their own way through the Underworld. These Eastern necromancers refused to pay Charon’s coin and when captured, babbled about a secret citadel, then perished.

Yet it took many more human lifetimes to gain a foothold in Enoch. When empires rose, the enemy ascended with them, making themselves secret kings of the kine. This growing threat forced the Bahari to set aside their plans for the First City and protect the Dark Mother’s path. Mystery religions devoted to the Goddess survived and thrived. By the time Rome turned inward, safely decadent, the cults of Lilith and Isis, and Cybele made tentative contact with the Tal’Mahe’Ra. They discovered Enoch’s minders were not disciples of Caine, but an order of living and undead mystics. These Idran believed that the significance of Enoch lay not in its builder, but in its fated purpose. The First City was destined to be the last.

With the help of the cult’s mortal witches, the Bahari sent emissaries to the fallen city. This sparked numerous minor conflicts with doctrinaire Noddists, who had already staked a claim to the city. They battled Bahari for access to important sites, but neither side held territory for long. The Idran invariably trotted out their sorcerer servitors to eradicate the victors.



Noddist and Ba'ham alike suffered under the rise of Christianity because it called their mortal cults heresies. However, the Dark Mother's children face the greater challenge, as the Church represented the very patriarchal authority they resisted. Tiring of sectarian violence at the very gates of Enoch, the Idran and other Eastern Kindred saw this as an opportunity to drive these "Roman" troublemakers away during the 5th Century CE. Yet this so-called "War of Betrayers" was necessarily limited by the secret of Enoch itself. Offend the enemy too much, and she would simply tell outsiders about the hidden city. Thus, even at the height of hostilities, the Idran still allowed small numbers of Western Kindred to visit the city if they promised to conduct themselves peaceably. Followers of Caine and Lilith eventually agreed to a truce. They committed to the Black Hand under the common belief that Gehenna must provide a reckoning for their kind, one way or the other.

The Anarch Revolt represented a threat to an orderly final judgment, so the True Hand set aside internal turmoil to send agents into the fray and in the process, forged a more meaningful peace between the Noddists and Bahari. The Bahari sanctified a Temple of Lilith in the dead city and even cooperated with Noddists on common projects to defend and study it. Meanwhile, Lilith-worshipping witch cults changed with the ages to found tradition of mages. Using Shadowlands-piercing magic, Lilin mages ensured access to the city throughout the next few tumultuous centuries. While the Eastern Hand grew more insular, Lilith's faithful spread their teachings among Western Kindred. With their sorcery, secret knowledge, and political clout, the Bahari can no longer be denied a place among Enoch's guardians. Even standing beside old enemies had proven itself a benefit. Noddists expose the Bahari to obscure texts, and the Dark Mother provides the guidance needed to interpret them anew. Her children stand ready for the nights of judgment to come, and will ensure that the ancient crimes Caine's people committed against Her will be punished.

## The Bahari Mission

Tal'Mahe'Ra Bahari didn't fight their way into Enoch to meditate on the ruins. They founded their temple beside their old enemy's throne. The First City shall be the last, where the world submits to judgment. Yet it cannot help but reflect the world's nature as an unjust place, where gods cast Lilith into the dust between their garden paradises. The Cult of Lilith must make Enoch a just city, and its Black Hand must guide and punish fairly.

## The Aralu Was a Woman

Enoch's an infamous place in Bahari lore, but they respect those who believe the city must be preserved and defended. This isn't just because they put their trust whatever the Wazir have to say about the *Guarded Rubrics*, because they don't. It's the Aralu.

The Aralu must be Lilith's childer.

Not all Bahari believe the Dark Mother created undead offspring, but all think she could have, and the fact that no Noddist can say who the Aralu are with any certainty constitutes a strong argument that the Aralu come from Lilith, not Caine. Only she could create beings of comparable power. In legendary times, Enoch and Lilith's D'hainu went to war. Perhaps the conflict was not as one-sided as even the *Lilith Cycle* claims. Maybe Enoch is deserted save for the Aralu not because of the Flood, but because Lilith's greatest childer took it from their enemies. If so, Enoch has already been conquered, and the Bahari stand on the side of the victors.

It must answer ancient injustices instead of obeying the corrupt laws of Nod.

Caine's patriarchy has fallen. His Antediluvians are doddering, half-sleeping fathers who feel nothing except through their cruel children, but this is an opportunity as well as a curse for the world, for the Ancients may be redeemed through their offspring's agony. Lilith knows that suffering inflicted upon a child transforms the parent. She experienced this in D'hainu, when the lords of Enoch slew her children. Gehenna must trade eye for eye and fang for fang for the injustices of the past.

It's time to plant a new Tree of Knowledge — one that poisons evildoers who swallow its seeds, showing their errors to the rest. The Cult of Lilith already broke the True Hand out of inward-looking apocalyptic visions. The Tal'Mahe'Ra used to give lip service to its mission to protect the kine from Kindred sadism, but Bahari hold them to their word. Shakari knives grow black with the ashes of infernalists and the Shadow Crusade destroys tainted

beings, but Lilith's children find it more meaningful that the True Hand earnestly punishes vampires who inflict far more suffering than they need to survive.

Bahari enforce discipline within the Hand as well, subjecting the guilty to purifying ordeals. They're not the only Kindred who punish wayward members, but by performing their duties with precision and a strange sort of compassion (for every torment is a lesson), they've earned the Qadi's trust.

Now Bahari redress old injustices. The cult doesn't believe it can take revenge for Caine's crimes during the age of myth (if indeed it was anything other than allegory), but it can repair some of the damage he inflicted. They share the Path of Lilith with Kindred who accept that Caine's an absent father, and emulating humanity is nothing but a false mask for monsters. They bring women of the Blood glorious news: life's injustices need not follow them throughout undeath. Bahari revive a faith in the Dark Mother not seen since the old nights when believers founded holy bloodlines in Her name. The cult remembers them—and how Cainites used Church proxies to destroy the Lhiannan and Giovanni slew the Lamia. But a rebirth is at hand.

In the Sabbat, Ahrimanes hunt woods and industrial wastelands, speaking to spirits Lilith begat during the age of Genesis. Although they refuse to stand with the Camarilla, Daughters of Cacophony sing at its Elysiums, channeling voices that sometimes praise Lilith. Now Harbingers of Skulls have returned with ancient Cappadocian lore and memories of the Lamia who, like them, come from the blood of Lazarus. Three mortal witches submitted to the Lazarene Harbingers' Embrace and revived Lamia's order as the Drakaina.

The last stream of the Bahari agenda harnesses the cult's mystical leanings. They study Enoch's legends not as fixed, dead words, but as a rushing stream of meaning whose course can be altered. Ancient texts guide seekers to personal enlightenment not through any spells embedded within, but by inspiring action. Knowing this, the yamasattva conceal critical sections of the *Guarded Rubrics* not because of the prophecies and potent rituals within, but how they might prompt the True Hand to respond. The cult's enemies burn copies of the *Lilith Cycle* and Caine's followers repeat Noddist myths *ad nauseam*, but texts can be rewritten, interpolated, retranslated, and interpreted anew. The Bahari may not be able to destroy sacred Enoch, but they can *change what it means*.

When the Bahari turned one of Enoch's slave pens into their temple, they not only brought holiness to an obscene place, but asserted political power in what was once the fortress of their great enemy. Building on interpretations

of the *Guarded Rubrics* that they may well have encouraged the yamasattva to utter, the Azicithra sect (see p. 68) have reshaped Caine into something the cult can support: the son and daughter of Lilith, given a mark by the holy Serpent instead of Adam. Caine may be only a name for a shadowed origin, but names have power. Naming is the deep magic that enslaves everything given a word, so that it might be dominated and controlled. The Bahari have changed what Caine means here, at the place he will return. Changing meaning is a deeper magic still. Those who worship the First Murderer as man and woman, and the offspring of the Goddess, now sanctify the Throne of Ghemal. When Caine sits on it once more, he will be bound to dispense Lilith's justice as the vines of D'hainu choke the avenues of the Final City.

## The Way of Lilith

To understand Lilith, study pain.

Pain is the first and last sensation for Kindred and kine alike, so it should not be feared, but exalted. It is the price of birth. We share the birth agony with our mothers (though she feels a different order of pain than we do) when, as screaming infants, we experience the icy air in our lungs for the first time. So it is with the Embrace, where the Blood's mother (one does not "sire" a Ba'ham like a lord recognizing a vassal) gives you precious new life. You crawl from death. She carries hunger from the vitae she sacrificed to create you. Mortals and Kindred both walk through turns of the moon until pain comes again, to carry them into the shadows and unknown gardens beyond this world. Whether it manifests in slow human cancers or the sun claiming its price from undead flesh makes no difference.

The name of pain is Lilith, she of the mystery of motherhood, life, death, and the agonies that transform. She is generous, sparing none Her blessings.

Like the Mother herself, Lilith's cult accepts all who enter sincerely, willing to study the feminine mysteries of pain, transformation, and creation. The cult shuns the hierarchies that other occult orders and mystical Kindred adore. Those pompous secret societies are errant branches of the tree, cut and whittled into something dead and brittle by ancient patriarchy. The cult is Lilith's living, wild garden. It embraces many offshoots from its primordial roots. None remember which sect is the original, but it doesn't matter — this is not a society ruled by pontiffs and priest-kings, but those who come of their own accord to understand the Dark Mother. The cult purifies its membership with difficult rites. Remember the pain?

## Doctrines of the Bahari

You may call them Lilin, Bahari, Howlers, Verbena, Nightjars, Owls, Cats, and Dragons. Whatever their names, the Dark Mother gave birth to them all, will slay them all, and will guide them through the moons of life and death. In the True Hand, believers form a loose alliance that answers to many names, but most refer to themselves as *Bahari* (singular *Ba'ham*) to evoke a sense of common sisterhood. The name originates from the *Lilith Cycle*, a group of texts said to record all of the Dark Mother's stories, from her presence at Genesis to her acts in the Final Nights. Tal'Mahe'Ra cultists give particular weight to the Cycle because they've probably gathered more of its fragments than any other group, but it's no "Lilith Bible." Sacred texts guide practice, but are not a *Logos* handed down from above, because the cult embraces personal revelation and many subsequent variants of its core precepts. The following are not hidebound traditions members adhere to with legalistic fervor, but what respected Bahari recognize as the way of the Dark Mother.

### All Are Equally Holy Before Lilith

The lowest neonate and mightiest elder are the same before the Dark Mother. Bahari avoid initiatory degrees and don't string along adherents with promises of greater secrets once they "prove themselves worthy." Bahari don't reject social hierarchies out of hand but favor intuitive, pragmatic ways of organizing. An elder Ba'ham deserves respect because she survived and studied for centuries, not because she holds a title. Modern Bahari who integrate recent feminist thinking may use some form of consensus decision-making, but most simply honor superior knowledge.

Bahari often claim this makes them capable of greater social harmony than "Cainites" who battle each other over title and influence, but the vampires who revere Lilith are still predators. The Dark Mother's children may not deeply care about who gets to be Harpy on the next Camarilla deep cover mission, but they can still compete with remarkable subtlety and savagery.

### Eve Ate of the Tree of Knowledge

As lover to the Serpent, Lilith took pity on Eve, who Yahweh made into Adam's slave. Lilith gave Eve fruit from the Tree of Knowledge to understand her predicament and aspire to greater things. Like Lilith, Eve swallowed its seeds. Legend holds that women who have joined the ranks of those monsters born of Lilith and students of witchcraft germinate the seeds of knowledge within and inherit Lilith's legacy. These women know the Bahari philosophy in ways men never can. Various sects differ on

## Gender in the Bahari

The Cult of Lilith unapologetically centers itself on the concept of feminine power. Most sects accept male adherents, but there's no room for a comparable doctrine of masculinity. Anyone whose personal gnosis leads them to (for example) treat Lilith and Caine as male and female equals should leave the Bahari. The Azicithra represent the closest the cult comes to any such belief. Male Bahari can earn a great deal of respect, but never more than a woman from the same sect.

When Bahari speak of gender, they normally refer to sincere personal identity instead of biological traits, and may talk about degrees of femininity rather than binary identities. While this may synchronize with modern, progressive ideas about gender, the rationale stems from ancient traditions and supernatural reality. Many adherents come from cultures that provide traditional ways to select one's gender, and in any event, many common sex differences fall away after the Embrace. Sex doesn't influence the ability or channel the Blood into physical strength or reproduce by creating ghouls and childer.

In other respects, many Bahari are less enlightened. To a Ba'ham, womanly ways reject authority, respect intuition, and endure suffering. Women who respect strong leadership, focus on analytical thinking, or display little patience for learning through pain may be alienated by Bahari internal stereotypes. Nevertheless, the cult's rejection of top-down authority allowed personal gnosis to trump the collective opinions.

whether women are inherently better servants of Lilith, but most practice gender equality, a few espouse female superiority, and all emphasize woman-centered spirituality.

Unfortunately, Bahari have a troubled history when dealing with ordinary women. Many sects promote contempt for mundane "daughters of Eve" because according to the *Lilith Cycle*, Eve was made to be Adam's inferior. Believers in this doctrine say that despite the Serpent's mercy, Eve's daughters will always be weak and oppressed unless they awaken the seed within and attain supernatural abilities.

This attitude is less common among contemporary adherents than elder Kindred.

### **Lilith Has Many Faces**

As the *Lilith Cycle* makes clear, the Dark Mother is equal to the other Elohim, including Jehovah, who was a purported sub-creator under a true maker of universes. But Lilith accomplished more. She's a maker of many gardens, a lover of the gods, and created countless monsters and demigods. Lilith is the first goddess and the origin of the goddess myth. Nevertheless, the cult treats its texts as tools to develop inner knowledge instead of inerrant authority, so adherents should not assume that the European Triple Goddess, India's Durga, or China's Nuwa are merely "masks." They represent equally valid accounts of the Dark Mother.

And yet, the cult is not so tolerant that it believes every account to be equally *useful*. The *Lilith Cycle* enjoys pride of place because it stands in direct opposition to patriarchal legends of Caine. Bahari blood magic harnesses this mythology. The cult has a mission, and ideas that don't move it forward, while personally edifying, should be set aside to concentrate on the greater Bahari cause.

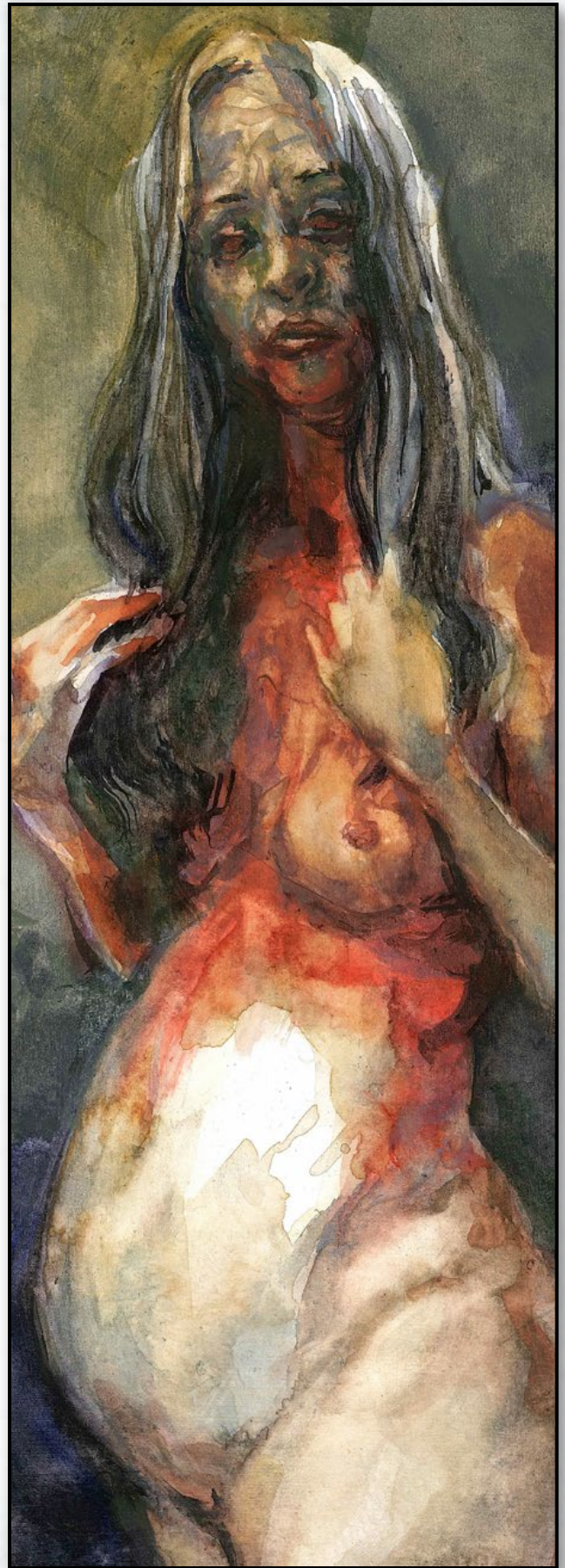
### **Lilith is the Mother of Witches and Monsters**

The Dark Mother gave birth to all the monsters and night-wisdom of the world. This knowledge doesn't belong exclusively to Kindred, lupines, mages, or any other type of supernatural being. Lilith made vampires, but was not just a vampire. Lilith shared the secrets of natural sorcery with the first mage, but was never just an "awakened" human. Therefore, the cult should accept any of Lilith's children, along with anyone else who sincerely follows Her ways. Bahari foster cooperation between Kindred and other supernatural beings, as long as all participants respect the Dark Mother.

Nevertheless, these groups rarely unite under one Goddess without encountering significant tensions. The Cult of Lilith focuses on Kindred needs, politics, and the spirituality that grows from conflict with the Beast. Some mages may honor Her, but outside of the True Hand, most relegate her to a secondary position behind their native cultures' polytheistic and pantheistic belief systems. While they theoretically accept non-Kindred as equals, Bahari sects usually put undead spirituality before everything else. The Lilin mages (see p. 70) represent an exception to the trend thanks to their long association with True Hand Bahari.

### **Lilith is the Pain of Transformation**

To become Bahari, one suffers and must inflict suffering. This requirement narrows the range of candidates for a theoretically open cult down to those able to transform pain into insight,



and inflict it for the edification of practitioner and subject alike. Some modern Bahari incorporate the frameworks and theories of BDSM psychosexual theater, but practices that use pain for instruction have an ancient lineage. To be counted among the Dark Mother's devotees, a petitioner must undergo a form of torment that symbolizes rebirth. To be considered loyal, she must transform others with pain.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra often trust Bahari to punish wayward members of the Hand. The True Hand corrects its members with a range of tortures that the Bahari not only demonstrate a special aptitude for delivering, but frame in such a way that wrongdoers learn from the experience. Against traitors and other irredeemable enemies, these teachings lead to Final Death, but the lesson is still important to deliver. The victim may take it to future incarnations, and the community learns from witnessing such executions. It is strictly forbidden to torture and kill for personal pleasure alone. One should not feel guilty for experiencing a certain degree of satisfaction, but all agonies should be offerings to Lilith, not shallow personal indulgences.

## Sects of the Bahari

The following sects do not represent all Bahari, but the most notable groups within the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Lilith's religion spawns numerous sub-cults. Most Bahari reject the idea of apostasy beyond certain obvious parameters, such as adopting blatant Noddist beliefs or male-supremacist doctrines. These philosophies aren't mutually exclusive secret societies. With precious few Bahari as it is, further division would limit each sect to less than a handful of practitioners. Adherents move from one current to another as their personal journeys compel them, combining them into personal forms of worship and adding to the cult's diversity.

### The Azicithra

Rising to prominence out of political necessity, the Azicithra (Avestan for "Seed of the Serpent," as the sect originally sought refuge in Persia) keeps an uneasy peace between the Bahari and Noddist factions of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Once considered a bizarre, minor current in Bahari philosophy, the sect recently vaulted to prominence on the shoulders of new pronouncements from the yama-sattva. Declaring that the time had come to reveal certain verses from the *Guarded Rubrics*, the deathless magi spoke of a fragment called "The Naming of Caine" which reads:

*For as Caine came forth from the union of Eve and the serpent, the seed of the Tree of Knowledge was the serpent's*

*seed. And Adam acknowledged it not, and could not name the serpent's seed, instead calling the child Caine. Therefore the mark of the serpent was substituted for the spear and was not named, and unnamed, it went unseen.*

The Azicithra long believed that Caine was not the child of Adam and Eve, but of Eve and Lilith as the Serpent. Thus Caine's lineage constituted the "snake" destined to strike at the heels of Adam's descendants. Furthermore, as the child of Lilith (who took the male role in procreation and was the supreme creative being), Caine was, like Lilith, man and woman — there was no "missing wife of Caine" to trouble Creationist vampires. With Lilith's abilities, the First Murderer became capable of spawning other monsters from biblical and Noddist lore. "The Naming of Caine" elaborated upon this by saying that Adam had concealed Caine's feminine attributes — the "mark of the serpent" — and replaced it with the utterly masculine name Caine, which translates as "spear."

This paved the way for a wary reconciliation between the Hand's Bahari and Noddist factions. Azicithra views gained great credence with progressive Noddists and moderate Bahari, but conservatives on both sides still oppose them, if quietly — despite their ranting, peace is too useful to disrupt. Political convenience promotes Azicithra legends from the fringe to the heart of the cult. Few Bahari believe in its doctrines before all others, but it serves as a cooperative face for believers, even if they follow a different path in personal practice.

### Azicithra Doctrines

- Caine was born of Lilith (as the Serpent) and Eve to punish Adam and Jehovah, but in pride, s/he forgot his/her purpose.
- Caine is both man and woman. The "mark of Caine" refers to his/her nature as a twin-sexed being, which Adam concealed and Jehovah unmasked.
- In defiance of Lilith, Caine gave birth to vampires and other monsters.
- In the Final Nights, Lilith will reconcile with Caine. Mother and child will judge the Kindred together.

### The Red Midwives

Lilith taught Caine the creative powers of the Elohim, but his arrogance limited his potential. He responded to pain with primitive defiance, inheriting just a fraction of the Dark Mother's power. Thus, vampires cringe in the face of the sun instead of mastering its burning might. They battle the Beast instead of uniting with it to explore divine passions. They cannot create children, but only transform Seth's descendants

into cursed beings, less than their parents. Mothers should aspire to create children that equal or exceed them in strength. They should make excellent monsters whenever they will it. The Red Midwives wish to correct Kindred deficiencies and release the Dark Mother's full power.

The Midwives are the most recent incarnation of sects as old as childbirth. Bahari have long attended to mortal pregnancies, providing safe births or abortions as women demanded. Most felt little empathy for the women themselves, as their concerns were social and mystical. When men perverted birth into a way to perpetuate themselves through dynasties, they dishonored the Dark Mother's gift. When Caine created children to worship him, he made them mere appendages of his will, doomed to repeat his follies. These Bahari also wished to examine the process of reproduction as closely and often as possible in order to master its mysteries and magical implications. Sometimes they would bless newborns with their blood and teach them sorcery. They gazed into subtle realms to examine how spirits and ghosts responded to birth. Some cultists studied the Embrace just as intensely. Others spied on spirits rutting in the invisible worlds or tracked lineages descended from monsters, devils, and demigods. Over time, the sect has learned enough about biological and supernatural forms of reproduction to make their archives a remarkable prize for doctors, Kindred researchers, and sorcerers alike.

Worshipping Lilith in Her aspect as the Mother of Monsters, the sect wishes to inherit the Dark Mother's divine fertility. For example, they hope to discover a way to allow vampires the power to conceive and give birth to human children or shape the Embrace to create beings that are neither mortal nor Kindred, but evolve according to their mothers' desires. This includes the ability to Embrace without condemning childer to weaker Generations, a prize that, once attained, would make the Bahari the strongest of the undead. To pursue these goals, many Red Midwives study blood sorcery, even capturing Tremere and Assamites to torture the secrets of blood manipulation out of them. In modern nights, they find themselves drawn to legends of the Thin-Blooded, for it is said that alone among vampires, they retain the power of human reproduction. It is whispered that the Red Midwives have studied the legends of *dhampirs* deeply, and may have succeeded in bringing a part-vampire child to term.

### **Red Midwife Doctrines**

- The children of Caine and Seth abandoned the secrets of birth for patriarchal folly.
- Women must be given full control of the power of birth.

- Birth is the ultimate creative force, and Lilith's highest manifestation is as the Mother of Monsters.
- We will achieve enlightenment by inheriting the power of Lilith's womb so that the dead may give birth to the living, the living may give birth to the dead, and all may beget children stronger than their mothers.

## **The Thorn Garden**

In the time of the First City, Lilith created D'hainu, the last holy garden. The Dark Mother took seeds from Eden within to grow a place free from the curses of the Elohim, where Lilith's children lived in a state of serene instinct. As predators and prey, they dwelled far from humankind's spears and half-barren fields. This refuge was necessary because Caine's get greedily drank life from the rest of the land. Pale mortals crawled across deserts that were once crops, surviving on wild grass. Antediluvian vampires preyed on anything with blood, leaving starving slaves and untended land. Indifferent to the needs of life, Enoch's self-styled gods paid no heed to their suffering subjects until the city itself crumbled from lack of care, as too few lived to maintain its glory.

Thus, the Antediluvians assaulted D'hainu. They drank from mortal refugees and the Dark Mother's beautiful monsters. Their corruption defiled the land and their starving slave armies ate like locusts, and then burned the remains so their ashes would fertilize Enoch's fields. All that remained were fire-hardened thorns. Some Bahari say it was the final sin God was willing to endure, triggering the Deluge. Noah's dove fetched an olive branch from D'hainu's thorns to signal its end, for burnt and barren as they were, only its trees could stand against the storm. The garden fell, but its trees re-seeded the world.

Named for the imperishable remnants of Lilith's last home on Earth, the Thorn Garden embraces its namesake's transformation. Although D'hainu fell, its ash-covered branches survived where untested trees did not. Lilith was exiled from this last echo of Eden, but now whispers in every receptive heart. All Bahari endure pain to enter the cult, but members of the Thorn Garden chase it with a lover's fervor to overcome barriers to self-knowledge. Some will arrange masochistic psychodramas, but for others this lacks authenticity — gnosis can only come from a genuine experience, not a simulation. Adherents wish to inflict refined pain as well — an eye for an eye describes the principle, but not the necessary degree of precision. Thus, the True Hand often employs Thorn Garden Bahari to teach through punishment. Beyond the Kindred, followers set upon mortals to correct their behavior. They carry the aspect of Lilith as the owl and

night terror. Under Thorn Garden protection, mortals need not have the existence of vampires hidden from them. They know that the consequences of displeasing their undead guardians are so horrific that they dare not resist.

### **Thorn Garden Doctrines**

- Pain is a creator, teacher, and sacrament. This is the lesson of the Mother at D'hainu.
- Endure suffering to exalt oneself, but not for any other reason.
- Never cause pain to simply please oneself, but to help the recipient learn and experience gnosis.
- Terror is better than any Masquerade. Masquerades can be broken, but those who fear you not only hide you from others, but from themselves.

### **The Lilin Witches**

Witches have long honored Lilith, either by that name or in the guise of another Great Goddess, personal deity, or archetype. Before the Flood, wise women escaped Caine's offspring by walking paths Lilith laid in moonlight, through the old gods' abandoned gardens. The Goddess has used these paths to visit these Pure Ones, who loved and persecuted her in turn. Against Lilith's resistance, the Pure Ones eventually shattered, imbuing humanity with their divine potential. As the oldest witches followed Lilith's paths, they emulated Her struggles and creative acts. They became Spring Maidens, Summer Mothers, Autumn Crones, and Winter Banshees. Alongside vampire Bahari and other Goddess cults, Lilin witches endured patriarchal persecution in a number of forms. When the Bahari discovered Enoch, they used the magic of Lilith in Winter to escort Kindred allies to the Shadowlands.

Centuries later, Lilin witches joined other wise women and cunning men to form the Old Faith magical Fellowship, but a secretive few maintained connections to the Goddess' undead children. In the 15th century, attacks from enemy philosophers, militant priests and sorcerers forced the Old Faith to expand its numbers and ally with a broader group of mages.

Many of these witches and mages honor Lilith, but few devote themselves entirely to Her worship. Of these, a single coven maintains its membership in the Kindred Bahari. The Lilin witches know other mages might be interested in plundering Enoch, and might not approve of their close ties to vampires. Lilin witches routinely submit themselves to the blood bond, and often accept the Embrace once their life extension spells fail. Thus,

certain Kindred believe in a form of spirituality that followed them from life to undeath. These witch-vampires are often highly skilled in forms of blood sorcery that manipulate living things and the elements. Indeed, the Drakaina and their Nightshade Necromancy evolved from the Kindred study of Lilin witch mysticism.

### **Lilin Witch Doctrine**

- Lilith was the first Awakened witch, but was never merely mortal.
- She Ascended to the ranks of the Pure Ones and returned to teach the Art to the living and dead.
- The Self is a garden, with seasons of growth and withering.
- Do not ignore or squander the power of life.

### **The Nightshade Path (Necromancy)**

Developed by the Drakaina, this Path of Necromancy studies natural cycles, including the savage interplay of life and death. All life is a manifestation of entropy, a chaotic miracle punctuating Creation's flow toward destruction. When rot claims a body, it impregnates the flesh with insects and lush plants, and its stench calls scavengers who sustain themselves with death's bounty. Vampires demonstrate how this process can be arrested and manipulated, for Kindred stand suspended at the moment of death, before nature blesses them with the power to decompose and feed living things. The black seed lies dormant within them, but they can encourage its growth in others, manipulating rot and staining life with the ghostly essence.

Although the Drakaina developed the Path, they don't hoard it – it's the Dark Mother's gift, to share with all who worship her. Any Bahari necromancer may learn it from a Drakaina teacher. Lilin Nagaraja practice this Path in increasing numbers because it unifies the life and death principles in ways anticipated (but never realized) by their Idran forebears.

#### **• Tend the Body Garden**

Modern forensics makes it possible to determine time of death with remarkable accuracy – a frightening prospect for Kindred with bodies to hide. On the other hand, sometimes it's better for people to find corpses before rot takes them. Presenting evidence that elder Kindred have suffered the Final Death is sometimes difficult to come by, as their bodies rapidly molder into nondescript ash. A



necromancer with this power overcomes these difficulties. She can speed up or slow the process of decay, turning a dead mortal into a bloated host for flies in seconds or nullifying the decay of Final Death.

**System:** The player spends one blood point as the vampire lets some of her blood drip on to a corpse, and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 6). Successes allow the vampire to accelerate or arrest decomposition as follows:

**Successes Delay or Accelerate Rot by:**

1	Up to one day
2	Up to one week
3	Up to one month
4	Up to one year
5+	Storyteller's discretion

The vampire may use this power on mortals and animals as long as the remains have not been substantially scattered. It may be used on Kindred no longer than one turn after they've met Final Death. Corpses that recently belonged to the living change according to local conditions, so that one stored in a dry place might mummify, while another that rests on soil quickly sprouts plants and maggots. Living

things that feed from the dead are quickened or held in stasis as the corpse is, provided they're plants, fungi, or no larger than a scarab beetle. Kindred under Final Death wither and fall to dust without attracting such organisms.

•• **Witch's Fruit**

Every plant relies on death to grow. Rotting things enrich the soil, and the trees, vines, and grasses drink up necrotic echoes along with vital nutrients. A necromancer can awaken this death aura by exposing their fruits to her blood. She awakens and concentrates their trace necrotic energies so that anyone who consumes them can sense and touch the Shadowlands.

**System:** The player spends a blood point while the vampire touches edible plant matter. No roll is required. The first living creature to eat this tainted meal falls into a waking, ambulatory trance for a scene, during which she may see into the Shadowlands, hear its denizens, and even touch and be touched by ghosts. The target may not make physical contact with buildings and other objects that were never alive, and may not be dragged into the Tempest or any other place that has no corresponding location in the living world. Tainted plant matter rots by the next sunrise and loses the ability to impart this state.



Witches' fruits are mild hallucinogens. Twisted visions of ghosts and long-fallen buildings disorient mortals under their influence. This normally imposes +2 to difficulties to perform any actions except for Willpower rolls while affected. Creatures who are familiar with supernatural phenomena don't suffer this penalty.

### ••• **Raise the Green One**

Tales of Kid, Osiris, and the Green Man all describe beings who were brought back from death and clothed in verdant color. Isis raised Osiris to become a symbol of rebirth and growth, and neopagans say Green Man iconography remembers the god who is slain by Winter and reborn in the Goddess' womb. Nightshade necromancers channel these legends into the act of raising a corpse bound and strengthened by plant matter. Leaves cover its skin and strong vines supplement its rotted sinews. The living shell grants speed and self-preservation instincts not seen in other animated dead.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 8). He spends one Willpower point and one blood point while concentrating on a corpse that lays upon or within fertile soil. If the roll succeeds, red-tinged vines, branches, and leaves envelop the corpse, and it rises to do the necromancer's bidding. The necromancer may only raise the Green Ones one at a time, and may never have multiple Green Ones active at the same time.

Green Ones are stronger, faster, and possess better instincts than most zombies. Their traits are Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, and the equivalent of 2 dots of Fortitude, as their damp bodies resist injuries. Bashing damage inflicts half damage to a Green One. Like vampires, they suffer bashing damage from gunfire. Unlike ordinary zombies, they act in standard initiative order.

### ••• **Wails and Whispers**

As the necromancer's understanding deepens, she explores the wavering barrier between life and death. When she screams like a banshee, she can lure a soul to its demise, increasing the chance of a fatal injury. When she whispers like a mother to her child, she can fix a soul in the lands of the living, even when it occupies a body that should be dead.

**System:** The vampire concentrates on a target, screaming or whispering as her intentions dictate. (The target does not need to be able to hear the vampire.) The player spends one point of Willpower and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 8). If she wishes to lure her target closer to death, each success adds

one level of lethal damage to the total inflicted by the next injury he suffers in that scene. If she wishes to prevent the target from dying, each success sets aside one level of damage (of any kind) from the next injury the target suffers during the scene, but this benefit only lasts until the end of the scene, after which the set aside damage returns. The target suffers injury but doesn't feel its effects, up to and including death, until the scene ends and the damage returns. Note that the Storyteller can rule that very large amounts of damage may cause death due to total or near-total destruction of the body, regardless of this power's effects.

### •••• **Chthonic Womb**

At the apex of this Path, a necromancer combines murder and fertility to give birth to the ghost of a mortal she has slain. She drinks the victim's blood to grab hold of his soul, and after dispatching him, traps it within her. At a later time, she may call it forth as a ghost to do her bidding.

**System:** The vampire must drink at least one point of a mortal victim's blood, but may kill him using another method. Another person or incident may cause the mortal's demise, but the necromancer must make physical contact with him at the moment of death. At that point the player spends one point of Willpower and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 8). If the player succeeds, the soul occupies the vampire's body in a dormant state for up to one month per success. (Aura Perception or similar powers will reveal the presence of the dormant soul, which might be mistaken for a form of possession.) The necromancer may store multiple souls this way, but "twins," "triplets," and more tax the "mother's" energy. Each soul stored beyond the first drains one additional blood point when the vampire awakens each night.

At any point before the soul leaves her body, the vampire may summon it forth to manifest with either the traits of a recently deceased ghost (see V20, p. 385) or those it possessed in life, along with a recently deceased ghost's supernatural abilities. It must perform three services for its "mother." After that, the soul is free to move on to its ultimate destiny. If the ghost is commanded to perform any task that would traumatize a mortal (typically, those which would risk a Humanity check in a vampire with that trait at 7) it may, at the Storyteller's discretion, treat the necromancer as a "fetter," an object that the ghost fixates upon and uses as a tie to the living world. This gives the ghost the ability to haunt the necromancer until it is banished. The necromancer may always simply dismiss the soul when it appears, or even command it to leave her body while the soul still slumbers.

## The Path of Lilith

Detailed on pp. 329-331 of *Vampire the Masquerade 20th Anniversary Edition*, the Path of Lilith represents the heart of Bahari doctrine, teaching an ethos of rising above human suffering, seeking personal enlightenment, and transforming rage into a passion for justice. On the surface, these traits seem commendable and entire compatible with Humanity. Indeed, many self-styled Bahari outside the True Hand still follow Humanity, and only use Path teachings to better define their goals and challenges.

True Black Hand Bahari promote just enough moderation to get along with the society's Noddists, death cultists, and other elder eccentrics, but nevertheless leads the faithful far from humane values. Practitioners rise above suffering by cultivating a love of pain as a teacher and inflicting its lessons on others. Personal enlightenment takes precedence over compassion and, for the Dark Mother's children, a sense of justice doesn't preserve peace from its callous enemies, but rains down terror in service of an ancient mythology. Lilith is a Goddess of cycles, so it is right that those who were cast down at the beginning of days should arise through blood and ash when Gehenna's black sun rises.

Nevertheless, the True Hand's Bahari are a political front as much as a philosophy, so they permit members to follow a small number of compatible Paths as long as they honor the Dark Mother. These include the Paths of the Feral Heart and Metamorphosis from *V20* (pp. 324-326 and 331-332, respectively) and of the Scorched Heart and Self-Focus from this book (pp. 55-58). However, members from other Paths make up a minority of the cult and never rise as high as true believers.

### Rise like the Mother

The heart of the Path is a simple demand: *Seek gnosis through suffering*. Bahari often speak of "gnosis" due to the influence of Greek culture, where the word represents spiritual insight. (The *Lilith Cycle* uses an archaic term, *sa*, which the oldest Bahari prefer.) Cultists speak of finding personal gnosis by developing their own ideas within the Path, and collective gnosis by sharing new ways of knowing Lilith with fellow Bahari. They find much to admire in Gnostic religions that identify the highest wisdom as the feminine principle of Sophia, but reject doctrines that treat the body and material world as obstacles. One should not escape the body, but constantly learn from its pains, lusts, and other demands. These sensations can be rendered down into the word *suffering* in the Path's demand: a state

### Rite of the Two Trees

All Bahari within the True Hand practice some form of the Rite of the Two Trees. Named for the Trees of Life and Knowledge from which Lilith ate and preserved the seeds, the ceremony demonstrates an adherent's commitment to gnosis through suffering. Some sects use a standard ritual for all newcomers while others tailor the ritual for each acolyte, but they all bear something in common: the kind of agony that takes people beyond even the point of withdrawing into their psyches, because its intensity, strangeness, and intensely personal nature forces them to confront it, seize a lesson from it, and let it wash away. This is actually easier to induce in Kindred than kine because the Beast indicates when boundaries have been broken, and the Curse of the Elohim (Bahari avoid using the term "Curse of Caine") provides fire and sun to stimulate the body.

**System:** Many Bahari emerge from the rite transformed, but ultimately unscathed. However, a few acquire permanent marks of the experience in the form of Physical or Mental Flaws, balanced by Physical or Mental or Supernatural Merits of equivalent value. The minor magic of the rite allows certain injuries that would normally be erased by a vampire's nature to persist, as its agony alters the Ba'ham's mystical self.

**Example Flaws:** Tic/Twitch, Disfigured, One Eye, Open Wound, Lameness, Flesh of the Corpse, Blind, Nightmares, Phobia, Vengeful, Flashback.

**Example Merits:** Bruiser, Daredevil, Common Sense, Introspection, Iron Will, Magic Resistance, Oracular Ability, Nine Lives.

that not only includes gross physical pain, but all forms of yearning that emanate from the body. Bahari study personal suffering and the pains of others.

Lilith is a gnosis-seeker's Goddess: a maker of inspiring myths and the first along the Path, the one who demonstrated that gnosis can vault Her children to the ranks

of the gods. The Dark Mother inspired a canon of staggering diversity that identifies Her with numerous Great Goddesses and offshoot philosophies. These inspire variant Virtues and sins that may replace those standard to the Path. The following examples encompass the largest sects within the Tal'Mahe'Ra, but not every group of Lilith's worshippers. The faithful need not join any particular sect – these affiliations are optional.

Bahari avoid rigid doctrines, so it is possible to adopt a sect's alternate Virtues without its optional sins or vice versa, or adopt both or neither, while remaining a member.

### **The Serpent's Seed (Azicithra)**

Newly-risen to prominence, the Azicithra arose from the Veiled Bahari of Persia who transformed their hatred of Noddists into a subtle campaign of ideological subversion. Instead of destroying Caine, they intend to conquer him by rewriting his myth into one more pleasing to the Dark Mother.

**Alternate Virtues:** Conviction and Self-Control

### **The Red Midwives**

The medieval Bahari of Making worshiped Lilith as the Mother of Monsters, whose creative powers brought wondrous and terrible beings into the world. The Red Midwives refined the tradition by noting that the Dark Mother gave birth to what she willed, as she willed it – never at the behest of gods and men. Now they emphasize mastering birth and creation instead of merely practicing it.

**Alternate Virtues:** Conscience and Instinct


### **The Thorn Garden**

Modern Bahari of the Thorns combine the ancient study of pain with a sense of justice born of the much travail the cult has suffered over the centuries. They suppress the urge for revenge in favor of enforcing the Black Hand's law. The Thorn Garden's name symbolizes the sect's dream of reviving the Dark Mother's paradise, one righteous torture at a time.

**Alternate Virtues:** Conviction and Self-Control

### **The Lilin Witches**

Lilin witches adapt the beliefs of Her Awakened followers, emphasizing the role of death in natural cycles and the Dark Mother's influence in countless ancient Goddess cults. As befits a sect of witches, they seek out the



### **Hierarchy of Sins Against the Serpent's Seed**

- 9 Tolerating any holy figure being raised above Lilith.
- 8 Failing to subvert the works of Noddists.
- 4 Sacrificing fellow Bahari to achieve your goals.

### **Hierarchy of Sins Against the Red Midwives**


- 8 Failing to attend a nearby birth or Embrace if other assistance would not be forthcoming.
- 5 Shunning inhuman or monstrous creatures.
- 3 Hindering your childe's search for gnosis and power.

### **Hierarchy of Sins Against the Thorn Garden**

- 10 Failing to recreate the Garden of D'hainu in Enoch.
- 5 Teaching without inflicting suffering.
- 2 Destroying an enemy in an expedient fashion without visiting instructive agonies upon him.

### **Hierarchy of Sins Against the Lilin Witches**

- 9 Failing to cultivate the Dark Mother's religion among mortals.
- 7 Failing to protect faithful followers of Lilith.
- 2 Destroying magical secrets and Bahari scripture.



Bahari's eldritch lore in the form of scriptures, artifacts, and magical arts.

**Alternate Virtues:** Conviction and Instinct

Marked forever more with the symbol of his crime, Caine wandered for seven times seven years and came upon the palace of the grim-eyed Lilith, who had been cast from the Garden for refusing to submit to the first of men and her twinned husband, Adam Kadmon<sup>1</sup>. Lilith: night-hag, who made her bed beneath the hidden parts of the earth and, despite her wickedness, was given stewardship over every male infant before their eighth day, and ever female infant before their twentieth. The she-demon suffers the loss of one hundred of her own children with each new dawn, and needs no beast to ride upon<sup>1</sup>, for it roars within her breast.

The scent of sin lay heavy on the air, and Caine came easily and untroubled to the outer gate, for those that would accost the domicile of the Mother of Demons and that of her brood would meet a prolonged death indeed. In those days, her palace extended well in each direction, formed as it was in fine stone and precious metals that gleamed in the light beneath the layers of verdigris and tarnish. To bear the manse of Lilith was to blight the very land, for the soil recognized that which came from it and that which had been rejected by the Lord.

She heard of his coming, and painted her face and adorned the head of her child Omoroca, who dwelled within her mother's palace as an attendant. As Caine crossed the gate Lilith called out, "Will it be peace between us, First Among Murderers?" Upon hearing her sweet voice, Caine lifted his face up, dirtied as it was, and said, "It is. Allow me inside, so that I may rest myself. I will be on my way come the next rising of the moon, as is my wont."

And so she bade him to come inside, for she recognized the curse of YHWH and the countenance of his father.

Wearing little more than the clothing of a traveler, thick with the road's dust, she permitted him to bathe and enjoy the hospitality of her home, for Lilith knew what it was to have a life filled with enemies. His hair now oiled with sweet attars and his clothes clean, he appeared within her hall to speak with his hostess and to partake of her table.

"Though cast from the house of your father," said Lilith, attired only in the rich stones of the earth and the pearls of the sea, "I recognize the spawn of Adam the Defiler."

Caine was astounded at the sight of her dark and shining hair, her bright eyes rimmed with kohl, and her lips painted with rich red and pressed with gold<sup>3</sup>. But his eyes were drawn by the strange beauty of Moroccan<sup>4</sup>, her brow crowned with the numerous horns of mighty rams and ibex, hung thick with golden rings and bright ribbon laden with the milk-teeth of children lost to the night, her legs belonging to that of the backwards-bending ibis, clad not in soft down but in the jeweled scales of adders<sup>5</sup>.

"Yes. I have been cursed by the Lord to wander the Land of Nod for all my days. The flesh of animals turns to ash in my mouth, and water to brine, for I killed my brother in the throes of my wrath. I may only sup upon the blood of the living as my nourishment, and no place is to be my shelter for more than one night<sup>6</sup>. And you are Lilith, matriarch of the Lilitu. You bear the mark of the owl, the cat, and the serpent<sup>7</sup>, and you are the beloved and the shunned bride of the Morningstar. Will you allow me to take but one drink from your handmaiden, and to make of her my companion?" He indicated Omoroca thus, where she sat at her mother's feet.

---

1 Here we see the only instance of Adam presented as the Etz haChayim, or Tree of Life, to Lilith's own Kelipot. As the latter stand for the empty husks that surround holiness, Lilith as the mother of demons – those cast from the light of the Divine, and unable to receive true unity with others.

---

2 The number of children appears to be deliberately exaggerated and rounded; no texts support significance for the exact number, and indeed, anecdotal references differ wildly and are often highly specific.

---

3 I have long wondered if Caine in this tale represents the taming force of male-dominated monotheism here, where the Lilitu are the old gods of the pagans. Much mention is made of their strange forms, and here we have Lilith presented as a decadent and tempting Other, found within the wilderness.

---

4 "Omoroca" is another name for Tiamat, embodiment of primordial chaos of the depths. In the Mesopotamian tales, the cosmos took form through her. As with many gods of the sea, she might demonstrate the unknown, the monstrosity inherent in the strange creatures that will always be alien to those that walk on land. In this, Caine becomes part of the Chaoskampf cycle, where a culture hero engages with a chthonic entity.

---

5 The monstrosity of wilderness is represented within the body of the pseudo-goddess, like that of Echidna. Considering the origins of her name, it seems likely that Omoroca was "borrowed" from various other cultures and fashioned into her own figure for the purposes of this tale.

---

6 Genesis 4:12: "When you cultivate the ground it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth."

---

7 All sacred animals to Lilith, as shown within some of her children.



Lilith demurred. "Omoroca is among the first of my children and among my most precious. If you wish her for your night's companion, she must agree. It is not for me to give the unwilling flesh of my flesh where I myself sought freedom from those that would bring me low<sup>8</sup>."

"I would have her as my helpmate," spoke the First Murderer, turning to the young demoness. "For she is as monstrous and beautiful a creature as has ever walked the Land of Nod or swam in its seas, as lovely as the birds that fill the sky or the crawling insects that dig deep into the soil."

Upon hearing this Omoroca's bright laughter filled the chamber hall of her mother's great palace.

"How might you make me that which is anathema to a child of the Mother of Demons? Nothing upon this Earth may lay claim to me, for I am sister to every horror that plagues the night. With every toss of my head, wild beasts kneel at my feet<sup>9</sup>. With every cant of my hips, I tempt men to sin. With every casual glance I might curdle milk within the dugs of suckling mothers<sup>10</sup>. What might you offer me, forsaken child of Adam?"

Caine looked upon her, and his eyes were filled with wonder. "I will make for you a bridal bed as has never been seen before, and upon it I will make you my mate and my childe. The angels above will grow jealous to see the bower I create."

"I am the daughter of the sea and the soil both," said she, her lips curling into a smile that caused his heart to loosen in his chest. "My mother was fashioned from the same sediment that the first man, your father, was borne from. She knows the secret name of the Lord, and her magics cause plague and ruin to mankind. She defiles infants not protected by the host of YHWH. And my father is the wicked Leviathan, whose great and mighty roar calls forth storms to ruin ship and sailor, and his thrashing within the deep sea causes fissures to break open in the earth. What use have I for such things?"

His head ducked low, and his brow furrowed deep in thought. He said at last, "Upon your curling horns I shall hang the stars that dance in the celestial sphere. I will drape you in precious gems<sup>11</sup> and paint your lips

---

8 As per rabbinical lore, Lilith escaped her marriage to Adam because he refused to lie with her as an equal.

---

9 A reference to Diana?

---

10 The attributes of Omoroca are remarkably similar to those that were given to witches in the old world. As Lilith was given to be the mother of witches as well, this seems to follow.

---

11 I am reminded of Hephaestus' courting of Aphrodite through these references to great wealth.

with the blood of liars. I will clothe you in the night, and make for you a trousseau of finest bone. Your retinue I will populate with those that abandon themselves to holy torments<sup>12</sup> for your pleasure, so that you may always hear their laments to your majesty."

Omoroca laughed again, her eyes filled with mirth as she gestured to the fine dress she wore. "I am dressed in the silken hair of unborn animals, and my limbs are hung with their bones. My companions are the demons that eat the dreams of the dying, and my siblings every evil." Caine held his would-be wife within his dark gaze. "I will slaughter nightly for you that which I love most in the world, so that you will be the only creature I might hold in highest regard. I will give you all that I said I would and more, for your bride price."

She considered this, the rings upon her horns chiming sweetly, and her dark and heavy hair arrayed in countless braids swinging about her form. "Would you, first among murderers? You, in whose mouth the flesh of animals turns to ash and water to brine? Who may only sup upon the blood of the living as your only nourishment? Who cannot shelter for more than one night in the same place? You, who slaughtered your beloved brother?"

And so Omoroca pulled the fine and wicked dagger<sup>13</sup> she wore at her hip, and held it out to him.

"Then each night you will give unto me the sacrifice of that which you love most, child of Adam. And I will drink deep of your pain and find it sweet, for nothing may love me without pain."

Caine looked upon the knife pressed to his hand, and held her eyes as he sliced open his throat into a carmine smile. So it was that upon the next rising of the moon, the pair and those that would follow left the house of Lilith. And each night, Omoroca became his bride and

his childe, and took from him offerings of exquisite agonies and delighted in them. Her lips became stained with the red of him, her teeth wicked and gleaming.

Omoroca, whose every word is that of the sighing courtesan, replete with every vice and dark pleasure to be found within her purview. Omoroca, whose skin is perfumed with the blood of the defiled, who bathes nightly beneath the staring eye of the moon amidst her innumerable consorts as Caine wanders the Land of Nod forever more. Omoroca, childe-bride, who needs no beast to ride upon.

Omoroca, borne of the coupling of the terrible night-hag Lilith and the monstrous on the shore of the wine-dark Red Sea, amidst the wailing host of her mother's countless other children. She who cried not when she breached the womb, but laughed upon the sight of the wide and hungry world<sup>14</sup>. Omoroca, devourer of the sins of mankind, who suckles every lost childe upon her sweet blood, sister to hideous and miraculous beings with the appearance of men, those furnished with the fourfold body of wild dogs, or those crowned with dozens of eyes upon their brow<sup>15</sup>. She is sibling to every horror that fills the night, dwelling in forgotten tombs and deep caverns.

Omoroca, whose followers slick their mouths with sweet seed and blood<sup>16</sup> and prayer, who dance for her garbed not in clothing but in the tattered remnants of their own purity, whose hands execute the vilest of holy sins in her name. Her priests lie with her in the throes of their midnight Sabbaths under the empty night sky, and her priestesses mutilate their would-be lovers for her pleasure when the moon grows turgid.

Omoroca, companion to Caine. Himself cursed by YHWH to never know succor, who fills his gullet with the blood of his victims but is never satiated<sup>17</sup>. Caine, who exalts in misery, progenitor of murder.

---

12 What Omoroca's supplicants might have sacrificed in her name is still under debate, even among her modern followers. The practice of self-flagellation in such idolatrous worship is among the more grave of her offerings, as in Kings 18:28. "And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out on them."

---

13 Among the various and sundry tribes that Omoroca might have originated from, the practice of carrying a small knife for self-defense was common. In giving her knife to Caine, the force of dominating masculinity and domestication, she is disarming herself and demonstrating her trust of him. Again, this tale might be some manner of composite story. Caine is presented as folk-hero and civilizing force, though the ultimate domination of Omoroca over him instead of the usual fable of the masculine conquering the feminine and wild.

---

14 A possible reference to Eris, goddess of discord.

---

15 This is one of the few times that the Omoroca of the Babylonians is produced, as in the history by A. Polyhistor. He writes of her attended by beings monstrous and horrible, who themselves might call back to the origins of Lilith as a twin of Adam.

---

16 Blood, semen, and urine are three of the substances given to holiness within some circles, for these are the secretions produced by the living body. Omoroca's cultists portrayed as decadent pagans given to orgies is of little surprise, considering what are listed as her purviews.

---

17 Omoroca and Caine both are well matched in their gluttony. This might be some allegory for the eventual failure of civilization, for in the end we are nothing but what we hunger for.

# Apocrypha of Lilith: The Analect of Names

I write these words from where I sit in the quarters accorded to me in the ghost of the Black Citadel of the Dark Father, in the ghost of the First City called Enoch, resting still upon the high place where it sat when the waters of the Deluge swallowed it and all the makings of man in a time before human reckoning. They are, as apartments within the Black Citadel are concerned, apparently quite spare. My most frequent companion these nights, Sophia-Amunet, the Second Assistant Librarian to Lorekeeper Tayumet, is thoroughly appalled by what appears to be a potentially insulting lack of creature comforts, but I am neither affronted nor dismayed. *Luxury* is not a requirement of my existence so much as a thing pleasant to have while I may, on which I waste no thought when I have not. Sophia-Amunet has, nonetheless, exerted herself of late to improve my surroundings, and thus I sit upon my apartment's balcony overlooking a vast garden court in the sort of silk-cushioned chair I have not owned since my youth — my *breathing* youth, at that!

with a table of carved teak inlaid with ebony at my elbow, which bears the scrivener's case that holds my writing tools, and a scribe's lapboard sits on my knee. I have lamps burning perfumed oils to chase away the shadows, as much as they can be banished in this dark place, and braziers to keep the cold from my hands. My floor, bare when I arrived, is now covered ankle-deep in the sort of carpets once woven in Samarkand, and my bed quite possibly once belonged to a Babylonian prince. Every other night, it seems, Sophia-Amunet arrives bearing some new book or scroll or palimpsest; I have accumulated quite a collection in my receiving room, where in between my (admittedly few) official duties, I have begun working my way through them.

I am, I have been assured repeatedly, not a prisoner. I am not required, by any commandment of the Del'Roh or the Wazir council, to keep to these rooms. If I am denied entry to any portion of the city, I should rest assured that all others — or nearly all others — are similarly forbidden. I am certain that, to some extent, this is true. The Oath I have sworn binds and compels me more efficiently than any physical chain, barring my passage more effectively than any locked and guarded door. The magics that Izhim ur-Baal etched into my flesh and soul hold me, in their own way, even more tightly. I cannot depart Enoch, even had I the wish or the power to do so.

But I am not a prisoner.

I keep to these rooms because every time I leave them I am reminded, sometimes forcefully, sometimes subtly, precisely how much of a prisoner I am. The Del'Roh

and her advisors may gild the truth of it as much as they like, mouth empty courtesies at the council table, and assure me that the shakari who guard my door are there for my protection. In the spirit of absolute honesty, that may be the truth. I am reasonably certain that half the seraphim wish to see me skinned with copper knives, rolled in salt, and then dipped repeatedly in a vat of boiling, blessed oil; it is not unreasonable to assume that lesser personages *might* wish me more than a trace element of harm. Very well, I will give them the guards.

I am not certain that I can extend similar allowance to the things I see flickering out of the corner of my eyes whenever I step into the nearly empty corridors of this vast, echoing tomb of a palace, or out into the streets of this vast, echoing tomb of a city. I would love with what is left of my heart to lose myself for an hour, a night, forever, in the garden that spreads out at my feet, and I cannot bring myself to do so. I am never alone, and the sensation of unseen eyes upon me, of being constantly watched and weighed and measured, would poison any pleasure in solitude that might try to find there.

My curiosity gnaws at the roots of my will, begs for the chance to ask Sophia-Amunet to show me the library her master governs, that I may assuage my *absolute skull-cracking boredom* with the accumulated lore of a thousand nations and even more thousands of years. I force it to settle for the diversions she smuggles in to me — collections of the lost poetry of the ancients, a thick volume of plays penned by the dramatists of the Second City, a selection of eye-searingly lurid novels from across the vast gulfs of Cainite time, and treatises on philosophy, art, and history. I have forced myself to ration my consumption of them, lest I run short and find my sanity fracturing completely; fortunately, I thought to bring my instruments with me, and have consumed some of the time between Sophia-Amunet's visits setting that ancient and forgotten poetry to music.

I am not a prisoner, but I confess I believe I am losing my mind from all the freedom that I gave away to come to this place, to offer what I can to these people.

I have done this of my own will and cannot nor would not undo it. I have given myself and all who follow me — the kin of my own blood and those we have taken into our fold, the allies who have joined their skills and knowledge to our own — to the purposes of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, for their way more than any other aligns with ours. They know of the threats and the dangers they know, and more importantly, they *believe* as only

those who have faced peril from beyond the borders of our world themselves would, without the sort of demonstrations of truth that would shatter the minds and souls of lesser beings. They are as invaluable as allies as they were implacable as enemies, and I would never invite the retribution turning away from them would bring down upon my people. I will do whatever I must to prove my... or perhaps, to prove *our* worth to them in this long and terrible struggle.

And yet I cannot help wishing that there had been *another way*:

I am still capable of at least that much foolishness.

• • •

I found them wedged in the middle of one of the more readable novels — never let it be said that the Languedocian Courts of Love failed to produce works at least as shocking to common sensibilities as their northern cousins. Three sheets of paper of a far lesser grade than the novel's pages, glued expertly into the binding to avoid a telltale differentiation in the edging, written in an entirely different hand and an entirely different language. A language, point in fact, that I did not recognize, much less speak. The author used the Nabataean script, but the *words themselves* were neither Arabic nor any of the Aramaic tongues that preceded it, a fact I found puzzling to say the least. Less puzzling but only slightly more illuminating: at the bottom of the final page lay a sigil, carefully hand-drawn, of a pale crescent moon edging a black lunar disk and bleeding a drop of darkness from its lower curve.

That, I did know.

I had crossed paths more than once with those cults that revered the Great Dark Mother who called themselves the Bahari. More often than not, those meetings were of a civil kind, if not entirely peaceful. The Bahari are often, wrongly, conflated with infernalists by *both* the Camarilla and the Sabbat, hunted and hounded from their havens, sent to the Final Death with sunlight and fire. They *expect* persecution when they are found and are not swift to trust, even when they are greeted with the ancient, formal hospitality of a *koldun* witch-priest offering the safety of his domain to his pagan siblings. When such meetings occur, they are dark wonders to behold, and I have had that privilege in the mountain fastnesses of the East, where the most ancient of the Tzimisce still rule and worship as they have in ages past and invite their Bahari cousins to do likewise. The symbol at the bottom of that page was derived from Ba'hara, the pictogram-language employed by the Great Dark Mother's adherents as an alternative to more easily decoded tongues and which they used to mark places, and sometimes people, of significance to their worship.

That sigil, which I had first seen branded into the gently rounded belly of a matronly Ba'hara priestess as she danced the fires on midsummer's eve, meant *magic*.

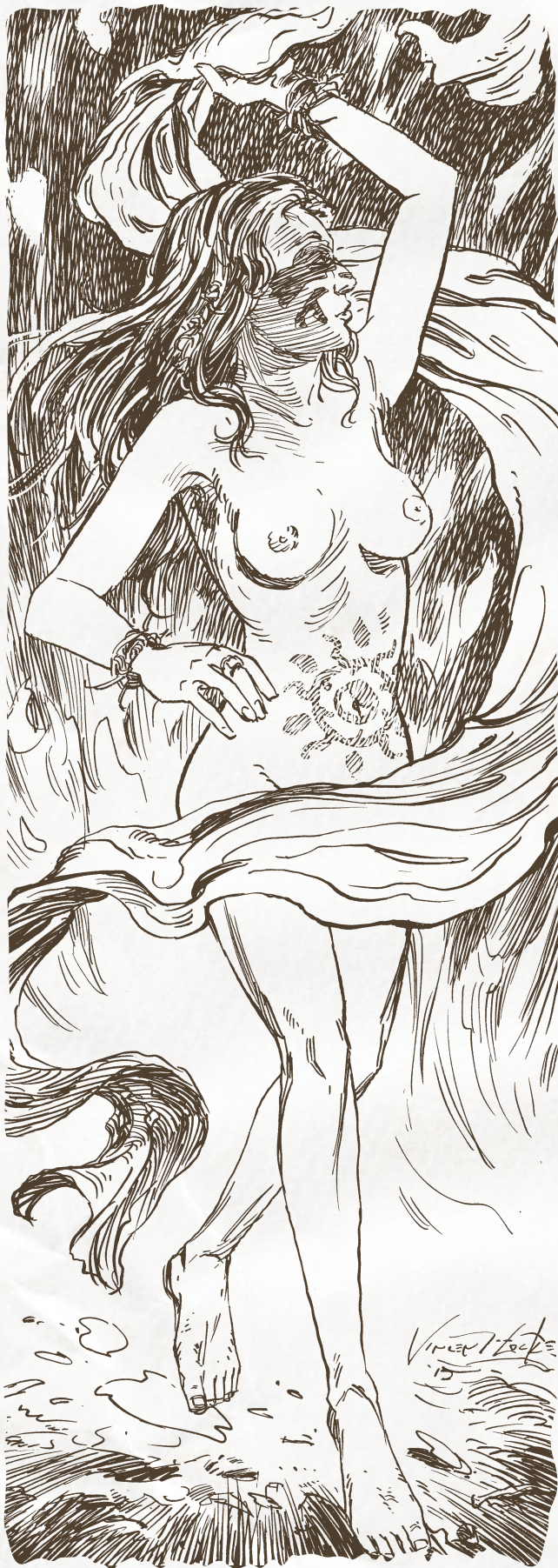
I tasted a mystery. With great care I copied those pages into the notebook that I kept for scribbling purposes then, as subtly as possible, went about checking the rest of the stack of novels for any other inclusions. It had occurred to me that, just possibly, the origin of those pages was Sophia-Amunet herself, but that possibility waned as I worked my way through the stack and found no more pages out of place, no notations in unknown languages, or Ba'hara pictograms scrawled in margins. I resolved to share them with her when next we spoke, but I doubted that she had been aware of their presence — but now that I knew, it kindled a curiosity in me that refused to be quenched.

• • •

The history of the Bahari is a long and woeful one for many reasons, inextricably tied as they are to the murky, complex, acrimonious relationship between the Great Dark Mother and the First Murderer. Among Cainites, many tales are told of the treacherous perfidy of the Queen of the Night, Mother of Demons, who with malice and deceit lured the Dark Father into her garden with soft words and promises of peace and succor, only to fulfill them with curses from her and the servants of the Most High, who she encouraged the Dark Father to defy. Others speak of hundreds, if not thousands, of years of conflict between them, the destruction and blighting of lands, curses hurled, blood shed, hatred mortared into the very walls of Enoch and watering the night-flowering plants of the Great Dark Mother's garden, until both were glutted and weary but not appeased. Some tales — particularly those in high favor among the Tal'Mahe'Ra these nights — speak of peace finally growing between them like some strange, blood-drinking flower, the Queen of the Night sending three of her most precious children to the city of the Dark Father as an offering of blood for blood, and those three became part of the Thirteen of the Third Generation.

In such ways, among others, the Tal'Mahe'Ra seeks to draw together the broods of the First Murderer and the Mother of Demons. Among the Children of the Dark Father, this effort seems to have borne some fruit. Among the Bahari, the Dark Father is known as many things: the inlaying son of their goddess' pitiful and inadequate first husband, the student who despised the lessons of pain she taught to him even as he mastered the seeds of her wisdom, the defiler of her divine flesh, the despoiler of her garden of renewal and repose, and the murderer of her most beloved children, those she bore to her beloved, the Star of Morning. No placation or comfort was possible for the vengeful goddess, for all she most loved was torn from her, leaving behind only the black fruits of her grief





and wrath. I have had the privilege of witnessing some of their rites and, in honesty, I can see how the children of the Dark Father would come to believe them infernal, when their own Clan sires are depicted as little more than ravening, bloodthirsty savages who tore the children of the Queen of the Night and the Lightbearer to shreds at the command of the demoniacal jackal that is the Dark Father. To him and those spawned from him, she offers nothing but the fruits from her garden of suffering, and only to those who refuse the paths he lays out for them and turn instead to hers, seeking out the wisdom that cuts and burns and bleeds, etching it into flesh and soul by the medium of instructive agony.

One wonders if the Bahari have made quite as much peace with the Children of the Dark Father as they choose to believe. One has taken some amusement from watching the theological contortions of the orthodox adherents of the Road of the Dark Father in order to justify treating the First Murderer and the Mother of Demons as two manifestations of the same entity. They try to treat them as abstract forces, two halves of a single cosmic principle of existence transcending the death of the flesh. It is, at some level, an attractive notion. If I knew less of what lived in the darkness beyond their constant push-me-pull-you struggle, I might find some comfort in it. However, as the Dark Mother teaches, wisdom has burnt blacker truths into me, and I cannot take comfort in self-chosen blindness. I doubt that the Bahari have chosen to take that comfort, either; but those who have come to the service of the Tal'Mahe'Ra at least appear to have done so in earnest and for that I cannot fault them.

One such Ba'ham found intellectual sanctuary in the section of the Great Library administered by Loremaster Tayumet. I found myself in her company some weeks after my discovery, sharing the tranquility of my balcony with both her and Sophia-Amunet, who had dragged along with her a cart loaded down with philology texts and vaguely musty scrolls of slightly less forbidden history. The priestess gave her name as Nadezhda, and while she was admirably wary, she accepted my hospitality easily enough when I offered her the traditional, respectful greetings owed to a celebrant of the Great Dark Mother. We spoke of our mutual sojourns in the East. She and her closest companions dwelt for a time in the domain of a Tzimisce ancient who recognized more than a trace of the Dark Mother in her own worship of Mati Syra Zemlya. She nobly refrained from questioning me too closely regarding how my own had come into the service of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Sophia-Amunet managed to not perish of annoyance at the tendency of two elderly vampires to avoid cutting directly to the chase and getting on with matters, though I decided to spare her too much aggravation and brought out the clean copy of the text that I had inscribed on its own scroll some nights prior.

Nadezhda was, to put it mildly, quite vocally shocked, appalled, and more than slightly wroth. The Bahari cherish a prohibition against committing their rituals, rites, and doctrine to the written word, preferring to pass down the wisdom of the Mother through oral tradition and actions that scatter seeds of pain and enlightenment to those that survive them. Her fury slowly died and changed to curiosity when she examined the pages more closely and found she herself could not recognize the language in which it was written, only the pictogram at the end. Like me, she sensed some slumbering power within those words that we lacked the key to unlock, but which felt real and numinous nonetheless. She agreed to search among her people for those who might possess the knowledge of any written archive of Bahari lore and theoretically possess practical knowledge of the languages of northern Arabia and their precursors. We agreed to reconvene at her convenience, as I was not in danger of going anywhere, and because doing so would allow Sophia-Amunet and I to continue our own research in the meantime.

That worthy young woman chose that moment to unload the contents of her cart. The fragments of the so-called "Lilith Cycle" that reside within the *Guarded Rubrics* are outside the sphere of her authority within the library. However, the assorted commentaries on them are available to any serious historical scholar, as are most of the documents related to the Bahari and their travails throughout the centuries. A few of those documents contained reasonably accurate renditions of Bahari sigils, including several I already knew and several I did not. Nadezhda confirmed or corrected the sigils' authenticity as the situation required. For the sake of clarity, and perhaps aiding in our search, she quickly (and with much discomfort and reluctance) sketched out a page of the most common sigils used in Bahari ritual parlance and what they meant. She also suggested that, since we had found the pages hidden in a novel written by a Cainite, we might wish to research the author. After all, the author could have included the page as opposed to a later hand, concealing knowledge that would otherwise be lost. Admittedly, that approach that had not occurred to me; a failure of imagination on my part, I fear. Sophia-Amunet allowed made some sense, given that the book dated from a particularly unsettled period in the history of the Courts of Love. I took the philology texts as penance for my lack of vision and we parted, hopefully to meet again soon.

• • •

I saw the cat for the first time after spending nearly three uninterrupted nights immersed in the history and development of the Semitic language tree and its myriad dialectical variants. Under most circumstances, the opportunity to quietly study a topic unrelated to

someone else's entrails and their ritual uses would have delighted me enormously; as it stood, I found mostly frustration in my efforts. I started to suspect that the author chose the Nabataean script for its value in adding an extra layer of obfuscation, and that I would find no true relationship between the language and the alphabet used to create or recreate it. I tested the weight of the words on my tongue, pronouncing them as I would were they an actual dialect of Arabic, and found them pleasingly free-flowing, almost musical.

It was then that I began seeing the cat. It was subtle, at first—a flutter of motion in the corner of my eye like the flickering movement of a ghost slipping in and out of visibility, but fading completely under intent focus. In fact, I originally thought it was one of Enoch's many residents that had left their mortal coils behind, going about some errand that required their path to briefly intersect my own. I returned to my reading, letting the words fall off my tongue in slightly different ways. After all, Arabic has an *enormous* number of dialects and sub-dialects, some of them wholly extinct in terms of usage, others breathing their last, and still others so different from the parent tongue that they might as well be a separate language entirely.

*Something* brushed against my leg—something soft and sinuous and imbued with warmth that no ghost could ever have—and it required all of my many years of hard-won self-possession to avoid leaping out of my chair and squawking in alarm. The animal twining itself around my ankles rewarded my forbearance with a bone-rattling purr and leapt into my lap, perching there as though it belonged nowhere else and had every right to stake such a claim. This almost unsettled me more than the sudden appearance of a manifestly living creature in the depths of the Underworld. As a general rule, animals do not *like* me and frequently have to be forcefully discouraged from attempting to claw out my eyes, tear out my throat, or otherwise savage any parts of my body unwarily left in striking range. This one, with sleek pelt flawlessly black from the tips of its forward-swiveled ears to the tip of its idly curling tail and eyes the palely-gleaming gold of a high summer moon, appeared to suffer no such hostile inclinations, and even submitted to a light, quick scratch of its ears. Satisfied, it leapt back down and found itself a wide, flat floor cushion that struck its fancy, curled up, and promptly went to sleep.

I found a piece of blank foolscap and wrote what I suspect was a rather rambling and unfocused note, in which I asked if Enoch had any sizable population of living animals, strays or otherwise. I sealed the note and gave it to one of the shakari at the door with instructions to deliver it to Second Assistant Librarian Sophia-Amunet immediately, if not sooner. I felt unsettled in mind and

wearied in body, as though I had just woken from a sleep that left me just short of ravenous. I settled down on the cushion immediately adjacent to the cat and began asking it a number of questions regarding its origins and how it came to be where it was, which I felt were rational and intelligent questions to ask. It responded to by opening one golden eye and rolling over onto its back in a silent demand for a belly rub. I provided it, my fingers sinking into warm fur. A weighty lassitude filled my mind and limbs as I did so, as though my physical strength and mental focus were pouring out of my fingertips. At some point I fell to my side, my body too heavy to hold upright any longer. My last clear recollection was of a warm feline nose bumping against my lips and a rough feline tongue pressing a kiss there before darkness flowed over me and pulled me down into it.

• • •

The Black Citadel does, in fact, have something vaguely resembling an infirmary. I discovered this by virtue of waking in it, shackled to the frame of a bed heavy enough to resist any attempt to move it. I suspect it was actually a carved basalt block from the lack of give. My brain was a lead sculpture inside my skull, and my body pulsed with the sort of thrashing, red-hot hunger that I usually only experienced after vast expenditures of vitae. No windows pierced the walls, and so I had no means of gauging where in the Citadel I might be; I was alone in the room, with no curtain or screen to obstruct my view of the other empty beds or the single portal at the far end, also without door or curtain. A part of me wished to sink back into the comforting, soporific darkness, while a larger, far more vocal part of me shouted for rescue, or at least attention. Fortunately, I was heard—the nurse, for want of a better term, was a ghost, well-starved and utterly lacking in nonsense, who summoned assorted others to my bedside. First, a vessel was provided to sate my savage hunger, then Sophia-Amunet came in the company of Lorekeeper Tayumet and, to my intermingled discomfort and surprise, Izhim ur-Baal.

They all, perforce, waited until I refreshed myself and was pronounced sane enough to be unchained before pouncing on me with questions. Sophia-Amunet stopped just short of physically shaking me, demanding to know when I had succeeded in translating the pages and why I had not summoned her before making use of them and did I know what would happen when I did. My native honesty forced me to admit that I had not translated them that I had simply read them aloud, and something in the reading had affected me with unexpected strength. I also mentioned the cat that made its presence known to me, and asked if Enoch had any resident living animals. I did not recall seeing any, but as the city sometimes contains more living chatterlings

than Cainites, I thought it not impossible. Lorekeeper Tayumet gently drew her away then, after receiving my leave to enter my quarters and examine the pages. Their exit left me quite alone with Izhim ur-Baal, known more commonly as Izhim abd'Azrael, shakar First Seraph of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, sorcerer, warrior, adviser to the Del'Roh, a true Methuselah of the Children of Haqim, and my personal patron and keeper.

He seated himself next to my bedside and regarded me with the steady, even consideration of a shark pondering where best to bite, eyes obsidian chips in his sculpted onyx face. When he finally spoke, he informed me that, had he not bound my tongue to speak only truth with his own hands, he would think me the baldest of liars, for no one would believe even the *idea* of finding a lost fragment of Bahari scripture bound into the pages of a trashy medieval romance novel. (I translate loosely: we were speaking the Tyrian dialect of my youth.) I pointed out, carefully, that I had not considered the possibility of Bahari scripture until recently, given their general disdain for both settled doctrine and written evidence of their beliefs, and that the mismatch of language and script intrigued me, as well as the pictogram. I suspected the possibility of learned commentary, not a religious devotional, which would have had a certain deleterious effect on my person. The Seraph pointed out, sharply, that I *had* been affected deleteriously, laying fully torpid for three days and nights, which came as a singularly unpleasant surprise as well as fresh intelligence. He had sensed the wards around my quarters registering an intrusion, and my guards found me lying insensible on the balcony, but had found no signs of violence or any trace of another in my quarters, unliving or otherwise.

Then he demanded to know about the cat, because he thought he saw one, as well.

• • •

I was subsequently granted a certain degree of limited access to documents and materials in what Sophia-Amunet cheekily referred to as the Restricted Section of Hogwarts Library, specifically those aspects of the *Guarded Rubrics* that dealt with the Great Dark Mother and the lore surrounding her. (I suspect that I now owe Izhim ur-Baal my first-born child.) This proved to be a great benefice, for it allowed us to call on Lorekeeper Tayumet and her vast knowledge of the archive's contents, forbidden and otherwise. It also granted us a research space in the library, one of the side rooms equipped with warded locks, cold-burning lamps, and even a small chaise for Sophia-Amunet to rest on—she occasionally needed to sleep, after all.

It did seem, as Izhim ur-Baal indicated, that we had found a lost fragment of Bahari scripture—scripture, in

this case, being fundamentally indistinguishable from a documentary form of magic; a written spell, in essence. The library contained one other such example, far older than my own and contained within a special preservative apparatus of warded wood and glass that kept it from harm at unwary hands. Like my own, it was written in the Nabataean script but on a ragged sheet of papyrus, slowly falling apart under the weight of its own centuries. These fragments did not contain the same spell, though certain phrases recurred in each, almost like repeating couplets in a poem. I carefully did not speak either aloud, having learned my lesson the first time when it came to giving voice to incantations of unknown provenance.

In comfortable retrospect, an invocation that could only be triggered by speaking it aloud made a considerable quantity of sense. The Bahari focus on oral history, song, and poetry, and performed dramas as part of the traditional practice of their rites. All indicated a propensity for using the voice as a vehicle for power; *many* forms of blood sorcery do so, such as my own, though it also makes use of the simple power of the *written* word as a binding agent. (Witness Izhim ur-Baal, his skin etched with the scripts of his magic; witness the bindings he burned into my own flesh, more visible for my lack of dark Assamite skin.) Our contemplation of this led to a second realization: the Nabataean script had been chosen for its *phonographic* values in relation to the language it represented. The script taught the reader how to speak the words, if not what the words themselves *meant* — the speaker did not have to know the meaning in order to successfully invoke their power. Sophia-Amunet and I posited that the original language was depicted through a written syllabary that lacked the linguistic sophistication necessary to produce all the required sounds, or possessed easily mistakable phonemes when spoken aloud from a written source, and so its speakers sought out a more precise method of representing their tongue.

Of course, what it meant was what we actually wanted to know.

• • •

One does not make oneself persistently obnoxious to the likes of Izhim ur-Baal without possessing a few fairly notable personality flaws: a complete lack of concern for one's own continued existence, for example, or possibly a reckless disregard for property, personal or public. I did not think I possessed these flaws when I submitted our initial report on our comparison of the two fragments. Included in our conclusions was a request for access to secured thaumaturgic laboratory space in which to perform the invocations under more controlled circumstances. We also requested the assistance of another sorcerer for purposes of observation. In the

meantime, we continued searching the library for more fragments, a time-consuming process in itself.

After nearly a month, my request was denied.

I confess that I was not at my most diplomatic when I went to Izhim ur-Baal's chambers and more or less demanded entrance and an audience with him immediately, if not sooner. The puzzle of the fragments *gnawed* at me. I woke with the memory of a cat's tongue on my lips. I saw the spark of golden eyes in the shadows everywhere I went, the sinuous twining of fur and warmth around my ankles jarred me more than once from my concentration. Somewhere along the way, it became more than a diverting intellectual exercise in recovering lost history, to the point of genuine obsession. In my most rational moments, I could admit it had become an obsession when I first spoke the invocation, but my rationality was not always the whip driving me.

I believe that the First Seraph may have realized that and taken it into account when he finally summoned me into his presence and made a few excruciatingly unpleasant adjustments to the bindings he had laid on me, using heated copper wire and blessed oil. It had the salutary effect of clearing my mind once both the agony and the subsequent dissociation into higher consciousness subsided. He still sat astride my hips, pinning them to the floor in much the same way that my wrists were pinned (though with fewer obsidian-bladed knives), thumb talons still sunk into the ajna plexus in the center of my forehead, the rest of his fingers curled close enough to my eyes to blind me in a single swipe if necessary. His eyes were fixed on mine, and I could feel his presence moving through my thoughts like a cold breeze caressing black sand. It took all my strength not to struggle against the intrusion as he touched my memories, contemplated, considered. Eventually, he withdrew, ordered me to rest, and departed, returning some hours later with the permission of the Del'Roh to conduct further experiments with the fragments. He would personally oversee them as the observing sorcerer.

• • •

We acquired a laboratory located outside the Black Citadel itself. The building, located in a quarter of the city once devoted wholly to scholarly pursuits, still held the echo of ancient magics in its walls, defensive and otherwise, in addition to the newer ward structures built since its recovery. I was permitted to prepare the space according to my own specifications and satisfaction, scouring walls, floor, and ritual implements with blooded salt and water taken from the Sea of Shadows. I wrote an extra layer of wards using the mingled blood of those who would attend with the intent of participation. In this case,

I would do the actual speaking of the words, but three others would attend to detect and control any results: Izhim ur-Baal, Loremaster Tayumet, and Nadezhda. Others, who had been perforce apprised of our plans, were invited to attend as observers. Several Loremasters possessed an academic interest in the ritual, and while Sophia-Amunet was too young to be directly involved, she was inextricably tied to the situation and deserved to see its resolution. These worthies were seated in a gallery ringing the laboratory itself, which in many ways resembled nothing so much as an operating theatre in a teaching hospital, its ceiling open to the Underworld's sky. I wondered, more than once, what sort of displays the ancients had conducted in such places, when the Dark Father ruled the city.

We gathered on a night that the ghost-memory of a full moon rode the sky above Enoch. Its ghostlight fell through the compluvium in the laboratory's roof, glinting on the fresh-drawn lines of ground salt and bone ash and washing any remaining trace of red from the lines of dried blood. The original documents were safe in the Black Citadel's library. I had taken the precaution of memorizing them both. Nevertheless, I took my place in the center of the circle with some degree of trepidation. I had precisely no idea if reciting the invocation would work again and, if it did, what effect it would have on me, attempting it twice. I had also not voiced any objection prior to this. It seemed impossible to do so, given what I had already done and it was entirely too late to back away from it now.

Izhim ur-Baal, Loremaster Tayumet, and Nadezhda took their places in the circle and performed the rite of closure, sealing us within a barrier of linked and overlapping wards—a ritually consecrated liminal space *within* a place that was already liminal by its very nature, the ghostlands between true life and true death. I truly felt that degree of separation for the first time, standing in that circle, etching itself into my awareness with each level of ward binding, resounding in my blood. Even as they closed I felt... *open*, as though I, in my person, were a door standing slightly ajar; a breath of cold wind and a ray of pale light passing through me. I began speaking almost without conscious volition, syllables rolling off my tongue with an ease my first effort had lacked, and suddenly I knew that this was not merely an incantation, but a song: A cradle song, sweet and primal as a mother's voice in the dark, and I sang it again, the words searing my tongue and boiling my blood even as Izhim ur-Baal's binding will upon me burnt my flesh and spirit. The cat simply manifested itself at the end of my third repetition, curling sinuously around my ankles where nothing but air stood before, with fur black as moonless midnight and eyes golden sun-sparks in its face. I sensed a vast but oddly not terrible amusement as it paced the confines of the circle, arching itself against

Nadezhda's legs and remaining to sit at her feet, idly bathing its tail with a smoke-white tongue.

I began the second invocation with song. Though I had never spoken it before that moment, I knew the cadence the way I knew the syllables of my own True Name, knew the rhythm and how it would sound when, if, I set it to music. The pain that speared through me, which had subsided between invocations, rose again, breathtaking and delicious. At the end of the third repetition, talons dug into my shoulder from behind and broad, soft wings fanned the air before their owner launched itself away. An owl with plumage all the shades of the moon's face in full eclipse, crimson and orange and black with faint silver tracery catching the ghostlight, flew a full turn around the circle before lighting on Lorekeeper Tayumet's shoulder, to her visible consternation. Its eyes were also golden, gleaming brightly in the dished feathers of its face, just above a flesh-tearing beak.

I felt a third invocation welling up inside me, words I had never read, and it burst forth from my lips before I could even think of stopping it, the knowledge of them pouring through me like a burning cold sea rising. Through the sound of it ringing in my skull, moving my tongue absent any will of my own, I heard the startled exclamations of two of my colleagues and the silence of the third, felt his eyes on me with nearly predatory intent. The third invocation tortured my raw throat and tongue with its sibilants and filled my mouth with the taste of my own blood, caustic and poisonous. I felt something far colder and even more sinuous than the cat coiled about me. A serpent as thick as my forearm unwound itself and slid the length of my body from I know not where, its scales the sleek, wet sheen of moonlight on water, with slit-pupiled eyes of amber. It also traversed the circle, nearly long enough to touch the tip of its own tail as it came back to the beginning. Izhim ur-Baal knelt to receive it, murmuring something in a voice too low to catch the words. It settled about his shoulders in heavy silver coils, blood-red tongue tasting the air.

I stood, swaying on my feet, and I knew that I was not yet done. Something else was coming, following the path forged by cat, by owl, by serpent, and some part of me knew to gaze upon that thing could easily be my end. I could not refuse to look. Now that I had begun, I could not choose, not to be the vessel for this thing, whatever it was, or would be; I could only serve it. A hopeless pain more exquisite than any I had known knifed through me, split open my mind and soul and pulled me higher than I had ever been before, into a vast, star-splashed darkness. I stood on the edge of dark water, tide washing rhythmically about my ankles, a bloody crescent moon riding impossibly huge just above the far horizon.

*You have spoken my words and summoned my servants to you, that moon said to me in a voice that was not a voice. I fell to my feet, bowing my face to the wet sand, humble in the presence of a being who could unmake all that I was with less than a thought.*

It did not need me to speak to know my affirmation and it continued, every word strumming the fibers of my being with fingers of velvety anguish. *You come to me of your own will.*

Vines twined around my arms and throat, black as char and studded with thorns the length of a large man's finger, digging into my back like a lover's talons in the throes of passion, jerking me upright on my knees, twisting into my hair, and forcing my face up toward the sky. The sea receded and I closed my eyes, already burning in their sockets, as unshod feet stepped upon the sand before me and a soft hand, sweet with strange perfumes, caressed my cheek like a brand of holy fire. *So afraid, in such pain. If coming before me is such a trial, child, why do you undertake it?*

The thorn-bearing vines curled tighter, drawing blood, and I felt the tongue that lapped it up as a brand that seared to the bone. The *presence* before me went suddenly and utterly still, like the wind gathering itself before the howling blast of a hurricane. I braced myself for it, knowing I could no more stand against it than I could against the sunrise.

*My children.* Softly, so softly, like the dawn breeze over the desert. *Your hands are wet with the blood of those who would enslave themselves to my children, twist them as they themselves have twisted.*

I nodded, unable to speak, the thorns digging deep into my throat.

Lips brushed my ear and I felt their smile, sweet and cruel. *My blessings upon you, little hunter, for you have chosen a path of grief.* And it burned through me then, sending me thrashing against the vines and thorns holding me, longing for the voice to scream. *Give them the gift of your mercy — wisdom is wasted on fools.*

The *presence* withdrew then, and I came back to myself so suddenly I would have fallen had I not already been on my knees. I forced my eyes, gummed shut with my own blood, to open, and found my colleagues frozen where they stood. Nadezdha's face was a mask of joyous, bloody tears, exultant, exalted. Lorekeeper Tayumet looked as though she desperately wished she could abandon the dignity of her office and rejoice likewise, her expression rapturous. Izhim ur-Baal's eyes held my own, expressionless chips of

obsidian, his carved onyx lips curved back in the slightest of smiles. I managed enough focus of mind to croak at them to unbind the circle and pitched forward, the salt-marked floor rushing up to meet my face.

My memories beyond that moment are fragments at best, slivers of imagery and flickers of sense-memory. I sensed the dissolution of the circle, felt strong arms gather me up, and heard for the first time the babble of voices from the observers, whose existence I had entirely forgotten. I remember a ceiling not my own and a bed that was little more than a slab of basalt incised over its mirror-polished surface with symbols I half-knew and half-did-not. My arms and back and throat ached and throbbed, worse than the kiss of holy word and demon fire put together, and the pain dragged me down more than once into blood-tinged darkness. I remember the taste of another's blood in my mouth, burning rich, old and strong, as Izhim ur-Baal fed me from his own veins while I healed, his hands on me, exploring.

When I finally woke, I was weak and hungry but in my own quarters, wrapped in my own blankets, and saw for the first time what the blessing I had received had done to me. Waxing and waning crescents still marked my palms, encircled now in a spiky braid — woven vines it seemed — and below that, running the length of my arm from wrist to elbow, the Bahari symbols of serpent and owl and cat. Wings spread across my shoulders and the twisting serpentine body of the dragon crawled the length of my spine. Looking upon them, one mostly sees the fine black lines of upraised scars; looking more closely, one can see those lines are script, impossibly tiny characters etched as though with the tip of a needle. More than once, Izhim ur-Baal has run his fingers over them and smiled a smile that reaches the midnight well of his eyes. I am not entirely comforted by that.

The contemplation has likewise granted me a gift of insight, and I have taken it upon myself to codify that insight, that others may make use of it as well. I append my initial efforts to this report, and hope that it finds satisfaction in your eyes.

By my own hand,

Sahar-Hanibaal,

Childe of Tanitbaal-Sahar

Childe of Tanit

Childe of Moloch

Dominion of the Order of Moloch

# Thaumaturgy Path: The Blessings of the Great Dark Mother

A thaumaturgic path of relatively recent development, the Blessings of the Great Dark Mother draws directly upon the nature of her spirit-beast servants – Cat, Owl, Serpent, and Dragon among them – to assist the *ashipu* in their struggles against the infernal. Despite the sobriquet “Mother of Demons,” Lilith’s children are almost never either denizens of Hell or cast-off remnants of the Outer Dark, but the offspring of her many unions with strange and wonderful beings. Partaking of Lilith’s essence and that of her mates, these unions produce entities that are unique admixtures of spiritual and physical, whose mutability of substance renders them vulnerable to abuse by the ignorant and the unscrupulous. The techniques used by the sorcerers of the First Tribe to subtly alter the true Names of the Children of the Outer Dark, the ritually enforced expectations of mortal demonologists, and the potent true magic of the Awakened can all force the Lilin into demoniacal form. The arts of this path can liberate them from this bondage and distort, disrupt, and defile the unholy pacts and bonds between an infernalist and their genuinely diabolical masters and minions.

## • Cradlesong

The *ashipu* utters an incantation that reveals to her the nature of any pacts, bonds, or spiritual ties to other beings within audible range of her voice. These bonds appear differently to each *ashipu* who employs the cradlesong, depending strongly on her preferred sensory stimulus. Some see the bonds as threads of light wrapped around others, pulsing with colors that define their nature; others hear them as a rich and complex song whose internal melodies, harmonies, tempo, and beat contain the information they require. Most properly *sung*, the incantation can also be simply spoken, whistled using the appropriate notes, or played wordlessly on a musical instrument as a tone poem; electronic amplification can and does increase its effective range.

**System:** The *ashipu* sings her cradlesong, spends one blood point, and rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty equal to the highest current Willpower rating of the individuals in the group, or the current Willpower rating of the individual if attempting to affect a singular target). If successful, the song causes any and all infernal pacts, spiritual pacts, and voluntary or involuntary bonds of any kind (including the blood bond) to become “visible” in some way to the caster.

## •• Kessep

The firstborn son of Lilith and Lucifer was named “Silver” for the light of the Moon, a hue reflected in the bright silver scales of the serpent that serves the Great Dark Mother. The serpent sometimes functions as one of her many forms, symbolic of purity and purification. The *ashipu* who calls upon the argent serpent sings, speaks, or plays an invocation that allows her to select one infernal or spiritual bond and purify the owner of it – severing the ties of bound spirits or demons. This invocation cannot sever the blood bond (no matter how involuntarily it might have been entered into), nor can it undo an infernal pact.

**System:** The *ashipu* invokes the gift of the argent serpent, spending one blood point and rolling Manipulation + Occult, with a difficulty equal to the target’s current Willpower. If successful, the invocation causes a single selected bond between the target and an enthralled spirit or bound demon to be broken. This, of course, frees the previously bound spirit or demon to flee, take vengeance, or visit whatever consequences of bondage they prefer upon their former owner.

## ••• Sotheq

The second-born son of Lilith and Lucifer was named “Silence,” for the peace and stillness of D’hainu, the Great Dark Mother’s garden of renewal, and is also an attribute of the watchful, night-hunting owl that both serves and embodies her. The *ashipu* who calls upon the owl with wings of twilight sings, speaks, or plays an invocation that allows her to silence *all* of the infernal or spiritual ties of her target, pacts and bonds alike.

**System:** The *ashipu* invokes the gift of the twilight owl, spending one blood point and rolling Manipulation + Occult, with a difficulty equal to the target’s current Willpower. If successful, the invocation causes a psychic or spiritual silence to fall across all bonds and pacts in which the target is involved – he can no longer issue commands to his bound spirits or servitor demons, nor can he receive communication or commands from any spirit or demon that holds him in thrall. Exceptional success (four successes or more) extends this effect to the Cainite at the other end of any blood bond in which the target is engaged.

## •••• Allah

The youngest daughter of Lilith and Lucifer was named “Night,” for the realm that would have been hers had she lived to maturity. Such darkness is also an attribute of the soft-pawed, sharp-clawed cat that warded the borders of D’hainu and protected those who dwelt within the Garden

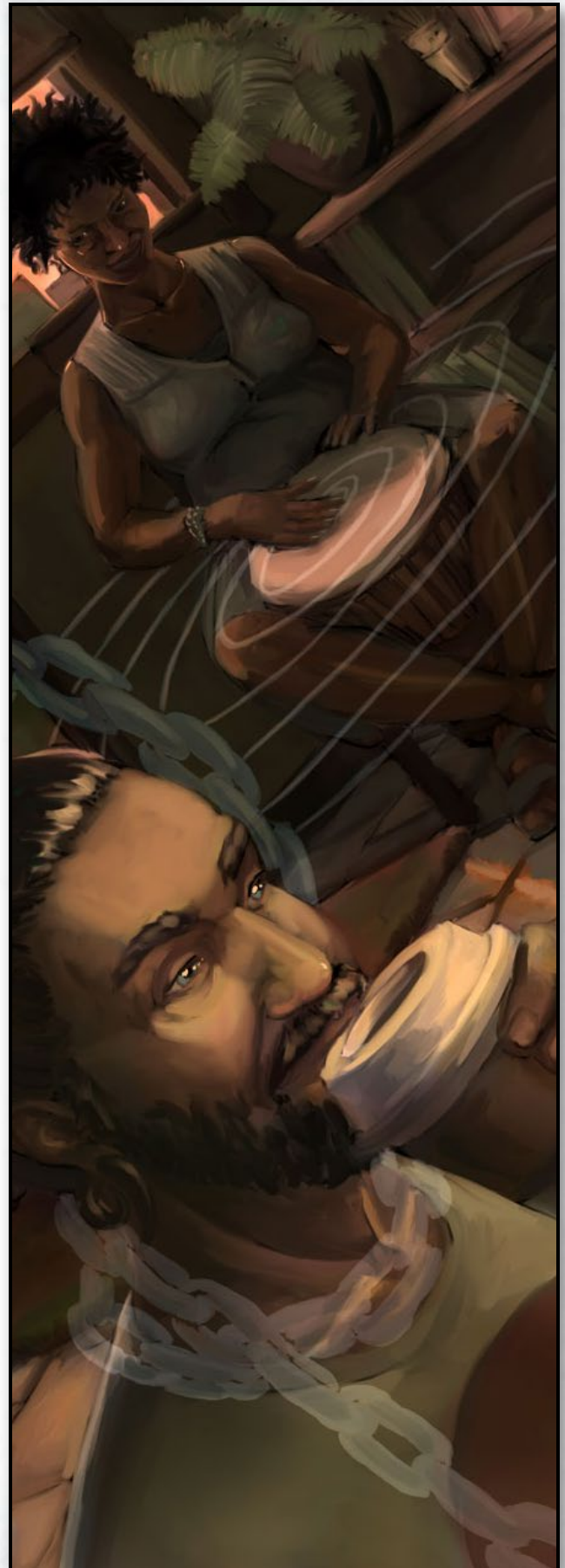
of Renewal. The *ashipu* who calls upon the cat with the pelt of shadow sings, speaks, or plays an invocation that allows her to directly assault *all* of the lesser infernal or spiritual ties of their target, parting the bonds as with a swipe of deadly claws and disarming the target of their spiritual weapons.

**System:** The *ashipu* invokes the gift of the night-shadow cat, spending one blood point and rolling Manipulation + Occult, with a difficulty equal to the target's current Willpower, for *each* spirit or demon that the target holds enthralled as a servitor. Success frees the bound spirit or demon to do as it wills. Failure not only fails to free the spirit or demon, but also allows those entities to know precisely *who* attempted to sever those ties.

### •••• Memo

The firstborn and eldest child of Lilith and Lucifer was their daughter, named "Water" after her mother's fond memory of both the crystal streams of lost Eden and the vast oceanic depths in which she took shelter after her expulsion. In the oceans, she bore the first of her many broods and emerged from her exile more powerful than before. Mighty and deep are the powers of that great primordial realm, and mighty was the form that the Great Dark Mother took there. She lent the secrets and gifts of that form to her first child and eldest daughter, the dragon whose wings blotted out and the moon and the sun and the stars, and whose scales shone with all the hues of the sea, greatest of all the purifiers. The *ashipu* who calls upon the dragon who weeps tears of salt sings, speaks, or plays an invocation that allows her to directly attack the principal infernal or spiritual pact of her target.

**System:** The *ashipu* invokes the gift of the great serpent of the ocean, spending one blood point and rolling Perception + Occult, with a difficulty equal to the current Willpower of the target. By so doing, she gains the knowledge of what impelled the target to enter into a bargain in which his soul would be forfeit. Each success rolled yields more detailed knowledge of her target, the nature and strengths of the pact, and any infernal investments or gifts that the target possesses. Spectacular success yields the True Name of the target's demonic patron and the opportunity to directly engage it in a contested Manipulation + Occult (difficulty equal to its *permanent* Willpower) roll. Success on the part of the *ashipu* severs the bond between the infernalist and their patron; success on the part of the patron allows the bond to remain intact. Failure of any roll in this sequence allows the infernality's patron to perceive the *ashipu* and derive substantial information about her through the contact.





"Shooting guns is hard," I said. I put my sniper rifle down and sat down on the sandbags, waiting for some response from Hastur.

"You need to learn," he said. He wore sunglasses even though it was evening. "There are many kinds of weapons in the Black Hand's arsenal."

"I know that," I shot back, just like I used to say to Ophelia. "Why is so much of my training all of you telling me things I already know?"

"We're not 'all of you,' insolent whelp," Hastur spat. "All of us. You are one of us. There are many ways to protect. You can obey, but sometimes we need a hand that can squeeze a trigger, Blake. At least try."

"Not right now," the voice behind us said. I turned and looked though I knew who it was. Anahita entered the room, dressed as if for a business meeting in a dark suit and trousers. "You'll resume your training later. Blake, I need you to run interference on something happening down by South Street, if you will."

"Of course, Anahita," I replied, picking up my gun.

"She'll never learn if you keep pulling her away," Hastur called as we walked off of the roof, into the stairwell.

"I'm not as bad as Hastur says," I protested, my boots clomping on the steps as I descended the stairs.

"That's good, because he says you're terrible." Anahita sighed as she followed me down, walking down the middle of the steps as if she was making an entrance. "You're going with Fergus and Dian."

"Fergus?" I asked. He was a mage I had worked with one time before. "Dian is running the head, isn't she?"

"Well, you aren't, obviously," Anahita said. She flashed a smile at me, which was meant to drive home the point, not soften it. "Listen to Dian and come back straight away."

"Yes, Anahita," I said.

"As a matter of fact, give me your rifle. I'll put it away for you while you go meet up with them." She held her hand out towards me and I unslung the gun from my shoulder, handing it over. "When you're done, let Dian debrief you and then go along your merry way." She walked past me on the steps, not bothering to look at me as she descended. "I will hear about how it goes, so do your best, Blake."

"I will," I said. I opened the staircase door and walked to the meeting area, seeing Dian and Fergus already waiting. Fergus waved.

"Glad to see you again, Blake," he said, tightening his belt. "You ready to be our minion?"

"I think Kindred outranks Wise One on this mission," I said, taking the tools Dian handed me.

"Don't be so sure, Blake," Dian scoffed as she zipped up her jacket. "Let's get out of here. I want this done well before dawn."

We left the building and took the route mapped out for us, sticking to shadows and neutral or favorable streets. As we drew closer we split up, scouting the area ahead. I knew who we were headed towards well before we could see them.

A shipping container landed on the dock with a soft thud of metal against concrete. A small crowd gathered around the door, the floodlights of the docks and the other humans doing nothing to deter them from their desires. I could feel their hunger as they looked at the doors to the container, waiting for them to be opened so the crowd could sample the wares inside.

Fergus did something. I didn't understand what he did beyond knowing it worked. He signaled for us to proceed. Trusting in whatever magic he had performed, I slunk forward, slipping from shadow to shadow and watching from within the darkness. I could feel their hunger more acutely, and what set it off. Fear wafted from the shipping container like a scent off a summer flower, the garnish to many a Kindred's appetite. Someone reached forward and grabbed a hold of the lock on the container and turned it, the high pierced shriek of metal against metal grating against my ears. The doors were only opened slightly, less than four feet wide, and the Camarilla Kindred all filed in.

"Now," I heard Dian say from somewhere. I stepped out of the shadows and darted forward past Fergus, with Dian a few steps ahead. Dian leapt into the guard knee-first, knocking him to the ground with a sick crack of his skull. I stood by the door while I waited for Dian to get back, the older vampire slipping in first, drawing her weapons.

No talking. Just shooting. The other Kindred who are here to buy react in different ways. Some press themselves against the shipping container. Some hide behind others, using them as shields. Some attack us. All are shot. Bullet after bullet explodes out of our guns, slowing them down. It gives us time to approach and finish them off properly. There are only six of them, so we take them out quickly.

The humans have cowered in the back of the shipping container this entire time. I don't blame them. I made

sure the undead are now actually dead as Dian spoke to the humans, quietly. I watched the door, making sure no one comes in and no one did. I looked back over my shoulder and saw the children among them start to stand up. They looked toward their parents as Dian ushered them to come forward. Dian said something to the remaining humans, nodding and answering one of their questions.

Fergus returned with a van. We loaded the children in and Dian continued to speak to them in her quiet, assuring voice. I sat on the floor among them. They smelled dirty, as if they had been travelling a long time and needed so many things.

"Where are we taking them?" I asked Dian.

"To a new home," she said with a smile. She reached over and tousled the hair of one of the children. The child smiled and blushed shyly.

"What about their parents?" I asked. Fergus turned on the radio.

"We can't use the parents," Dian replied. "They're old and can't be trained. But the young ones? They have a lot of potential."

"As what, food?" I asked. Dian just laughed at me.

"What a waste," Dian said, leaning back against the wall of the van. "No. If they were left with their parents, they would be deported or forced to work a menial job, the pathetic life of a kine. Instead, we can take them under our wing and train them up. Teach them. And make them happy." She said something to one of the children. He smiled in response to whatever she said. I leaned back against the wheel well and watched her speak with all of them.

We unloaded the children once we were parked. Some of them clung to each other nervously; siblings or relatives surrounded by us, the strangers. "Don't worry," I said to a small, brown-eyed girl who stared at me. "Safe. You're safe here. Better." She smiled slightly, the fear in her big brown eyes melting away.

"Well, it's always good to have more potential help." Pim stepped forward and looked over the children. "Some of these look very strong. We'll feed you and clean you up and get you in fresh things. And then you will learn to work, will you not?" Pim smiled at the crowd of children before he spoke again, beckoning for them to follow him. They all did. I watched as they all left, the little girl looking back at me. She looked like she wanted to know if it was all right. I nodded.

I turned and headed back to the small cell I was allowed. I used it to sleep and change, when such times came. I pulled my black T-shirt off and threw it on the bed, pulling on my black button-up and buttoning it in the mirror.

A knock came at my cell door. I cross the small room and opened the door, surprised to see Anahita there.

"Good job, young Blake," she said. "Very pleased with how you handled yourself. No one got a scratch on them. At least none of us."

I nodded and finished buttoning up my shirt. "We got what we wanted."

"And what was that?" She sat on the edge of my bed, looking up at me. It was strange to have Anahita sitting below me, looking up.

"We wanted to stop the Camarilla from destroying those people," I said. "We are saving them."

"You believe that?" she asked.

"I do," I said. Maybe I should have said it more quickly. "In the last days, they will be saved," I added.

"All of us will," she said, rising from the bed. She started for the door, walking past me as she did. "I am glad you will be saved as well, Blake. It is what you want, correct?"

"I hope I am found worthy." I said. "It would be a shame to have been chosen but fall short." Anahita nodded and opened the door, slipping out of my room and into the hallway.

*It was better those children come to us, I told myself as I left the room and headed out of our sanctuary into the cold, black night. They did come to us... I saw them. I had heard what happened to some children taken in by the Black Hand, this group which was said to benefit both kine and Kindred alike. Some of it was good. Most of it was not. But the stories were inconsistent. One thing which was said over and over again: good servants are hard to come by. Sometimes it's easier to raise one than to find one. What is better, to die on the streets or to live forever, suspended between life and death, serving those true entities which came so far before us, who will one day look down upon us and judge who had been righteous and who had been wrong?*

For a few blocks, I envied those children. They would be taught the way they should go from the start. Life would be easier for them, the chosen.



# Chapter Three: The Dark Below

*“Why me?”*

*“That is a very Earthling question to ask, Mr. Pilgrim. Why you? Why us for that matter? Why anything? Because this moment simply is. Have you ever seen bugs trapped in amber?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“Well, here we are, Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no why.”*

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Legends of the Tal’Mahe’Ra are abstruse in the extreme. Even among the members of the True Black Hand, only a limited number can define the Sect’s arcane goals. This perhaps sets the Hand apart from the Camarilla, Sabbat, and Anarchs in that the aims of those three Sects appear largely transparent.

Researching ancient lore discovered in buried cities, murdering enemies of the Hand in their havens, and delivering puzzling riddles to dark figures in shadowed rooms are merely the first steps toward excavating the depths of the Tal’Mahe’Ra agenda. It’s no secret the Hand recruits those vampires seeking forbidden answers to illicit questions, headhunting only the Kindred with a taste for the mysterious and the obscure. Only when such a vampire has shown years of trust and loyalty to the Tal’Mahe’Ra’s enigmatic edicts does he begin to pry apart the membranous layers of subterfuge coating the Hand’s true goals.

A dominion summons a kamut to walk the border of the underworld city of Enoch, viewing the sinister tableau of tormented souls stretching across an infinite expanse of nothing. They are to walk until they can recognize pinpricks of light piercing the endless dark. They are to report to the dominion the exact formations these lights

make, no matter the mental pains the vampire suffers during the observation.

A qadi orders shakari to travel to Chicago, providing a portfolio containing information on a Kindred named Tamoszius. The shakari suspect the portfolio to detail an assassination order, but this vampire is already torpid. The order is to eliminate all vampires who may remember Tamoszius. Once done, the torpid body is to be brought to Enoch for interrogation. The shakari are to ask no further questions.

A rawi encourages agents to trace the whereabouts of a Tzimisce known as Torrance. They are to take no further action beyond stalking the Fiend for a month and recording his every move. The rawi cites an infection in the vampire, but explains that more will become clear through studying this monster.

Pilgrims into the heart of the Labyrinth are ravaged in number. Two members survive, dashing through Enoch to escape something they claim is pursuing them. They encounter a new recruit before they can communicate with anyone else, babbling about the Aralu, the throne, and the missing Antediluvian. They both crumble to naught but oily ash in seconds.

One of the seraphim affords an experienced kamut the great honor of drinking alongside her in the presence of an artifact she calls the *Anann Tablet*. During the celebration of historic victories and lament of past failures, she offers a weapon to be used against the Hand's enemies. The weapon is dangerous to both body and soul, but she assures it will be devastating. The vitae tastes more potent than any the kamut has drunk before. The seraph's broad smile is more alluring than ever.

Excavations into darkness are not ordered lightly, nor are they undertaken without due reverence for the hunt's cause. The Tal'Mahe'Ra seeks to understand such esoterica as the entities known as Asakku, the powers of debased sorcery such as infernalism, and the hidden levels of their own city. The nucleus of the Sect may not reveal every secret to those tasked with the pursuit of such clandestine aims, but they will reveal some. Little by little, the Tal'Mahe'Ra feeds its membership enough to keep the appetite in place while sating the need for answers where they may be given.

Those who follow the trail their Sect leaves may come away from their destination feeling a combination of enlightenment and terror. The Tal'Mahe'Ra hope for that mixture; the Wazir demand a healthy dose of fear of empyrean wrath and respect for one's betters. Awe is the first step on the path to absolute fealty; the Antediluvians require nothing less. Knowledge of the Antediluvians, their history, and beliefs is the primary layer of the Sect's skin.

Deeper within is the revulsion and hatred a member of the Hand must feel for those who would rebuke the ordered might of the Clan founders. Only when a shakar has encountered, studied, and destroyed one of the grotesque Asakku or vile infernalists can he delve another layer deeper. The shakar is now submerged in the Hand's structure. He can see both gods and devils around him.

Vampires within the True Black Hand are forced to witness and understand the grace of humanity. Few such Cainites cling to human morality after witnessing the horrors on show in both the Underworld and the world of the living, and this lesson allows further penetration into the Hand's intent. Humanity, however, is the beacon that calls Hand members back home. Whether viewing humanity through the crimson smokescreen of hunger or examining their souls in the wretched gloom of the Underworld, acknowledging the importance of humanity puts these Kindred in the direction of meeting their makers.

Such is the final hesitant footstep in understanding the Tal'Mahe'Ra; its enemies, its allies, its motives, and its existence are nothing when the truth of Enoch and the Aralu are at hand. If an agent ever truly seeks to know

why they were selected for membership in the Hand, they must be willing and able to traverse the turbulent pandemonium of the Labyrinth and the jet-black shadows of Enoch, presenting themselves at the tombs of the Aralu.

Some who make this pilgrimage claim to hear the voices of those within. Others say they hear nothing. More than one has felt compelled to open the tombs, but found the task impossible. The journey alone is one that rewards the participants with revelations of their role within the Tal'Mahe'Ra and tidings of the Sect's ultimate destination.

## **Infernalism: The Long Crusade**

Infernalism is one of the first and oldest crimes practiced by the descendants of Caine, a mournful fact not at all lost upon the Kindred of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. It is no surprise that the battle against the infernal and its servants among the Children of Caine is one of the oldest and bitterest conflicts in which the Tal'Mahe'Ra is engaged. Infernalism flies in the face of the Sect's goals of protecting the Children of Seth from the worst excesses of their own kind and protecting their own kind from the depths of depravity to which the truly perverse can sink. The passage of millennia has changed the shape of the battlefield and many of the tactics used, and brought alliances previously considered impossible to the point of madness, but distressingly, the long and costly struggle remains unaltered.

### **A Brief History of Damnation**

*Thus it is written, upon the stones of the Earth and the stars in the firmament, thus it is written and thus I have seen:*

*In the beginning of things, all was dark. That darkness was alive and breathing and writhing, heavy with child and feeling within itself already the pangs of a coming, bloody birth. This I saw, as though watching from an impossibly vast distance: the great living darkness twisting as a woman upon the bed of her travail, its surface rippling as water into which a stone has fallen, as flesh into which a blow has been struck. The stones fell, the blows fell, and the ripples grew, fiercer and higher, until with a shriek that rent both the heavens and my senses, the darkness broke open, burst forth in a torrent that poured down, down, down to soak deep into the roots of all things...*

*From the Analects of Zillah*

There were no infernalists in the First City. This is a matter of iron-bound faith for the Kindred of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and the teachings of the ruwat, derived from the histories

recorded in the *Guarded Rubrics*, leaves this matter not subject to interpretation or argument as so many others are. In Enoch, Caine the Lawgiver ruled with a just but firm hand over his childer and grandchilder, permitting them the freedom to seek both intellectual and spiritual nourishment within the strong frame of the laws and traditions he laid out for them, barring from them all that was degenerate and defiling to body and soul. Some of their number may have chafed against this, and some may have resented it, but all obeyed the command of the Dark Father and dallied not with those forces that could befoul and devour the souls of even the purest and mightiest among men and vampires. It was not until after the Deluge — the Flood that came, at least in part, to wash away the sins of a world defiled by union with that which most unholy — and the rise of the Second City that evidence of the practice of infernalism entered into the histories of the Children of Caine.

In the nameless Second City of Men, a more willful damnation than even the one supplied by the Embrace made itself known to the Children of Caine. The Third Generation, freed from the shackles of the Dark Father's will by his disappearance, his abdication of authority to Enoch the First-Ruler, responded to their freedom as children often do — in unruly rebellion against all that they have been taught, and all they have been instructed to fear or avoid. Most infamous among their number — moreso even than the witch-priest Mekhet and the divine lunatic Malkav — was the one known as Ashur: scholar, wanderer, one time sorcerer-king, and relentless seeker after knowledge, unclean or not. Only Ennoia's absolute loathing of civilization kept him from being the most far-traveled of the Third Generation, for he left the Second City while its foundations were still being laid to wander the world scythed clean by the Deluge, from which the waters were still receding. Legend claims he traveled to the four corners of the world, questing for some strange unknown, and finding many things of wonder and horror on the paths he trod. He did not return until the Second City was near the pinnacle of its ascendancy, ruling all that its Cainite residents surveyed. He extracted tribute in wealth and slaves for the bleeding from all of its neighbors, and its glory nearly surpassed that of the First City. Ashur did not return alone; he brought with him a childe, a boy of such surpassing beauty of form and manner that he charmed even Ashur's most worldly and jaded siblings. By Ashur's own word, the boy was the only survivor of a wicked tribe of demon-worshippers, rescued from sacrifice.

Here is where the tales diverge rather sharply, breaking into multiple, sometimes contradictory paths. Some of the stories of the fall of the Second City say that it was Ashur who let doom in by the front door, claiming that

## History is Written by the Victors

Through its possession of the ghost-city of Enoch and the vast library of otherwise lost and forgotten documents that makes up the *Guarded Rubrics*, the Tal'Mahe'Ra possesses one of the most complete archives of early Cainite history in the world. Even the fabled Library of the Forgotten cannot match it in the quantity or quality of the lore it houses. The ruwat, the designated lorekeepers of the Sect and the guardians of this archive, release information from it solely on a need-to-know basis, and only with the permission of or with a directive from the unanimous vote of the Del'Roh and the Wazir council. In such ways does the Sect maintain a clear ideological and cultural identity for its younger members and pacify the ancestral hatreds and biases of its elder members in one stroke, while also concealing those things that no one outside the ruling council wishes to be commonly known.

One of those things is the extent to which infernalist corruption may have infested the pure and righteous First City itself. Some of the archive's most ancient scrolls and tablets hint darkly of childer of the Third Generation who met their Final Deaths at the sharp end of Caine's laws. Accounts of the accusations made against them and their trials under the Lawgiver himself bear the names of these childer so that none could cherish the belief they had been punished wrongly. In at least one of these accounts, consorting with unclean things from beyond the dark borders of the world is least of the crimes being considered, and the name of the accused is utterly effaced, chiseled from the stones. The Del'Roh is aware of this, as is Izhim abd'Azrael, First Seraph. They are currently debating whether or not they wish to share this intelligence with the Dominion of the Order of Moloch, and whether or not that knowledge will serve as help or a hindrance to his mission.

the childe he Embraced in the fell and nameless city of demonolaters was a poisoned gift of damnation. While beautiful and virtuous without, the boy was corrupt beyond

the ken even of his wise and erudite sire within, spreading depravity and degradation among the Third Generation with his hell-spawned wiles and infernal magics. Other stories say it was Saulot that brought corruption into the Second City. Still others lay the blame at the feet of one or more of the nameless grandchilder of Caine who perished in the fratricidal struggles for power that finally destroyed the Second City from within. All of these tales end with sending the survivors of the Third Generation and their descendants into diaspora far from the cradle of their ascendancy. According to the ruwat, only an externally corrupting force could have induced such a thorough and absolute collapse of Cainite society.

The Order of Moloch, a fairly recent addition to the ranks of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, holds a somewhat different perspective on the matter, one that has created some friction with the Sect's lorekeepers. The Order believes, and teaches among its own ranks, that Ashur was a *place*, not a *being*. A great and ancient city, Ashur the Fallen, was built atop the tomb of an inhuman creature of immense, unholy power, whose siblings were worshiped by the nameless First Tribe that called that city their home. In the high mountains, while digging the foundations of their city, the First Tribe uncovered a creature entombed in the living earth itself, a being that writhed and shrieked and died in the light of the sun, and whose death-cries held soul-flaying knowledge.

The First Tribe turned that knowledge into power and a tradition of cruelty so terrible that, even at its most decadent, the Second City paled in comparison. In war, the First Tribe invoked the power of their patrons to blight the lands of their enemies with pestilence, spreading plagues that murdered thousands where they stood. They summoned horrors from beyond the borders of reality to devour all who stood against them, offering libations of sacrificial blood, flesh, rapine, and slaughter in thanks for their gifts and to soothe their patrons in their rest. In peace, they slit the throats of beasts and defiled innocents over the offering bowls, sported among themselves and with their slaves in manners both sublime and perverse, and indulged in extremes of pleasure and excruciation.

In the end, their efforts were all for naught; a being far more powerful than any human, even a human calling upon the power of an entity older than time, came into their midst. One of the Third Generation of Caine came upon Ashur the Fallen during one of the great rites of the First Tribe and, observing them in their endeavors, was offended by their failures of imagination and elected to make a lesson of them. The Antediluvian slaughtered the entire population of Ashur, casting their bodies, whole and in pieces, into their own sacrificial pits. Only three

survived to crawl from the Well of Sacrifice and the wreckage of their homeland. Nergal fled the place where he was found wanting and shamed, abandoning the remnants of the First Tribe and soothing his own wounded pride with the guise of godhood in his fortress-city Mashkan-shapir. Moloch gathered what remained of the First Tribe and guided them away from the ruin of their homeland, choosing a subtler, saner course than his narcissistic and maddened sibling. Little is known of the nameless third. They may have been male, female, or a horribly twisted fusion of the two, or they may have been a beautiful and virtuous slave rescued from torment and death, and taken to the Second City.

The Idran preserve a similar tale: the story of the ancient city of Bhât, where dwelt in the earliest ages of man a tribe of demonolaters who called themselves the Nif'ur'en Daah. They lived according to an ethic of infernal predation, Awakened demon-wolves among the fold of sleeping and powerless sheep, waiting only for the strong to devour them. They warred among themselves and with other magi in the long and forgotten eras of prehistory, emerging from this crucible as the many and varied cults of the Nephandi, reviled and persecuted wherever they tread, and as ineradicable as their Cainite fellow travelers. Scattered Lupine lore teaches of an incarnation of the natural force of entropy, captured by its opposing force and twisted, tormented, and broken into many forms of destruction. One of these forms, which they call Eater-of-Souls, is the subtlest and most corrupting of them all, inducing those whom it influences to turn away from true and righteous ways of their own will, using their weaknesses of mind and spirit to devour all that they are from within. They call its servants the Dancers of the Black Spiral, for the sanity-breaking labyrinth where they receive their unholy initiation.

Regardless of the story's origin, or the excuses infernalists make to justify their acts, the Tal'Mahe'Ra has only one reply to offer them.

## **This Means War**

The Tal'Mahe'Ra has stood against the depredations and depravities of infernalists and their patrons since before its formal foundation of the Sect. When the Idran sought allies in their efforts to find and secure Enoch against the Setites, they found them among Cainites already engaged in a struggle against a similarly malevolent undead threat.

By the time the Idran met the Cainites with whom they would found the Tal'Mahe'Ra, the blood wars against the Baali had gone on for literally thousands of years — since at least the time of the Second City, if not the First. Nergal was unmasked for the poisonously delusional monstrosity

that he was, and Mashkan-shapir lay in shattered, shadow-haunted ruins in the lands between the Tigris and the Euphrates, guarded by Cainite sorcerers and warriors alike. Moloch and his brood had gone to ground, concealing their activities behind the blinds of human mystic and religious questing. They avoided open conflict with their many enemies, including the ferociously vengeful surviving elder childer of Nergal, who knew their siblings to also be their betrayers. The Children of Haqim hunted the Baali with a particularly bitter hatred, as did the warrior caste of the Salubri, who seemed to consider it a holy calling to scourge the bloodline from the face of the world. The Idran learned of the existence of this conflict from their newly-acquired allies among the blood sorcerers of the Tzimisce, whose struggles with the Baali were less frequent but no less vicious because of it. Realizing that the infernalist threat was as acute as the Setite one, the Idran and the first Cainites of the Tal'Mahe'Ra established the doctrine of hunting infernalists wherever they laired, ending their lives or unives, and taking whatever knowledge or artifacts they possessed to be guarded forever.

An elder *koldun* of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, a witch-priest and master of a *kraina* commanding earth and fire, was among those who went to war on behalf of the Sect during the struggle against the infernalist who called himself *Shaitan*. The infernalist's lair in Knossos was an abomination so great that reality itself recoiled against it. He perished there, but not before the gathered sorcerers completed the great working that caused the eruption of Thera and the subsequent destruction of Knossos. The Sect gathered recruits from the survivors of that struggle, many of whom did not believe that the threat posed by the Baali and the worldbreaking forces they could command was at an end. The future would prove them prophetic rather than pessimistic on the battlegrounds in and around Carthage, on the infernal field at Chorazin, in the pits of Damascus and Mexico City, and other cursed places that would crop up well into the modern nights. Infernalists, Baali and otherwise, proved to be as numerous and as difficult to kill as the vermin that infested their lairs.

For a time, the circus of Cainite political theater distracted the Tal'Mahe'Ra as a whole from their struggles against the infernal. The Anarch Revolt upended the entire Cainite social order – Antediluvians were slain (or claimed to be slain), Methuselahs and elders met Final Death or were driven from power, and from the chaos emerged two new Sects of Cainites. The Tal'Mahe'Ra spent centuries inserting agents into the ranks of the Camarilla and the Sabbat, preserving what they could of the history and lore of their people wherever possible. They took great care to conceal the contours of their handiwork in the Camarilla, while







## Let Them Kill Each Other

In the waning years of the thirteenth century, the Baali did the Tal'Mahe'Ra and the entire world an enormous favor: they went to open, bloody war against each other. The Sect was not certain what precisely triggered such a violent schism, especially since it occurred in the Ashirra-dominated Levant. Both the Children of Haqim and the remnants of the Salubri warriors whetted their knives for the survivors. Not for the first time, the elders of the Tal'Mahe'Ra wished they possessed better insight into the motives and tactics of their ancient enemies. However, they were perfectly willing to observe from the outside, particularly when doing so yielded high dividends with little chance of loss. The location and defenses of the *Iblii-al-Akbar*, the great Well of Sacrifice concealed in Damascus, were betrayed to the Children of Haqim, and agents of the Tal'Mahe'Ra among their ranks managed to acquire and subsequently safeguard a treasure trove of infernal artifacts and lore. Chorazin the Damned, a site of bloodshed and horror beyond human reckoning for centuries, was rocked by a series of violent earthquakes that finished the destruction of the upper city and collapsed the physical structure of the lower city into itself. Assamite sorcerers who observed the event disclaimed any involvement in it, but they swore they heard the voice of an *ashipu* singing praise-songs to the servants of the Annunaki as they devoured the black city whole. In the wake of Chorazin's collapse, the conflict seemed to wane – the survivors melting away into the Levantine shadows, some pursued and destroyed, others making good their escape. For centuries thereafter, the Baali nearly ceased to exist as an organized bloodline, much less as an organized threat.

Nearly.



they acted openly as a bracing support in the other. By the time their attention turned again to their ancient enemies, those foes had taken the opportunity to reorganize and, to some extent, regain their strength. They would likely never be as mighty as they were in the nights when they basked in the worship of their demented cults, but what they had

lost in raw power they made up for in subtle, corrupting cunning and a far wider net cast through both the Camarilla and the Sabbat, the tattered remnants of the Ashirra, and even among the Inconnu. Autarkis infernalists dwelling at the fringes of the Sects made their presence felt, and with a gradually rising degree of alarm, the Tal'Mahe'Ra re-engaged in the fight against them.

Five shakari kamuts of specialist infernalist hunters were formed and trained under the auspices of Seraph Phaedyme in consultation with First Seraph Izhim abd'Azrael. Phaedyme accepted the assignment to oversee the Sect's struggle against the infernal centuries before from the Del'Roh, and returned to it with vigor. She spent the majority of two centuries deploying the forces at her command against demonic redoubts, tearing open butchers' nests and exposing them to the purification of fire. As their crusade against the infernal continued, however, they began to find signs that someone else was engaged in it as well – particularly when it came to bringing low older and more thoroughly entrenched cults and individuals. On at least four occasions, a kamut arrived at its target destination only to find that destination already thoroughly and utterly undone: its Cainites destroyed, its mortal cultists slain, any portable artifacts removed, and any stationary artifacts ritually defaced in a manner that rendered them impossible to use as an infernalist ceremonial focus going forward. More impressively, if a Well of Sacrifice was present it was *also* destroyed, with any human remains removed and then scoured clean with elemental fire. Whoever the hunter or hunters were, they did not sign their kills, and the Tal'Mahe'Ra found no indication that they were working at cross-purposes with any of their tools in the other Sects.

In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the anti-infernalist column began receiving anonymous intelligence regarding the expansion of infernalist activity in northern Africa, fed to them through their remaining operatives within the Ashirra. The hunt was deployed in force, and during the course of their investigations, they uncovered several minor and one major nest, which they began disassembling with the precision and thoroughness demanded by Seraph Phaedyme. As the shakari closed in on the largest of the nests, however, they found that once again they were beaten to the killing blow – but, this time, the source of it was waiting for them, quite patiently, in the midst of the carnage of death-ash and cultist blood, the air thick with the scent of lightning above the blackened remains of the still gently smoking Well of Sacrifice. He greeted the commander of the kamut politely, gave his name as Sahar-Hanibaal, peacefully admitted to being an elder among the Baali, and requested an audience with their leaders among the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

Somehow, despite his self-evident age and personal power, Sahar-Hanibaal remained inoffensive enough during the subsequent debate within the kamut to avoid summary beheading. The fact that he agreed without conditions to be both staked and thaumaturgically bound in a manner selected by their support team helped smooth matters along. The shakari brought him back to their temporary base of operations in Tripoli and contacted nearly everyone above them in the chain of command that they knew how to reach. A substantial number of them responded, a kamut of shakari elders came to take possession of their prisoner, and soon he was incarcerated among the tender mercies of the Sect's most gifted information extraction specialists. He had, they were forced to admit, a rather substantial tolerance for both physical and mental discomfort. They also grudgingly conceded that he did not appear to be interested in lying to them, which they dutifully reported to the entire Wazir council and the Del'Roh, recommending that they receive him for a formal audience and hear what he had to say.

Brought before the Wazir and the Del'Roh in thaumaturgically forged bonds that compelled him to speak no falsehood, Sahar-Hanibaal told him why he had sought them out: he felt he had no other choice, and the danger had grown too great to refrain from seeking outside assistance. He spoke of ancient lost city – not Qal'at Sherqat, the city mortals called Ashur, but the *true* city, the fallen city, the home of the First Tribe from which the Baali had sprung, lost no longer. He spoke of the *first* great Well of Sacrifice, the Maw of the Sleepers, lost for ten thousand years if not longer, and how it should have fallen into dust and silence without blood and flesh and pain to sustain it. When it was found in the cradle of the high mountains, it was neither dust nor silence, but thrumming with a hideous dark power that rivaled that of Knossos and Chorazin, with *something* pulsing within it, changing, *becoming*. He spoke of the lone survivor of his Order who escaped what surged forth to pursue them – escaped, but not unmarked, not *intact*, not sane. She begged for the peace of Final Death, and he could not be certain that he had truly granted it even as she crumbled to ash in the sunrise, bound in the scriptures of Earth and Heaven to see her soul set pure and free.

He told them of the Order of Moloch and their own centuries-long hunt to rid the world of the infernal taint unleashed on it by his own foolish kin. These kin had called on half-known names and half-understood pacts, and sold what they should not for the sake of their own venality. He cursed those same fools who stirred the sleeping Children of the Outer Dark in their prisons and pushed everything closer to the edge of dissolution in their stupidity. Finally,

he begged for their help in finding what was left of Ashur again, and its Well, before what gestated within it could be birthed into a world ill-prepared to meet it. He offered himself and the services of his Order to their own struggles, in the hope of preventing a calamity beyond imagination.

The debate that followed among the Wazir and the Del'Roh was long, and bordered on the acrimonious. Phaedyne, already aggravated by the willingness of her fellow Seraphs to hear the honeyed poison of a Baali's lies in the very halls of Enoch, ardently and immovably opposed any cooperation and brusquely expressed her shock and horror that he was not yet dust. She was not alone in her assessment, though others were more diplomatic about it, and still others pointed out the relatively recent history of the Baali at war with themselves, which the Tal'Mahe'Ra itself had witnessed almost firsthand. Each rawi was summoned to offer historical context and supply specific references in support or refutation of the information they had been offered. A number of disturbing details emerged, both from the writings of the ancients and more recent intelligence reports from operatives deployed in the field, which only fanned the flames of the debate. The qadis were summoned to offer their wisdom and to help soothe fraying tempers. The convocation, now less a debate than an argument among powerful, wrathful elders, dragged on for thirteen nights, and might have dragged on for thirteen more when Izhim abd'Azrael left the council chamber where the Wazir held court and summoned Sahar-Hanibaal to a closed-door audience in his private chambers.

No one knows precisely what passed between them – no one was bold or suicidal enough to attempt to intrude – but when the First Seraph emerged hours later, he threw his support behind the proposal to claim the Order of Moloch for the service of the Tal'Mahe'Ra and aided it in its endeavors, helping to craft the protocol by which the Order's members were inducted into the anti-infernalist column. Seraph Phaedyne stopped just short of accusing him of treason against the Tal'Mahe'Ra before the Del'Roh, and refused to accept the Order of Moloch under her command. Thus, it remains a knife in the hand of Izhim abd'Azrael, who does not appear to find that burden of responsibility onerous at all.

## Weapons in the Fight

The anti-infernalist column is the task force carrying one of the permanent and ongoing crusades that the Tal'Mahe'Ra supports, devoting significant strategic and tactical resources to the effort. Consistent backing has waxed and waned over the centuries in close correlation to the

level of perceived infernalist threat, as well as other considerations that consume the attention of the Sect's leaders, but the fight against the minions of Cainite and human spiritual degradation has never ceased or been required to stand down when actively on the hunt. The Spenta Aurvant works under the command of Seraph Phaedyme, a Persian Ventrue whose ardent Zoroastrian faith from her breathing days has transmuted into a relentless pursuit of those forces that would unmake the world in her thousands of years of unlife. Under her direction, the anti-infernalist column is a tightly disciplined and well-honed weapon consisting of five specially trained kamuts of shakari and their thaumaturgic countermeasure and intelligence-gathering support units. At least one of these kamuts is on station in Enoch at all times, ready to be deployed to the living world at a moment's notice; the other four are embedded, whole or in parts, within the territories claimed by the Camarilla, the Sabbat, and the Ashirra.

In addition to the several kamuts inserted into the various Sects, the anti-infernalist column has also recruited an assortment of agents among Camarilla, Sabbat, and formally unaligned Cainites. This broad network helps gather and disseminate information concerning infernalist threats before they develop and during action taken against them.

**E Division** is the brainchild of former Tremere Justicar Karl Schrekt. A former demon hunter, Schrekt formed E Division to investigate paranormal occurrences outside the norm or experience of most Kindred. The Camarilla Hand has since recruited one of the E Division Archons, who has formed a standalone task force within the division devoted explicitly to investigating infernalist activity within the ranks of the Camarilla and demonic activity in general. Archon Iphegenia McClellan has since sought and received permission to make contact with the Order of Josiah, the Camarilla's own small but devoted division of infernalist hunters. The Josians are few and scattered, but their knowledge and experience would be an invaluable addition to the cause.

**The Order of the Star of Morning** is neither a branch of the Tal'Mahe'Ra nor a tool of it, but rather an ally of centuries-long standing. Founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by adherents of the *Via Adversarius*, they are an order of militant hunters dedicated to rooting out the infernalists within their own philosophical brotherhood. Many of them are now Autarkis elders of considerable personal power, including their founder, Gabriel de Cambrai. Cambrai is a Toreador whose artistic focus (his juniors sometimes claim with bland amusement) is making infernalists produce genuinely pleasing screams. Others are at least nominally attached to the elder Camarilla domains

of Old Europe or to the more settled Sabbat territories in Central and South America, where they possess some contact with followers of related Paths.

**The Sabbat Inquisition** would be a more useful tool if the Tal'Mahe'Ra did not have to exert so much care when dealing with them. The Inquisition believes, correctly, that there is more to the Black Hand than meets the eye; it also believes, incorrectly, that the Black Hand worships infernal powers. No element of the Sabbat Inquisition is directly under the control of the Tal'Mahe'Ra's anti-infernalist column, much to the irritation of Seraph Phaedyme. She wishes her agents could do more than gently prod suspicions in the direction of genuine infernal threats and away from paranoid delusions regarding the Hand.

**The Order of Moloch** is a relatively recent and reluctant addition to the Tal'Mahe'Ra's arsenal. The Order consists entirely of Baali descendants of the Methuselah Moloch the Defiler and Cainites of the Old Clan Tzimisce who sheltered and protected them for centuries. They are militant adherents of both the *Via Hyron* and the original ethics of their bloodline, making use of inhumane ritual practices to soothe the demonic entities known as the Children of the Outer Dark, thereby preventing them from awakening from their nightmare-raddled sleep and devouring the world. The Order was founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century during the bloody conflict between the would-be *shaitan* Azaneal, his followers, and the unimpressed Baali elders of the Levant. This conflict led to the destruction and subversion of no small number of previously unassailable nests, broken by the dark powers resident in Chorazin that Azaneal commanded. The Order's first action as an organized entity was to discard the *Via Hyron's* prohibition against blood sorcery. They invoked the teachings of the *ashipu* to collapse the ruins of Chorazin in on themselves and trapped Azaneal and the bulk of his brood in a prison warded with holy fire and sacred earth. They subsequently turned their attentions on any of his debased bloodline that managed to escape their sire's fate, and expanded their operations in an effort to stamp out the infernalist errors promulgated by decadents and fools.

Centuries of covert warfare followed; sometimes bloody, sometimes subtle, but always costly to both sides in the struggle. Elder Baali infernalists were required to become ever wiler to avoid final destruction at the hands of their coldly efficient, highly knowledgeable blood-kin. The Order of Moloch found its resources becoming unsustainably stretched with every member who fell in battle. They accumulated the most complete library of knowledge and artifacts in the world regarding the Children of the Outer Dark and infernalism in general, but their ranks of members

were more difficult to replenish. By the modern nights, they were no longer anywhere near as numerous as the infernalists within their bloodline's ranks, and something was inevitably going to give for good or ill.

The breaking point came when a pack of the Order's hunters tracked an infernalist and his blood-bound cult into the wilds of the Near East, and found a horror beyond imagination. Only one member of the pack survived long enough to bring word back to her superiors before succumbing to the madness of her Beast. In her remaining lucid moments, she revealed that the impossibly ancient ruins of the First Tribe's city had been found, and something malevolent and powerful beyond human comprehension was gestating within its revitalized Well of Sacrifice. Believing his hunter's report, the Order's commander put his affairs in order and took the risk of contacting the Tal'Mahe'Ra, the only Cainite organization he believed capable of taking the threat seriously and, perhaps, being willing to listen to him. The Order and the Tal'Mahe'Ra have since made common cause. Sahar-Hanibaal has been granted the courtesy rank of dominion, fitting to his age, personal power, and mastery of the Order, and he resides in Enoch as an adviser to the Del'Roh and the Wazir council.

The protocols developed to insure that the Order of Moloch is not playing some deep game of treachery are likewise invested in him: he accepted a full blood bond to the Del'Roh, who functions as his personal patron within the ranks of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and further thaumaturgic safeguards that bind far more than his will to Seraph Izhim abd'Azrael. Every member of the Order was required to accept the blood bond to a patron within the Tal'Mahe'Ra who wasn't of the anti-infernalist column. The relative shortage of volunteers for such a duty has led to a concentration of the Order's members around a small pool of domitors primarily from the Old Clan Tzimisce or the True Brujah, bloodlines with whom the Molochim have a shared history of non-hostile relations. Seraph Phaedyne flatly refused to accept the Order into the ranks of the hunt, and ordered the Cainites under her command to keep their distance. The Del'Roh has thus far elected not to consider this behavior on her part unseemly defiance, though that may change should the situation deteriorate. As matters stand, a subtle but undeniable tension exists between Seraph Phaedyne (who commands the anti-infernalist column) and Seraph Izhim abd'Azrael (who commands the deployment of the Order of Moloch). This tension does not bode well for long-term peace between them.

**Crowsong** is also relatively new, and enormously secret, development in the arsenal of the anti-infernalist column.

The sixth permanent kamut in the column is also an experiment of extraordinarily dangerous and heretical nature. Composed entirely of dedicated infernalist hunters with many centuries of service to the Tal'Mahe'Ra among them, the members of Crowsong have volunteered to risk their unives by learning to use their enemy's weapons against them. Millennia of infernalist hunting have yielded a vast collection of unholy grimoires and demonic artifacts, which Seraph Phaedyne decided to put to practical use. The Cainites who comprise Crowsong are the only authorized practitioners of Dark Thaumaturgy within the Tal'Mahe'Ra, selected for their unswerving loyalty, the purity of their righteousness, and their ironclad force of will. All of these traits are required to truck with demons, if only to reduce the chance that the entire anti-infernalist column might be annihilated in the face of a truly overwhelming enemy.

The Del'Roh would never have authorized such a stratagem, and so Seraph Phaedyne did not crave her permission to enact it. The very least she, and the members of her secret kamut, could expect should their efforts be discovered is a traitor's brand and a summary Final Death. At least part of the Seraph's resentment of the acceptance of the Order of Moloch derives from the risk they pose to her own loyal hunters. If the Baali recognize the marks of Dark Thaumaturgy within the anti-infernalist column itself, it will set in motion a chain of events that will end in blood, ash, and tragedy.

## **Dark Thaumaturgy: The Devils' Brew**

Until recently, the Tal'Mahe'Ra's practical knowledge of Dark Thaumaturgy has focused on understanding rather than practice. Their studies covered recognition of the signs and symbols, subtle or otherwise, employed by the forbidden blood art's practitioners and the effects that sorcery has on the stability of reality in its immediate vicinity, as well as upon the sorcerer herself. Under the direction of Seraph Phaedyne, one kamut of the Sect's dedicated infernalist hunters has undertaken a secret study of the art itself, as the crusade against the infernal stands on the precipice of becoming far more deadly.

Unfortunately, many of the eldest members of the Tal'Mahe'Ra cannot take diabolism as it is practiced by younger Cainites seriously, regarding it as the decadent and self-indulgent misbehavior of spoiled childer in need of correction rather than a soul-devouring evil in



need of immediate and forceful interdiction. Some of its truly ancient members – who predate the existence of monotheism, never mind Judaism, Christianity, or Islam – cannot regard the pallid and self-important devils of the Book as real and as dangerous as the entities of primordial darkness they remember from their own youth. It requires decades, if not centuries, of careful scholarship to see the connections among the darkest powers of the world, and many infernalists – and many not so infernal – deliberately obscured those links, hiding them among layers of apocrypha and misdirection. The Molochim Baali in particular spent thousands of years trying to keep the levers of true infernal power out of the hands of mortals and Cainites alike. The demented antics of their Nergali cousins and the endlessly inventive human propensity for both soul-corrupting greed and self-destruction made this a Sisyphean task.

## The Archdukes of Hell

Regardless of the doubt and disbelief of Methuselahs, some power does reside in the names of those entities most commonly known to youthful Cainite infernalists, mortal diabolists, and spiritually corrupt mages alike. The Host of Hell is not entirely a fiction of Bronze Age goat-herders, and the demons that they fought and bargained with are not solely new masks for far older powers. *The Book of Nod*, *The Revelations of the Dark Mother*, and *The Erciyas Fragments* are all remarkably consistent in their myth-cycles when it comes to the existence of One Above all the other gods. They are similarly consistent in their identification of the shadows of those bright beings.

The Order of Moloch refers to these beings as the Pentad (or sometimes simply the Five) and assiduously avoids invoking them by name, preferring to make use of the titles and honorifics less likely to draw their attention to an empowered speaker. The Pentad is, as a whole, *disturbingly* cognizant and aware. Both the anti-infernalist column and the Order believe that the vast majority of active infernalists in the world have made pacts directly with one or more of the Pentad or their direct servitors, demons of lust and greed, wrath and malediction, physical corruption and death. Drawing their attention, or that of their minions, is a relatively simple matter for even a middling-skilled occultist, and the swath they have cut through the souls of humanity over the ages cannot be overstated. For organized infernalist hunters, this is a backhanded blessing. A myriad of methods of identifying and ameliorating the works of the Pentad exist as means of invoking their power. As a result, at least as many specific icons, warding structures, and scriptures exist to repel, bind, and purify others of their baneful influence.

## The Children of the Outer Dark

The First Tribe of men, whose descendants became the founders of the Baali bloodline, worshiped these entities to the exclusion of all others. From their ancient seat in the city they called Ashur, they spread their dark faith to lands they conquered in the names of their patrons, whom they called the Sleepers, and through more peaceful acts of colonization when their population outgrew the walls of their city alike. Ashur, its corrupted neighbors, and most of its colonies were destroyed millennia ago, both before and during the Baali Wars. The knowledge the First Tribe painstakingly gathered was scattered to the four winds – though not so far that others cannot find it, despite the best efforts of the Molochim to keep it from the hands of the foolish and the unworthy.

Both the Tal'Mahe'Ra's anti-infernalist column and the Order of Moloch believe that many of the beings known as the Children of the Outer Dark existed either before the dawn of reality as it is currently known or came into existence as part of the current world's bloody birthing pains. Unlike the terrifyingly aware and active entities that make up the Pentad, the Children are mostly quiescent, sleeping entombed within the body of the living world, trapped in the recursive prison of their own dreaming minds.

On at least two occasions, the living body of a Sleeper was uncovered. The first time, the First Tribe was constructing the foundations of their settlement. They broke through the crust of the Earth and exposed the moribund body of a Sleeper, who burned to ash in the light of the sun and howled names of power in its death-agonies. The second time was by design; Nergal obsessively sought and finally found the mummified flesh of Namtaru, Bringing of Plagues, with whom he had already achieved psychic contact. In each case, the emergence of the Sleeper into the world – possibly from its chrysalis – brought the creature closer to wakefulness. As it woke, reality warped and twisted to the point of breaking: sunlight refusing to fall on the benighted shores of Knossos, the seas turning to blood, and unclean knowledge burning itself into the minds of those exposed to its half-conscious thrashings. The Order of Moloch now possesses the greater bulk of all the lore related to the Children of the Outer Dark, including the most comprehensive codex of the true and diluted names by which their power may be invoked or, in the case of specific Sleepers, soothed back into deeper rest on the soporific waves of nightmarish cruelty. Supposedly, most


## The Pentad

The five demons (or great fallen angels as some of their adherents prefer) are Abbadon, Dagon, Asmodeus, Belial, and Mammon.

Asmodeus, called the Great Beast or Leviathan, is by far the most powerful of the Pentad, a creature composed almost entirely of hatred and wrath, whose might and madness have both only grown through the ages. Consumed with loathing for the being he once loved above all others (even his maker), he grants those who call upon him gifts that allow the physical and spiritual destruction of those who have wronged them or the power to ascend above their lessers in a savage and glorious dominion. Among his principle servitors are Thahlil, the Voice of the Dragon, whose pacts lend gifts of social, political, and personal domination over the minds and souls of others, and Samael the Black, the Fangs of the Dragon, who grants the gifts of the hunter to drag down those who seek to flee from righteous vengeance. Particularly skilled or fortunate infernalists may occasionally invoke Morael, the Eyes of the Dragon, who shows those who call upon him the means of accessing lost or unseen wisdom. The Walker of the Unseen Ways, however, appears to be in some rebellion against his own lord, and such pacts have a tendency to coil about and bite those who enter into them.

The “lesser” Archdukes of the Pentad all embody some form of deadly sin – Belial, for example, is a creature of lust in all its most twisted embodiments. Orthodox demonologists categorize them and the servitor-demons beneath them accordingly, enumerating attributes and favored means of sacrifice like a guidebook to damnation. Many of these codices of demonic lore are heartily sought after by practicing infernalists, who use them for substantially darker purposes than mere ethnographic research.


of this library resides in Tyre, and the Order is pleased to let fools seeking such knowledge immolate themselves against the defenses of their Tyrian motherhouse.



## True Names and the Children of the Outer Dark

The True Name of a thing or a being is far more than the simple appellation by which that thing is called and known to others. It contains the *absolute essence* of that being and the keys by which that essence may be invoked to aid the caller or to smite his enemies. This is particularly true of the Children of the Outer Dark, who exist in a state of physical and psychic separation and imprisonment. Their flesh exists in the physical realm, embedded in the substance of the Earth itself in “tombs” that show no sign of human construction, and that have walls etched with the scars of their thrashings. Their minds seemingly exist elsewhere, adrift in a bloody sea of tormented horror that is to them the sweetest of ambrosia, from which they either cannot or will not leave unless coaxed to do so. When lunatics in search of dark apotheosis deliberately attempt to awaken them or others recklessly overuse the Sleeper’s name, the mind and flesh of the Sleepers come near to union. The results are uniformly horrific for any Cainites or mortals in the area, as the essence of the Sleeper’s nature spills over into the minds of all sapient creatures in the vicinity, driving them to greater and greater acts of depravity.

Lamentably, Namtaru, the Bringer of Plagues, the most well-known of the Children of the Outer Dark, is one of these. Nergal unearthed the creature during his quest for dark divinity, and Namtaru’s awakening was only prevented by the willing sacrifice of a dozen Cainite blood sorcerers during the rite that unleashed Thera. There are others, however, and the Order of Moloch has found a disturbing number of their names etched into the remains of Enoch’s palaces and temples: Nehemoth the Whisperer, whose merest breath could instill madness; Shevirah the Breaker, the shatterer of bonds and sunderer of fellowships; and Guland the Unclean, whose touch renders all things unclean, never to be pure again.



## Wells of Sacrifice

Whether orthodox Hyronist hive or heretical infernalist nest, the center of every consecrated Baali ritual space is the Well of Sacrifice, to which all things are offered, be they libations of horror and suffering to soothe the Sleepers in their tombs, or the fruits of cruelty to purchase gifts of infernal power. The oldest and most traditional are actual wells, deep shafts bored into the living earth so their lullabies reach the minds of the sleeping Children more easily. Supplicants fill these wells with both the mortal remains of the sacrifices offered to them and the trapped and continuously reinforced psychic agony of those who perished there. The symphonies of horror and torment that still ring in these places echo not only through the physical world, but also gouge deep scars into the spiritual substance of the Shadowlands. According to the ghosts who serve the Tal’Mahe’Ra, these scars (called “nihils”) are where an all-devouring power wells up and taints all that it touches with madness.

Fortunately, only a bare handful of truly ancient Wells of Sacrifice continue to exist – the ages have driven some to dormancy, and millennia of internecine and external conflict have led to the destruction of others. Mashkan-shapir’s Great Well of Sacrifice was dragged completely into the Abyss by the Lasombra priests of Ereshkigal during the fall of that city to forces of the Thirteen. No remnant of it, physical or spiritual, has ever been found by any Baali, though many have sought it. According to legend, the Labyrinth-Well of Knossos was built in a great descending spiral carved by and with the nightmares of Namtaru. The eruption of Thera utterly annihilated the Labyrinth, and what little remains lies shattered beyond reclamation on the bottom of the Aegean Sea. The Nergali Methuselah Cybele took no chances when it came to the Tophet-Well of Carthage. The rites she crafted first severed Moloch from the power he could summon from it, and then imploded it in on itself, its remains lying sealed beneath the same binding of blood and salt that holds the city’s fallen ruler-lovers. The *Iblii-al-Akbar* of Damascus was torn open and cleansed to its absolute destruction by the combined forces of the Assamite sorcerers, the Ray’een al-Fen, and the Salubri warrior Tzaphkiel al-Amin. Unfortunately, the greatest of the surviving elder Wells resides in the vast undercity of Chorazin the Damned, home of the infernalist cult known as the *Angellis Ater*. Its high priest and *shaitan*, Azaneal, may well have attained the dark apotheosis lusted after by the Nergali for thousands of years.

The vast majority of all hives and nests do not enjoy the luxury of access to a pre-established Well of any age or degree of power, and must make do with what they themselves




## The Lost Wells of Sacrifice

Once upon a time, the Baali were a much larger, much more powerful bloodline. In Mashkan-shapir, between the Tigris and the Euphrates, the Great Whore Nergal ruled openly as a god-king. In Carthage, Moloch the Defiler shared both the bed of his Antediluvian lover and the reins of governance. In a thousand cities spread across the face of both Europe and the Near East, Wells of Sacrifice lay as part of the eldest foundations. The vast majority of these Wells no longer exist except as a faint and fading echo of depravities past, lingering just at the edge of perception for mortals and Cainites alike. The Wells of Sacrifice are, in a sense, alive. Without a cult of worshipers to continue feeding them and maintaining the self-reinforcing mystic feedback loop of palliative suffering, they can effectively starve to death, reduced to a mass of stained and crumbling brickwork filled with the remnants of a forgotten, barbaric past.

Such Wells can be coaxed back to life by sacrifice, offering a path of least resistance for infernalist cults who would otherwise have to go through the laborious process of creating and consecrating their own ritual ground. The Order of Moloch makes a point to complete the destruction of any moribund Wells that they encounter and cannot claim. They extract any human remains for their own ritual uses, remove or efface any inscription containing a genuine Name of power, scour whatever remains in fire and water and, if pragmatic, implode the physical bore of the Well itself before sealing any remaining aperture with wards of a particularly lethal and unforgiving nature.

Even so, most of these “lesser” Wells are only a few hundred years old. Truly ancient lost Wells are prizes worth fighting and killing for, regardless of circumstances. The First Well, the Great Well of Ashur the Fallen, has been the unholy grail of the Baali since the bloodline’s diaspora. Any living memory of the city’s physical location was lost with Nergal and Moloch, though many believe it lays in the high plateaus of Anatolia or the highlands of what is now northern Iraq. The Mouth of Hell is the mobile pit-hold of the ship the *Dark Magister*, consecrated with artifacts taken from the depths of Chorazin by the Anazeali priestess Arishat, and has been missing for centuries. It is only recently that advanced underwater salvage technology has made finding the wreck of the ship possible. What remains of the *Dark Magister* lies in multiple pieces on the bottom of the Caribbean Sea near the Cayman Islands, with no lingering psychic trace of the Well among its physical wreckage.



create. The barest acceptable form of Well is a shallow pit, dug into the earth or bored into stone, ringed in invocations and bound in wards, and consecrated with the blood of ritual sacrifices. They contain the flesh, bone, and entrails of those offerings, unless they have been ritually immolated to reduce the chance of exposure or otherwise repurposed for ceremonial use. There is power in the ash, in the bone, and in the braided hair and bloodied entrails. Many of the Baali, infernalist or otherwise, are skilled at the divinatory art of extispicy; the Order of Moloch in particular honors their necessary victims by making as much use of their sacrifice as possible, employing their remains for augury and

the construction of ritual implements. Physically shallow though they may be, the accumulation of ritually focused energies within gives the Well a spiritual depth completely out of proportion to its actual size, sinking through many veils and thresholds and boundaries like a dagger-thrust to its true purpose.

For infernalist cults, Cainite or mortal, this purpose is communion with the dark masters to whom they have offered their souls in exchange for power. It is here that the diabolist enters into the corruption of her own being, spilling sacrifice into the maw of darkness and taking on the tasks demanded by those she serves, in return for a



portion of their might and knowledge. Here pacts are forged, unholy unions consummated, unclean knowledge exchanged, and words spoken that shake the foundations of the world and stir restless things that should not be woken in their sleep.

For the Order of Moloch, the Well of Sacrifice is a necessary evil – very necessary and very evil. Through these apertures, their songs of sacrifice enter the tormented dreamscape of the Children of the Outer Dark, holding them in slumber and sparing the world the horrors of their waking. Bearing the burden of their ancestors' errors and excesses, this is the *only* purpose of the Well among their ranks, and they neither call upon the Sleepers for any measure or power, nor do they permit others to do so in their name. Such practices are as anathema to them as the worship of lesser demons, and they bind the borders of their Wells with inlaid talisman-wards that prevent the infernally clever or corrupt from siphoning their power. As it stands, few among the Order are genuine initiates to these practices, though as of late, the Molochim priesthood has grudgingly begun sharing their knowledge of ritual forms with the ruwat of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, against the day when the Sect as a whole may require access to such rites.

### **The First Well: The Maw of the Sleepers**

The fallen city of the First Tribe, it is said, lay high in the cold and arid mountains, where snow was scarce and free-flowing streams scarcer still. Built as a fortress against the myriad dangers (not all of them merely mortal) of the post-Deluge world, one of the first necessities for the fledgling settlement was to secure enough water to support the needs of its population – for drinking, washing, and the irrigation of crops. During the sounding of that high, defensible plateau, their diviners first felt the call of the unnatural thing in the earth, the moribund body of the Child of the Outer Dark that their well cutters uncovered and, in so doing, accidentally slew.

Little remains of the city itself – the low remnants of fallen walls, the foundation-holes of dwellings long since crumbled to dust, and the smooth, stony expanse of a vast central plaza around which the rest of the city spread out in concentric circles. In the very center of that plaza lies the Well itself, perfectly circular and ringed in a low lip of stones still stained the rust-red of dried blood thousands of years old. Its bore sinks into the stone of the plateau and vanishes into absolute darkness a few feet from the top, even in broad daylight. Its resemblance to other, less horrific desert wells of the region is not a coincidence; in ancient times the First Tribe freely abused the customs of

hospitality that made a community's source of life-giving water a place free of worldly violence, where strangers and wanderers could come to seek safety and guidance. At the edge of this Well, the Maw of the Sleepers, many an unsuspecting traveler met their end. They were bound and suspended in the long-vanished wooden rack above the aperture, their throats slit and their bellies opened, or tortured to madness and beyond in their last moments.

In fact, it is not possible to perceive the depths of the Maw of the Sleepers, physically or psychically. Dropping pebbles yields no echo, though observers may hear a sound like rippling water or whispering voices just at the edge of hearing emanating from the opening. Flashlight beams fall into the darkness as completely as sunlight. The only product of attempting to project one's thoughts into that abyss has been utter, shrieking madness for any who tries, whether human, Cainite, or other. Something resides in the Well that is not yet ready to be seen.

### **Countervailing Forces: Dur-an-Ki and Koldunic Sorcery**

When the Order of Moloch abandoned the *Via Hyron's* prohibition against blood sorcery, they turned first to the most accessible art they could reach: Dur-an-Ki, the Way of Heaven and Earth. Erroneously known in some quarters as "Assamite Sorcery," the Children of Haqim are not the sole practitioners of the art and never have been, though they are often the most well-known of its adherents. Called an *ashipu* – meaning, variously, "sorcerer," "healer," and "exorcist" – the practitioners of this path call upon pacts with the ancient gods, spirits, and demons of Heaven and Earth to work their magic. The Molochim were, in fact, in the fairly unique position of knowing *which* antique gods and spirits and demons were masks for the Children of the Outer Dark and which were not. Fortunately (or perhaps not), they had an abundance of materials from which to craft the tools they used to contact their new patrons, many of whom were not offended by blades, musical instruments, scroll-cases, scrolls, or pens crafted from human remains. The Order of Moloch entered into covenants with those gods and spirits of a primarily chthonic nature, wrapping their souls in the protection of entities as mighty as those whose servants they fought and defending the borders of their own being from defilement from without. Favoring the gods of Mesopotamia, Sumer, and Phoenician deities who were not masks for their own elders, the most aggressive of the Order entered into compacts with gods of war, hunting infernalists across the Levant with *ghul* hunting-hounds in their train and

the breath of Enlil raging across the sands before them. The more contemplative among the Order were inclined to deities and spirits of a scholarly nature, and supped of knowledge from the tables of their patrons.

When the Order of Moloch finally abandoned the Levant, they traveled north into the domains of their scholarly allies among the Old Clan Tzimisce. It was there that they found a second path of blood magic in the arts of the *koldun*. An ancient tradition among the oldest of the Tzimisce lineages, the *koldun* witch-priests were slowly but surely dying out as the Clan fractured apart, assassinated or devoured by the Tremere with no apprentices to replace them, murdered by their own fratricidal Clanmates, or driven into torpor by the weight of ages. In return for the largess of their hospitality and protection, the Order of Moloch offered the Old Clan several ancillae not yet initiated into any path practiced by the Baali to become a new generation of *koldun* for their defenders. The Old Clan accepted, and no few among their number came to join the Order of Moloch when its hunters ventured out into the world in pursuit of infernal malfeasance again.

## Dark Thaumaturgy within the Tal'Mahe'Ra

Dark Thaumaturgy is one of the blackest of the black arts, and the members of the anti-infernalist column that practice it make no attempt to avoid that fact. Instead, they embrace that realization as a cruel but necessary evil. They defile themselves, their souls, and their hope of ever being wholly pure or free again so that others among the Tal'Mahe'Ra need not take that risk, and they do so for the sole purpose of fighting their ages-old enemies among the ranks of the infernal on even ground.

As with the Order of Moloch, the members of the Crowsong kamut favor pacts with entities that teach the magic of war or grant investments that ease the conduct of the same. Unlike the Order of Moloch, they are not interested in seeking a greater depth of knowledge or transcendence through an explicitly demonic vehicle. Desperation, more than any other motivation, led them to this pass. Slowly but surely, the corruption engendered by the genuinely malevolent and the desperately foolish began to devour Cainite society from within, and few possessed the insight to recognize that fact, while even fewer had the desire to halt it. Even the Tal'Mahe'Ra lost its focus for centuries, wallowing in the iniquities of secular politics and the acquisition of empty temporal power of the execution of their sacred duties. Only Seraph Phaedyme and her closest advisors realized the depth of the threat; only those she most trusted were set to the task of meeting it.

## The Agony and the Ecstasy

For the Assamite *ashipu*, one of the most common tools of communion with the entities that empower their blood is the miraculous drug known as *khalif*. A potent hallucinogen made from the resin of marijuana plants fed from Cainite blood, it is a common visionary aid for those who possess access to it. When smoked or drunk, it liberates the imbiber's mind and eases the passage into the trance-state that all *ashipu* strive to attain when seeking contact with their gods or attempting an enlightened experimental next step of their own.

The Baali *ashipu* of the Order of Moloch have not enjoyed the benefit of access to such a perceptual shortcut until very recently. Instead, they harnessed a far harsher advantage: the curse lying in their own blood. Born from the blackest of unholy darkness and ineradicably scarred by it, the agony they suffer in the presence of the pure and the divine became their first route to ecstatic transcendence. Already skilled at inflicting pain on others for the sake of keeping the Sleepers at their rest, they turned those abilities to rituals of personal excruciation and self-torture in order to induce states of altered consciousness. Of course, they also practiced less masochistic methods of attaining such transcendence, but for many of the Order of Moloch, the administration and endurance of pain comes far too naturally.

Like the Second and Third Generations before her, it is entirely possible that Seraph Phaedyme has permitted the doom of Enoch in through the front door. Crowsong, for now, stands strong in the face of infernal blandishments, accepting only that tutelage in the dark arts that they believe will aid them in their quest. It is, however, not possible to deal directly with demons and entirely escape the stain such corrupting intimacy leaves upon the soul. Temptation need not be overwhelming – in most cases, the inevitable descent begins with something small and subtle, like the tiny cell misplaced within the human body that will grow into cancer. The single instant of impure motivation will become a blot of darkness in the spirit, one that will grow to justify nearly any degree of



perversion or cruelty or inhumanity, provided it serves the burgeoning infernalist's cause. Even so, they are not beyond salvation. The Order of Moloch knows the means of severing such demonic bonds and armoring the souls of those who have been victims of demonic seduction against further degradation.

## The Denizens of Hell and Other Sundry Spiritual Realms

Infernalists call upon a vast profusion of demonic entities in their quest for personal power and the myriad satisfactions it brings, summoning and binding generally lesser beings to service and offering slivers – or even the entirety – of their sin-blackened souls to patrons of greater orders. Entire codices of unholy lore exist solely to provide the formulae for budding demonolaters to make contact with the denizens of the Pit and use a creature's true Name against it for binding and protection. These codices also provide the proper rites and rituals of spiritual debasement by which one may shuck off the thinning skin of humanity and become the monster that has always resided within. No matter what high-minded or low-souled purpose leads the summoner to call upon infernal assistance, her path is almost invariably fixed from that point: directly down into the nigh-inescapable coils of sweet, hellish temptation, moral compromise, and ethical decay.

Blood sorcerers of other, less repugnant traditions also call upon entities of a spiritual nature for assistance in their workings, to bind as servants, or to serve as intermediaries in the physical realm. Many of these beings have since come to be considered demonic, but not inherently infernal – chthonic elder gods worshiped before the rise of monotheism, violently unpredictable elemental entities, and savage spirits of forest and night and underworld. A Tzimisce or Baali *koldun* might call upon the strength of Tschernovog or Veles without selling their soul for the gift. An Assamite *ashipu* might send *ghúls* abroad to harry their enemies without entering into a pact with either Ereshkigal or Nergal for the privilege. Some argue that drawing a line between “demons” and “spirits” is crafting a distinction without a difference, a contention that generally fails to amuse.

In any case, demons and spirits share several traits in common.

**Incorporeal:** Demons and spirits are both incorporeal by nature until they are summoned across the Gauntlet, the liminal barrier that separates the many layers of spiritual reality from the physical world. Spirits overcome this deficiency through the use of charms that allow them to

forge temporary bodies from the substance of the world. Demons may use similar gifts of their own or take possession of a crafted reliquary or the flesh of a prepared host body.

**Supernatural Vigor and Healing:** Demons and spirits tend to render their physical forms substantially more potent than most humans, frequently rivaling or surpassing the might of a Cainite or lupine. They can endure vast amounts of punishment that would kill or incapacitate lesser creatures, and repair any damage that they do sustain to their physical shells at a similarly advanced rate. In practical terms, demons and spirits can possess anywhere from one to five dice of Potence, one to five dice of Fortitude, the capacity to soak aggravated damage from any source except explicitly holy magic or gifts powered by the True Faith of the wielder, and the ability to regenerate one to four health levels per turn.

**Imposing:** While demons and spirits can be both subtle and insidious when they wish, they favor grand and impressive displays when summoned and bound into a physical form. Such a form strikes the proper tone of awe and fear in the hearts and minds of those who dare to call upon them. Pragmatically, demons and spirits tend to possess several dots in Presence, Dominate, or Daimoinon, which allow them to twist the minds and manipulate the emotions of others – even the summoner, if she has not properly protected herself against their blandishments.

**Immortality:** Neither demons nor spirits can be slain by any earthly force – not even the supernatural gifts of Cainites, magi, or lupines. If the corporeal form is destroyed, the immortal creature within it is banished back to the realm from which it was summoned.

Demons and spirits alike can be broken down into broad categories, particularly those lesser beings that are summoned into the material world to serve the needs of a master. Most sorcerers go the fearsome effort (and even more fearsome expense) of summoning only those creatures whose gifts or skills they require for a particular task – binding their servitors with chains of magic and will, setting them loose to do the summoners' bidding, and dismissing them once their work is complete. Some summonings are of a more permanent nature: minions called from the world's deep spiritual or infernal shadows to meet the sorcerer's long-term needs, for advice, for companionship, or for protection. Summoners use a slightly different version of the standard binding magics, and offering their servants greater flexibility and even some degree of freedom in the arrangement.

(All demon mechanics below are based on vampire mechanical equivalents. See "Demons," V20 pp. 386-387, for more information.)

## Servitors

Servitor demons and spirits occupy the lowest tiers of the Umbral and infernal hierarchies. These beings embody a single emotional or elemental focus – creatures made entirely of rage or lust or cruelty, one of the five classical elements of Western or Eastern tradition, lesser banes, or minor demons of pestilence, misfortune, and mischief. Highly specialized and dubiously intelligent, they are often called for the purpose of setting them loose against the summoner's enemies to wreak what havoc and devastation they can before their physical forms are destroyed or the terms of their binding run out.

### Servitor Template

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 2-6, Dexterity 2-4, Stamina 2-7

**Abilities:** Alertness 2-4, Athletics 2-6, Brawl 2-6, Melee 2-6, Intimidation 2-4, Subterfuge 2-4, Stealth 2-6, Survival 2-4

**Equivalent Disciplines:** Auspex 3, Daimoinon 3, Fortitude 3, Thaumaturgy (Path of Flame) 5

**Attacks:** Claws and bite (4-7 dice, aggravated)

**Humanity: 1, Willpower: 5, Faith: 5**

### Advisors

Advisor demons and spirits not only occupy a higher stratum of the spiritual or infernal hierarchy, but they are also markedly more intelligent than their lesser kindred – and far more seductively dangerous to their so-called "masters" as well. Frequently summoned by sorcerers seeking a specialized tutor in the arts of the spirit or demonic courts, advisors run the gamut from seemingly wise and kindly, tricksome riddlers who tease the minds of their masters to greater heights of wisdom, or sensual companions whose skills exalt both the flesh and the intellect. Summoners who call upon spirit or demon counselors must be particularly careful to arm their souls well against the wiles of their servants, lest they find the tables turned on them.

### Advisor

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6

**Abilities:** Academics 5, Alertness 4, Athletics 5, Brawl 4, Drive 3, Empathy 8, Etiquette 10, Expression 5, Intimidation 8, Melee 5, Occult 6, Politics 5, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 10

**Equivalent Disciplines:** Auspex 5, Daimoinon 6, Dominate 6 (works on vampires Eighth Generation and greater), Fortitude 3, Presence 6

**Attacks:** Claws and bite (Strength +3, aggravated)

**Humanity: 1, Willpower: 10, Faith: 10**

## Warriors

Martially-inclined demons and spirits are most frequently summoned to function as bodyguards and assassins for their masters. Physically impressive but not as intelligent as their advisor cousins, they are often pure engines of destruction when provoked to violence, capable of cutting vast swaths of devastation when given leave to do so. They are also most likely to hold a grudge against anyone bold or foolish enough to call upon them, and frequently possess the wherewithal to turn against an incautious former master when the terms of their service are complete.

### Warrior

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8

**Abilities:** Academics 2, Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Intimidation 5, Melee 5, Occult 5, Subterfuge 3, Stealth 3,

**Equivalent Disciplines:** Auspex 3, Daimonion 3, Fortitude 5, Potence 5, Vicissitude 6

**Attacks:** Claws, teeth, tentacles, spikes, assorted martial physiological enhancements (Strength +3, aggravated)

**Humanity:** 1, **Willpower:** 10, **Faith:** 15

## Asakku: The Fevered Curse

*Something growls within our arts of the blood. Perhaps it is only the madness of those who contemplate our curse for too long, but I fear the Watchers are no dream, but separate and real creatures who jealously rattle the roots of our might. By necessity, we struggle against dreams or demons halfblindly. We are earnest fools.*

*Long ago, I knelt for an audience with Michael of Constantinople. Incense could not disguise the sweetness of his blood, heavy in the air because he was the Childe of Arikel, the Ancient. I suppressed my lust for his vitae and told him what we knew about the Asakku. I had not intended to. We had destroyed a nest within sight of the Hagia Sophia. He sensed it and willed me to appear, his magnetic presence a cat's claw in my heart, dragging me down to his court. I knew he'd give my companions the Final Death, but I hoped to survive by giving him the knowledge he would otherwise claim by force.*

*"You have the stink of the Franks upon you," he said. "It offends me." Brilliance emanated from him – a convolution of the powers he used to look like his divine namesake. I winced at the false sunlight and pressed my forehead to the marble.*

*"I chased them through Rus to the barrens beyond as the Manus Nigrum bade me," I said. "Returning, I have seen the corruption in your own city. Near and far, they conform to the patterns I tell you of now."*

*"Evil voices? Visions? You believe these beings speak to us when we explore our strengths – that they wrest our wills from us, correct?"*

*"Yes."*

*The light passed. I looked up to his beautiful, contempt-stained countenance. He knew the Discipline of the Shapers, so his face was a perfect instrument for his emotions. "You know nothing," he said. "Your diluted blood can never seek out the knowledge of the Thirteen. Have you even ever seen one of them?" He walked to me, his radiance like a memory of sunset now. Even knowing that this was a trick of his, I wept. My fallen red tears looked up from the floor like two devilish eyes on marble.*

*"You'll never hear the angels or see their light," he said. "You only guess, but do not experience. You blunder in ignorance and shadows, like the Franks under their high priest. I give your ancient order all respect by sparing you, but you will send this message to your dead haunts: your shadow crusade is not permitted here."*

*Some undead Varangian vassal of his escorted me to the gate. I never returned to the city. Less than a century later it burned while they ate Michael, for he had listened to the voices of angels.*

## Whispers from Afar, Whispers from Within

Caine's gifts are a two-edged sword. They provide god-like abilities, but might seduce practitioners into believing themselves gods. Kindred should not be so proud. The Disciplines were not Caine's to give, but stolen—manifested in defiance of God or swindled out of Lilith. The Third Generation built upon these violations of the natural order.

Studying ancient writings and questioning Methuselaha, a small group within the True Hand has learned that when some vampires explore Vicissitude, something makes contact with them. This corrupt, enigmatic intelligence offers power in exchange for the ability to manifest itself. Some believed that the Discipline itself was a malevolent being seeking a foothold in the lands of the living, but problems with the chronology of this theory has tarnished its reputation. The Hand's Tzimisce remember their Ancient shaping flesh in the earliest days. Furthermore, these entities have spoken to practitioners of other Disciplines, indicating that the Sect faces not a single threat but a pantheon of madness or banished things.



No matter the cause, the Elioud of the Tal'Mahe'Ra study and, when necessary, strike down those afflicted with the Asakku, a term named for Akkadian demons of fever and madness. To them, it is neutral, technical language, because they don't know whether the disease is a fever in the Beast or demons from forgotten episodes of Genesis. Named for the grandchildren of angels, modern Elioud are themselves better known by the term the Methuselah Michael gave them in insult over 800 years ago: the Shadow Crusade. These mutable names suit a cause that requires misdirection and secrecy.

The Elioud explore many theories about Asakku, but two dominate current thinking. The first holds that Asakku is a form of madness peculiar to Kindred who study Vicissitude too deeply. These adepts visualize the Discipline as an autonomous entity: a voice in the Beast. This refined manifestation destroys the vampire's original consciousness.

The second claims that Vicissitude was stolen from entities called *Iryi* or "Watchers." The Watchers want their power back, and a foothold in the lands of the living. To the Watchers, Vicissitude is like the living lures of deep-sea creatures: enticing lights that lead seekers straight to their owners' maws.

## Andeleon's Folly

The True Hand discovered Asakku through Andeleon, a childe of the Tzimisce Ancient. In life, Andeleon had been a Greek *pharmakos*: a witch who practiced human sacrifice. The Antediluvian envied this sorcery and seized it by embracing its practitioner. Andeleon was the Ancient's ideal emissary, able to match the occult knowledge of Enoch's old guardians. Arriving around 500 BCE, he helped solidify Kindred influence over the First City and gained access to the *Guarded Rubrics*. Its lore and his observations inspired Andeleon to explore the deep Tempest. If Enoch survived, the Second City and even the Gardens of the Elohim might persist as memories incarnate, hidden across the Sea of Shadows.

Accompanied by mortal and Cainite necromancers, Andeleon made three voyages in a ship made of tempered souls called the *Sighing Lion*. He stole into Stygia and recovered certain artifacts from the citadels of their masked lords. The shining princes of Swar turned him away until he offered them the spirit of an ascetic from Mahavira's retinue. Guided by the lost texts from the libraries of the dead, he guided his ship into black storms and down to the Labyrinth that separates existence from the primordial Abyss.




## Dirty Secrets Indeed

Like everything else in this book, this section is only “true” to the extent that the Elioud exists and believe that Asakku exists. This section explicitly presents it as an option for your chronicle, but that doesn’t mean it *must* exist in your game, even if your story is all about the True Hand. The Elioud might be nothing more than an extreme, schismatic cult that indulges in confirmation biases, superstition, and rampant self-deception, perhaps to serve an agenda set by hidden Kindred or others who might find a cult of killers who concentrate on certain Clans exceedingly useful.

Some within the Shadow Crusade believe infernalism in general opens the Kindred mind to Asakku. There’s less evidence for this than for its relationship to Vicissitude. But this is far from a hotly-contested topic, since Tal’Mahe’Ra orthodoxy has infernalists sentenced to death anyway; it matters not if they’re infected with Asakku or not.

On that note, consider this: the Elioud’s beliefs set them against the Sabbat, whose Tzimisce leaders practice Vicissitude. The Camarilla contains no significant traces of Vicissitude. And it just so happens that the bedrock of the Camarilla are Ventrue, masters of political and supernatural persuasion who also believe in ancient beings manipulating Kindred society....



In the black maze, Andeleon and his companions found a forest that whispered with human voices. At its heart, a ruined city sheltered malevolent ghosts called spectres. Andeleon believed the forest was Lilith’s D’hainu and the Second City stood in its midst. Its hazards slew all of his companions except for the yamasattva-scribe Yamadanda, but the two eventually reached a court of thirteen thrones ringing a bottomless well. Andeleon approached the well and whispered to it.

The Methuselah’s body rippled as if reflected on storm-tossed water. This amazed Yamadanda, who had never seen Vicissitude before – his companion preferred to rely on blood magic, and did not practice the Discipline ardently. Some versions of Yamadanda’s account say instead that

a visible entity erupted from the well, and Andeleon fed from it. In any case, the incident passed and Andeleon declared the journey a failure. Of the well he said, “I only spoke to myself.”

He made Yamadanda swear and offer a blood bond to destroy the scrolls chronicling their journey and never describe what he had seen. The yamasattva falsely assented; he’d already enchanted himself against the soul-binding properties of the blood. Later, he recited his lost writings and other recollections to Idran scholars, but not all of them understood his strange descriptions of the Labyrinth, its denizens, and the events of the voyage. Some versions of the resulting *Leonatic Scrolls* say Andeleon visited the “roots of Mount Meru” or “the starless end of the sky.” The Elioud have pieced together the most likely interpretation, but must still define much of what they know as mythic embellishment – though in arcane matters, myths often signify deeper truths.

Regardless, they know Andeleon mastered Vicissitude with remarkable speed, as did his childer, ghouls, and even chatterlings under his service. The last was a curious phenomenon, but the Methuselah refused to submit his servants for examination. His brood and staff eventually sequestered themselves in what would one day become the slums of outer Enoch. The yamasattva accorded him the respect due his lineage, sending mortals and neonate acolytes to slake his thirst. After these servants returned with broken minds (or not at all), the Wazir council sent a phalanx to evict him.

They discovered skittering things that resembled nothing in nature except for the faces, which were almost recognizable as those of the kine and Kindred they had once been. They tore apart chatterling soldiers. Red vines that smelled of offal tore at the heels of shakari. And Andeleon himself was gone – as befit his station as the Ancient’s childe, they’d given him a talisman to ease passage between worlds.

The True Hand purified the polluted place with fire and left it deserted for an age, but not without interrogating the distorted things that survived their assault. Each of them howled, “I am Aretstikapha!” before being consigned to the fire.

That was the beginning.

## Children of the Loyal Angels

The Elioud formed in the wake of the battle’s fear and confusion. The True Hand knew neither the extent nor the origin of the plague. In the 5th century BCE, the Tal’Mahe’Ra possessed a fraction of its current power and knowledge. Clans from “barbaric” parts of the world beyond the Fertile Crescent had barely made contact.

They were better known through Noddist and Bahari lore than direct experience. Some believed that Vicissitude itself was the disease because it did not appear in ancient fragments of the *Book of Nod*, where the “Temptation of Caine” enumerates the powers he learned from Lilith. The erroneous notion that Andeleon “contracted” Vicissitude from a spirit persisted for centuries, and still surfaces with rumors of Asakku.

Yamadanda selected the Elioud from lesser members of the True Hand. He flayed their minds for secrets and rebuilt them. He propelled iron needles through them in search of impurities. When it was over, he had bound an Idran, a Noddist, a newly arrived Lilith cultist, and a mortal necromancer to serve one another and discover the source and spread of Andeleon’s curse.

The four recruited others one at a time, carefully examining prospective members before quietly pressing them into the cause. Gone to death and Final Death, the first Elioud passed their legacy down to the present day. A handful of kamuts now serve the Shadow Crusade. These are too many to remain completely secret in such a small organization, but the True Hand has always indulged cults within cults, strange obsessions and rituals whose functions have been lost to the ages. Members of the True Hand looking from without may know some of its doctrines, but they would be hard-pressed to find them more significant than the countless lost religions, rites, and secret names that already infest the organization.

Yamadanda has been gone for at least a thousand years, his whereabouts unknown. The Elioud never replaced him as leader, preferring debate and cooperative rule. The modern cult officially doesn’t recognize the Del’Roh’s authority in matters related to the Shadow Crusade against Asakku, and she seems to ignore them in turn, though they haven’t tested her by assassinating a high ranking member of the Hand. Perhaps she’s given them autonomy in case Asakku penetrates the upper echelons. Perhaps she sees a convenient scapegoat she can activate when it suits her.

Based on nascent theories about the enemy, the founding four named their society “the Elioud” after children of the Nephilim, who they identified with the Antediluvians. They believe that unless they eradicate the plague, Asakku could destroy the Nephilim. If they cannot be judged and redeemed, Gehenna will fail, replaced by some horror of eternal, purposeless torture.

## Two Millennia of War

Setting forth from a nondescript estate in Enoch, the Elioud searched the lands of the living and dead for Andeleon and his childer, but also sought the occult lore

of the Disciplines. They mastered several forms of blood magic along the way.

Early forays sent them into wild places and strange cities. They encountered Cainites, sorcerers, and cults unknown to the Tal’Mahe’Ra. As accidental ambassadors, they built alliances throughout the Western world, inducting trustworthy associates into the *Manus Nigrum*. Thus, they increased the Western Hand’s reach as a side effect of their primary mission. Battles across the ages convinced them that Andeleon’s disease was not only a persistent threat, but reached beyond a single Methuselah’s twisted Vicissitude.

## Western Dacia: 100 CE

LEFT SARMIZEGETUSA AT THE BEHEST OF ITS SELF-STYLED CAINITE PROCURATOR, WHO ACCUSED US OF DEFYING THE BLOOD SILENCE. YET IT WAS NECESSARY TO FEED FROM ITS POPULACE, FOR WE HUNGURED AND NEEDED THE STRENGTH TO PURSUE OUR QUARRY. WITH THE BENEFIT OF OUR BLOOD, THE WITCH-STEEDES WERE AS SWIFT AS PROMISED. AFTER FOUR NIGHTS, WE SAW FIRST GREAT GERMANIAN TREES, THOUGH NOT THE TRUE THICK OF THE BARBARIAN WOOD.

THE CREATURE WAS EASY TO FOLLOW, FOR IT LEFT A TRAIL OF MALFORMED KINE AND OTHER ANIMALS. WE SLEW AND BURNED THEM. ULSA DISPATCHED SOME HEAVING THING THAT HAD ONCE BEEN A MAN AND A BEAR. I USED THAT SPELL I LEARNED FROM THE SYRIAN TO CONFIRM THE THING HAD INGESTED BLOOD FROM THE LINE OF ANDELEON. WE FINALLY CORNERED OUR TRUE QUARRY IN ONE OF THE EARTHEN MAZES THAT THE FIRST ELDERS MADE WHEN THEY STRUCK OUT INTO THE WORLD, THOUGH IT WAS OTHERWISE ABANDONED.

I WILL NOT WASTE INK ON A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE. YOUR SERVANT AULUS, WHO RETURNS WITH THIS SCROLL, IS TRAINED IN THE ART OF MEMORY. HE WILL DESCRIBE OUR EFFORTS



AND ITS TWISTED BODY, WHICH IS NOW ASH. I PRESERVED SOME OF ITS BLOOD, WHICH I SENT WITH HIM, BUT KNOW THAT I HAVE ALREADY EXAMINED IT. IT IS NOT OF THE LINE OF ANOELEON. THEREFORE, THIS SICKNESS IS NOT CONFINED TO HIS LINEAGE, THOUGH IT IS LIKELY THAT IT ORANK FROM HIM, AND ANOELEON WAS SURELY CLOSE, FOR HE MADE THE BEAR-CREATURE.

PLEASE QUESTION AULUS CLOSELY ABOUT THE THINGS IT SAID THROUGH ITS MANY MOUTHS. MOST OF IT WAS INCOMPREHENSIBLE, THOUGH I AM CURIOUS ABOUT ITS MENTION OF KUPA-LA. IT ACCUSED US OF BEING THE SERVANT OF THIS PERSON, OR WHATEVER IT IS. PERHAPS IT'S A OACIAN GOO?

### Zaragoza, Al-Andalus: 1109 CE

at the forefront of defending the city from Navarre and its allies. The Banu Haqim reward exceptional fighters with the strength of their Vitae. This also ensures their loyalty to the cause. In fact, their ghouls might be more pious than the average Zaragozan, who treats Ummah and Crusader alike with grim indifference, for they do not know who will rule them tomorrow. The Banu Haqim called me because they feared impiety, but not from their protectorate or apprentices. Their master had abandoned them. He uttered blasphemy before departing on the moonrise, and he was skilled enough to conceal his tracks.

Fortunately, your secret vassal Ibn-Shaddad remembered we ministered to troubled spirits, and that we possessed certain capabilities that might be used to follow their errant teacher. I employed my Blood Familiar Danna, who told me that petty ifrit always followed elders

in the Blood, and bound one to follow its scent like some hunting hound. Thus, we discovered a secret wing of Castle al-Jafariya. It was hidden by the teacher's powers of the Blood, which he had mixed into the mortar, but this invisible tower possessed a single exposed door.

Exploring the tower, I found an octagonal room. Scratched upon the walls were verses in the language of Enoch, whose meaning I will discuss upon my return. I found the elder's body, but it was hollow and cut open, as if he had been fashioned of blackened, wax-stiffened leather. I thought there was nothing else but his long shadow, but when I walked around the body I saw it was not black but deep red. It was his double, made of blood.

It arose on my approach, saying, "I am the day the blood spoke. I am the night of wailing red rain." I recognized their parables, but when I spoke the name

### Nagasaki, Nippon: 1582 CE

presence of the Warring Hand is exaggerated. I am your ideal agent here. They watch sailors from the Black Ships closely. I appear to be an ordinary sort of merchant who has taken the route from Iuchu, foreign but not unfamiliar. The Spanish also took little notice of me. As Devadatta had given me a vision of the quarry, I identified him immediately despite his new body. I recognized the habit of smiling at music in a particular way and his preference for red, though I was only certain when he stood to greet another sailor and I saw his shadow's six-angled hands.

I did not confront him directly. Instead, I contrived to offend another Spaniard and, taking hold of his spirit, insinuated my commands. He approached the soul-eaten one and suggested they acquire their own room at the inn, and in private addressed him as

*"Azaneal." I had employed a spell of watching from afar. The soul-eaten one's shadow drove its fingers into the other sailor's eyes. Darkness swallowed the body, doubtless dismissing it to the place that is not a place, and I ended my spell, for things with such capabilities may slip through magical eyes to the sorcerer who looks through them.*

*Therefore, you must be correct. If the Lasombra Ancient has fallen, The Watcher of Darkness lies behind the plot. It wishes to send its creatures to many places as a strategy to avoid banishment. I fear a direct assault on the Castle of Shadows may be ineffective. Yet as the magical Art teaches,*

## Awjilah, Libya: 1984 CE

constructed and seemingly abandoned by the Libyan Army. Light artillery would have been useless and armor, while technically available from our contacts, would have attracted far too much attention. We resigned ourselves to light arms and set the assault for 1 AM. I would have preferred daylight, but it would have put the most competent operatives out of commission.

Individual after-action reports and a detailed timeline accompany this summary. In short, we encountered eight former Kindred and maybe two dozen former kine, though of course as is usual when the Shaper is involved, it's impossible to know for certain — but we didn't just see Vicissitude at work. Reports include three confirmed Shadow sightings. On two occasions we witnessed the Corrupted manifest both abilities, along with other phenomena we have yet to identify. This is a new problem.

We use a buddy system for our kine occult assets. They keep an eye on each other and report to separate Kindred. After performing a standard site burn, we sent them in. Mudimbe describes what she encountered in a separate document I'm not qualified to comment on, because I don't know anything about Bahari metaphysics. You can work out what a "Fallen Garden" means with your own experts. In any event it's persistent, so I recommend executing Salem Imposture. The 4450th Tactical Group should get wheels

## Near Nord, Greenland, 2009 CE

**MRupa:** Test.

**VMacgregor:** Ack. Weather's clear and I don't think they're interested in the LAN.

**MRupa:** Between that and the Sat we should be fine. LAN's got a backup battery, right?

**VMacgregor:** I torched the generator, we're talking, and the Sat isn't over the horizon yet so what do \*you\* think?

**MRupa:** Fuck you, Vic. Focus on the work. You and I can have words in E. My count is 8 g-types spotted, 6 down. I can't confirm any v-types but AFAIK there's got to be one this far up to feed them, right? Nothing in the ground. I don't think it can propagate in permafrost.

**VMacgregor:** I'm at 10 spotted, 7 down but we both swept the hangar, so I think there's overlap. No confirmed v-type here, either.

**MRupa:** We're pretty sure everybody else is dead/Fdead, right?

**VMacgregor:** Yeah. IMO they're eating, not converting. But they got Arjun's stick, so no gate.

**MRupa:** Oh shit.

**VMacgregor:** No kidding. How far do you think we can make it before we freeze solid? We ain't endothermic. Not sure I want to build an igloo and take chances with a flare.

**MRupa:** Not that.

**VMacgregor:** ?

**MRupa:** Can they operate it? Get to E?

**VMacgregor:** No. Need password.

**MRupa:** I'm closest to the base. It'll show an aura. Maybe I can make a run for it, call the cavalry.

**VMacgregor:** Already called. They're coming.

**MRupa:** Think. Nobody's been here by spell before, so they can't pop in instantly. By the time the plane comes we'll be vampsicles. Is this a

trust thing? We can meet first and leave together, but that might be tricky. You'd have to come back to the base, and I don't know how many of them are still out there.

**VMacgregor:** Trust thing? Yeah, you could say that. Everybody knows the stick's word protected.

**VMacgregor:** You things are smarter than I thought.

**MRupa:** We can make an arrangement.

**VMacgregor:** You'll never find the detonator in time, demon.

## The Corrupted Way

If the Asakku phenomenon is a disease, Elioud warrior-scholars know its symptoms but not its etiology. They give the most credence to two theories. There used to be other theories, but most of them have broken under accumulated evidence. They know the Asakku strikes Kindred who study Vicissitude with particular focus, but most escape the curse. Only a few fall under its sway

so obviously that the Shadow Crusade can comfortably target them for destruction.

## The Watchers

Hardline mystics in the Elioud believe Asakku comes from vengeful, dead things from before the Flood, come to retake what the Antediluvians stole. For them, this is a simpler explanation than psychological folderol, and it fits the Shadow Crusade's cultic traditions the best.

The Elioud possess a unique perspective on the era of Genesis. Depending on the individual Elioud, it's a theology, ideology, or a technical language for occult principles. Founded by sorcerers well versed in twisting myths for pragmatic ends, Elioud have never mandated literal belief in their mysteries. Yet they dwell in Enoch under the Curse of their kind, and know that not *everything* strange is allegorical.

They call the Dark Father Azazel, or Azazel-Caine to specify his incarnation as the slayer of Abel. God made him a scapegoat for humanity to punish him. Seth's descendants could shun Caine as personified sin, blaming him for troubles that God Himself unleashed. As Azazel, Caine went into the Abyss between places in the form of a spirit. Lilith guided him to safety in the darkness, where he embraced three natures in opposition to the three



angels who cursed him. His wrath emanated sevenfold, so he embraced ten Qlippoth: shells of anti-being and deception. Spurned by angels, Azazel-Caine became a dark angel, earthly instead of celestial, and arose in might to lay a master's hand upon the world.

Defying God (or the plural Elohim, for those who believe in the Bahari theory of multiple demiurges), he and Lilith begat ten *Iryi*, or "Watchers," from the substance of the Qlippoth. They were not vampires in the modern sense, nor did they belong to any order of beings a sorcerer-theologian could easily classify. Like their parents, they were anti-divine, empowered by Elohim curses that were bent upon themselves. Most Kindred would identify them as members of the Second Generation. Azazel-Caine could not have created the *Iryi* without Lilith. She claimed seven to rebuild the paradises destroyed by spiteful angels. The Dark Father took three to found Enoch, for he meant to rule with the mercy God had never shown him. These three Embraced those children of Seth who became the Third Generation. The Elioud identify these Antediluvians with the Nephilim of angelic lore.

The Nephilim were restless. Azazel-Caine commanded them to avoid Lilith's wilderness and be satisfied with ruling over men and women, but inheriting the Dark Father's thirst, they visited horrors upon their subjects. Enoch became a city of screams, cursed by nomads who were unfortunate enough to know of it. Therefore, Azazel-Caine relented and said, "Go into the land of Nod which I have forsaken, where the Mother and her Watchers will give you ease."

They stalked out in thirst and rage and came upon verdant D'hainu, its fruits born of the last seeds of Eden. Lilith's seven *Iryi* dwelled there as angels of the Earth, stewards of monsters and lesser gods. The Nephilim delighted in the discovery and devoured them all, destroying D'hainu. The spirits of the Watchers returned to the Qlippoth where they had dwelled before birth, but the Nephilim drank their creative powers: They created childer. One of those childer sinned so greatly as to damn each of the Third Generation; that childer discovered Vicissitude. The Third Generation returned to Enoch in glory, but had sinned so greatly that the One Above sent the Deluge.

Watchers still dwell in the Qlippoth, each commanding one of these dark stations. They whisper to descendants of the Nephilim who stole anti-divine attributes, promising easy power in exchange for greater control over Kindred minds and bodies. Andeleon was not the first to be seduced. The Watcher Azaneal promised the Lasombra immortality in bottomless darkness. Others discovered the true owners of their Disciplines, looked within, and were corrupted.

In this context, the War of Ages takes on deeper significance unknown even to uninitiated elders. Elioud who believe in the Watchers see the Anarch Revolt as Aretstikapha's and Azaneal's triumph. They disposed of the Ancients whose wills prevented them from manifesting in the world above. Now they can influence their Clans freely. To the Shadow Crusade, it is no coincidence that the Camarilla primarily formed around Kindred without Vicissitude, some Elioud take credit for that fact.

## The Path of Asakku

No matter the ultimate origin of the Asakku state, the Storyteller may use the Path of the Asakku to represent a Kindred's surrender to its spiritual pollution. Vampires set upon the Path when they grow obsessed with Vicissitude to the point of identifying with the Discipline itself. This is not always a voluntary journey; some unconsciously seek corruption after making contact with another victim of Asakku.

To qualify for the Path, the character must lower her current Humanity or Path rating to 3 or less and follow the rules set out in **V20**, pp. 315-316. The character may transfer from another Path of Enlightenment to the Path of Asakku. The character must attain at least four dots in Vicissitude and make contact with the Path by ingesting the blood of an Asakku, studying the lore of the Watchers, or performing another task set by the Storyteller.

Taking the first dot of this Path is an irrevocable choice. The character cannot switch Paths again, and if her rating drops to 0, she is lost to the Beast and falls under the Storyteller's control. The Storyteller might make exceptions for mighty spells and obscure rituals, but if discovered, these permanently alter the chronicle, since the Elioud can now cure instead of destroy the Asakku.

**Nicknames:** Corrupted

**Virtues:** Conviction and Instinct

**Bearing:** Otherworldly. Followers adopt an alien demeanor. Most utilize their Vicissitude constantly. Even when they attempt to blend in, all but the cleverest make unusual mistakes, marking themselves as beings unfamiliar with the human world. They ignore social conventions and stare in odd directions. An Asakku's bearing modifier applies to Awareness and Occult rolls to sense supernatural energies.

**Basic Beliefs:** Asakku followers are less an ideology than a state of being prompted by the obsessive study of Vicissitude and communion with the dark intelligences behind it. As members of an intuitive Path, the Corrupted only use common terminology after working together for some time, though advanced followers display a strange



synchronicity at times. They may call the presence they summon forth a “shadow within” or a “Watcher,” or identify with one of the Qliphothic demons associated with Vicissitude.

Vicissitude is the focus of the Corrupted’s obsessions. It spreads this power through blood and instruction as widely as possible. They resent untainted Kindred who inherit Vicissitude through a Clan or bloodline, devoting special attention to converting or destroying them.

**Common Abilities:** Since their Path relies on acquiring raw supernatural power, Asakku grow obsessed with invisible forces, honing their Awareness and master the Occult Knowledge. Some Corrupted grow interested in the history of their kind or the measurable effects of their Disciplines, and study Academics and Science as well. They are well aware that they would be hunted for their disease and sometimes cultivate Stealth and Larceny to cover their tracks.

**Preferred Disciplines:** As noted, Corrupted favor Vicissitude, and indeed must have it. Other Disciplines are not disallowed, but often fall by the wayside in focus. However, some particularly devoted Asakku develop other Disciplines if only to create Combination Disciplines to broaden their Vicissitude’s scope.

## The Ethics of the Path

- You are not a vampire. You are a Discipline personified: an emanation of a Watcher or a shadow within your Beast.
- You are no more an individual than a raptor’s feather on a wing or a single memory locked in a mind with a million memories.
- Master Vicissitude and it will unlock the secrets of the Ancients.
- Non-Asakku who inherit Vicissitude from a Clan or bloodline usurp power. Convert or destroy them.
- The voice within you cries for a presence on Earth. Share your power, blood, and Path to host it.
- Hide your nature from enemies. Prepare a place to dwell in advance of your ultimate transformation.

## Transmutations

As a vampire on the Path of the Asakku increasingly surrenders to her Vicissitude, she attains special abilities. These Transmutations represent the Discipline’s will to

## Hierarchy of Sins against the Asakku

Rating	Moral Guideline	Rationale
10	Using or answering to your former name	You are not a vampire. You are one strand in a web of power.
9	Refusing to use Vicissitude at every opportunity	Become your power.
8	Failing to increase your command of Vicissitude to the greatest extent possible	You must apply all your efforts to identifying with the Watcher within.
7	Failing to commit Amaranth or convert a member of the Clan that practices Vicissitude	Take back the power they have stolen.
6	Refusing to teach Vicissitude	Let the Watcher see through a thousand eyes.
5	Allowing enemies to discover your true haven	Your lair belongs to the Watcher.
4	Betraying another of the Corrupted	We emanate from the same darkness and must claw our way into the world together.
3	Allowing enemies to discover your true nature	Let Caine's bastards forget the origins of their gifts until we are ready to reclaim them openly.
2	Refusing to convert those under the blood bond to the Path	The Watcher requires followers to manifest more powerfully.
1	Failing to use Vicissitude nightly, unless in torpor	The murmuring shadow within must speak

expand into other Cainites and living things, and its ability to take firmer hold of the vampire's consciousness. A follower of the Path gains Sinister Mastery at the first dot of the Path, and another Transmutation of the player's choice at every even numbered dot thereafter. She can gain and lose power depending on her degree of harmony with the Discipline's ruling entity. Once a Transmutation is selected, it is set – when the character returns from a Path rating drop and re-qualifies, she regains the prior Transmutation.

**Sinister Mastery (Possessed by All Asakku):** The Corrupted reduces her Vicissitude experience cost multiplier by 1. Combination Disciplines featuring Vicissitude are purchased at half cost, rounded up.

**Blood Inception:** The Corrupted can convert a fallen Cainite into an Asakku like herself. The victim must be placed in torpor and completely exsanguinated, after which the Corrupted must replace at least half of his blood pool with her own.

Upon the following sunset the target awakens, converted to the Path of Asakku. If the victim does not possess Vicissitude, he acquires one dot, but loses another dot in his weakest Discipline. The converted character cannot rise above the first dot in the Path until he attains four dots in Vicissitude. Blood Inception counts as *two* steps toward the blood bond.

**Inner Babble:** The whispering Beast or Watcher within fills the vampire's mind with a stream of dissonant sounds and impossible images. Unfathomable emotions ripple through her aura. Telepathy (wanted or not) fails against the wall of babble. Auspex and similar powers can no longer read the character's aura except to note its strange, hazy appearance.

**Occultation:** The Asakku's increasingly alien nature becomes something the very Earth seeks to abjure. Fate erases the Corrupted's footsteps. Freak events erase records of her presence. This Transmutation may be selected multiple times. Each time it is selected, give the character one point of the Arcane Merit (p. 177). This stacks with existing points of Arcane.

**Potentiation:** The Asakku acquires the power to exceed her Generation's limit on Vicissitude mastery by one dot. The character may acquire this Transmutation up to three times. It can never allow her to exceed the ninth dot.

**Seeding the Garden:** Bleeding into living soil, the Asakku infects an area with the essence of his Vicissitude. Each blood point poisons the local ecosystem for one lunar month or until consumed by a large animal. The poison spreads over a contiguous area whose ultimate size is determined by the Storyteller, but which grows based on the strength of the Asakku's Generation and Vicissitude dots. Plants take on a reddish hue and manifest elements of the Asakku's Vicissitude, warping and twisting in alien fashion.

An animal that eats plants or drinks water from a seeded garden may indirectly ingest one point of the invested blood per month, becoming a ghoul with one dot of Potence and one dot in Vicissitude. If it is eaten in turn, the predator inherits the ghoul state. If the Corrupted possesses the Soul Whispers Transmutation, below, she may determine which creatures may benefit from her blood, if any.

**Soul Whispers:** The Asakku within the Corrupted attains the ability to reach out through the blood to creatures tainted by its vitae or Vicissitude. Soul Whispers may be used on the Asakku's ghouls, other Corrupted it has incepted, and any being it has tainted with the Sinister Obsession derangement (p. 118). If the player spends a blood point, the Corrupted may experience what her target senses, though not his thoughts. She may use the Auspex, Animalism, Dominate, and Vicissitude Disciplines through this connection as if she were touching him, and relay emotions and instincts, such as the sense that someone the target sees is an enemy (though not information explaining why this is so). If the target possesses at least a dot in Vicissitude, the Corrupted may utilize any rank of Vicissitude through the target, using it as a proxy. Getting the creature to perform any prerequisite actions, such as grasping flesh to use Vicissitude, may prove difficult unless the Corrupted can send coherent instructions.

### Soul Infection

Corrupted who do not enter the Path voluntarily fall to it when blood and supernatural power give a Watcher access to a Kindred's soul. It whispers and prods her down the road to degeneration. This is normally a gradual process, though Asakku with the Blood Inception Transmutation (p. 117) can inflict it more rapidly upon captured, torpid prey.

Storyteller characters fall prey to the Asakku whenever you see fit, but as Storyteller, you may require specific guidelines. You might decide that the protagonists can never become Asakku, or you might discuss the possibility with a player outside of the session. If she wishes, her character can violate his former moral code and explore the Path without needing any special rules. She controls his descent, but in the story, he's being lured in.

### Sinister Obsession

If you'd prefer a more structured method, you may instead decide that certain events make it possible for a character to acquire a new derangement: *Sinister Obsession*. It can only take hold in one of the following circumstances:

- The character drinks Asakku-infected blood.
- The character makes telepathic contact (via Auspex or another supernatural ability) with a member of the Path.

- A Corrupted uses Vicissitude on the character to great effect (Storyteller's discretion, but five successes with a four dot or higher power should be sufficient.)

When any of these circumstances have been satisfied, the character will acquire Soul Infection as the next derangement earned out of moral degeneration (a botched Conscience or Conviction roll as per V20, p. 310).

The derangement has two effects. First, the character must succeed at a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to act on any long-term goal other than improving Vicissitude. Voices and bizarre images flood her mind, encouraging her to pursue Vicissitude first. Second, each dot she possesses in Vicissitude strengthens its alien voice at the expense of her ethical resolve, adding one success to the minimum needed to avoid a future degeneration check. This hastens the character's degeneration, but automatically makes the Path of Asakku available as a possible source of "salvation."

## The City that Caine Built

Wraiths walk amongst ruined cities and in the shadows of buildings long since destroyed in a place they call the Shadowlands. Beyond death's shroud, these shades spy on the living, siphoning passions to keep their souls enlivened. If they survive, they may descend deeper into the Underworld, inhabiting a dark island of sorrow populated by ancient ghosts.

If they're strong and lucky, these souls find a niche, a calling, or a place to while away eternity. If they're unlucky, they're enslaved by the strong, tossed into mighty forges and screaming forever as their souls are carbonized into steel. Others are manacled, forced into the holds of sunken ships to serve as slaves in some other dead kingdom. It's there they learn a horrid truth.

Cities can also die. They, too, leave ghosts behind. One city's name is whispered, again and again, in the holds of those dead ships.

*Enoch.*

### The First City

*"And the Children of Seth made] him King of their great City, The First City. ...And so, it came to pass that Caine beget Enoch and, so doing, named the First City Enoch."*

Enoch died as a symbol of vampiric defiance, but before that, it lived as a mortal city. The metropolises of ancient Mesopotamia were mud and brick, baked in the sun and

piled high in tribute to the gods. Ubar – the Queen of Frankincense – was the finest, a metropolis of perfumes and commerce nestled within a river delta, the waters softly caressing the adjoining fields of the city. From that fertility, groves and gardens bloomed. Heavy clouds of incense clung to great burning braziers, crouched on rooftops of stone. The city's people had all they desired, but they found no purpose beyond enjoying their days, and dark things threatened their nights. Every new moon, the planting celebration would be threatened by the demons that stalked the fields. The people lacked only a leader, a guardian, a god. They sent their finest citizen questing in the deserts beyond, that they would finally lack for nothing.

The leader that the citizen brought was not of the city. He was crowned under the stars as an outsider, a visionary with the will to remake the metropolis of life and fragrance into a salve for his loneliness. He never claimed to be a god, but said nothing when the temples to his name rose. In time he brought more such as himself into the night, monsters who walked like men.

A black renaissance swept through Ubar, taking centuries to darken fully. The new gods deferred only to their progenitor, arraying themselves in a pantheon for the mortals of the city. The obeisance commanded by the vampires reshaped the city in their image: palaces built without windows, knowing the light of neither flame nor sun. The rivers that fed the city were dredged and diverted and their fields worked to dust, the rich silt fueling lives fated to end in bloody orgies. Great statues stretched skyward in arrogant defiance. The dark king painted a line of his blood upon his high house, which smoked and crawled around the dwelling until the longest day of the year eradicated it fully. Ubar's people, so used to luxury, found themselves aching for a god's kiss. They said nothing when their leader renamed the city for the citizen who found him.

Enoch towered over the cities of prehistory, but all knew that it was a city destined to consume itself. For among the gods were the wise, the fierce, the beautiful beyond compare – but all drank of the city, and all demanded a too-heavy price as their immortal due. For their hubris, they were cast down. As they perished beneath the waves, so too did the Black City. It fell, until it could fall no more.

### **Enoch and the Underworld**

The dead realms where the city came to rest are comprised of four metaphysical parts. First among them are the **Shadowlands**, which resemble the living world down to landmarks and geographical features. Once-renowned buildings rendered destroyed or ruined possess an ontological inertia, persisting in the Shadowlands for decades

### **Vampires in the Underworld**

Beings of stasis and death, vampires find the Underworld to be cold, but strangely comforting. Most enter the Shadowlands through the Ash Path of Necromancy, though stranger methods exist, and the Itarjana's entire existence focuses on easing passage directly to the Black City. Within the Shadowlands, the only part of the Underworld with physical correspondence, the Shroud-weakened daylight merely results in bashing damage. Below the Shadowlands, vampires are buoyed by the energies of death. Deep in the sunless liminal stratum between the abyss and the living lands, vampires do not feel the need to sleep, and find themselves resistant to the spiritual effects of the ghost storms. Being able to operate in darkness eternal comes at a stark cost, as few minds can withstand constant wakefulness. Besides rendering one unable to recover Willpower by sleeping, the vampire must still expend a blood point every 24 hours. Staying awake for more weeks than one's Willpower rating increases the difficulty of all Willpower rolls by 2 and inflames any existing Derangements. The vampire frays spiritually, becoming distracted and irritable; their inner monologue takes on a barbed and sharpened aspect, savagely mocking their own flaws and weaknesses in self-deprecation. Only the strongest of wills can endure such fatigued depression – it's rumored that the Del'Roh has never slept since the sect reconquered Enoch.

or centuries after their demise. Slowly but surely, these dead cities mirror their living counterparts. Vampires enter these lands through the power of the Ash Path of Necromancy. Deeper still are the **Dark Kingdoms**, places with no Earthly correspondence that serve as an "afterlife" for cultures living and dead. In these lands, there is no sun, and the dead build cities out of spiritual detritus and the manifest soul-stuff of their fellows.

The Kingdoms exist as islands of conceptual stability upon the **Tempest**, a massive, roiling storm that usually manifests as a stormy sea. Prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the Tempest was known as the Sea of Shadows, a relatively



calm sea consisting of fragmented memories and rotten, grasping hands just below the surface. Now, the storms' lightning illumines the sickness within souls, while the waves rip away will and remembrances. And that's when the storms are merely air and water, instead of magma-tempered glass or the regret of a loveless marriage.

The final layer of the Underworld is a rocky substratum under the Tempest, where meaning, coherency and sense of self are ground down into nothingness. The **Labyrinth** is comprised of the most broken pieces of the living world, a maze of infinite size and subtle malevolence, inhabited by ghosts who worship and commune with the void.

Enoch is an aberration — a primeval city existing within the Tempest and connecting directly to the Labyrinth, with no natural illumination save the sheet lightning that sweeps through the eternal storm. Five great curved rocky spires rise from the sea, cradling the area in which the city resides and raising it high above the troubled waters, acting as natural breakers for the storms that spray the streets and leave them sodden. Rawi poets have noted the uncanny resemblance to a hand since medieval times, leading to many new volumes within the Tal'Mahe'Ra's library. Great chains of soulsteel, an alloy made from Labyrinth iron and the souls of the weak, sway in the

churning maelstrom and babble still in Enochian patois. They anchor the tops of the spires to the black marble outer walls of the city.

There are no fires in Enoch, by order of the Del'Roh. With the vast amounts of ghostly stone involved in the architecture, the city probably wouldn't burn anyways. Between the spire-chains float thousands of enslaved ghosts, their bodies ballooned to buoyancy and translucency, necromancy firing their corpus with inner lights. Carried aloft by the vortex of stormwinds that circle high above the city, they orbit the inner spires in an orderly manner, a gently moaning sidereal timepiece. The Idran have no name for the slaves who keep the city lit with false starlight, but Hand members Embraced within the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have taken to calling them the Doomsday Clock.

## Necropolis Enoch

Enoch contains multitudes.

When a city dies in the living world, it falls into the Shadowlands. There it succumbs to the forces of decay far more slowly than in the living world, but succumb it will. The Idran and the Nagaraja, during the Dark Ages





## Prediluvian Enoch

from the journals of John Sidestorm


Despite Niccolo Espuccio's blind faith, his excavations have produced some startling archaeology. Parts of his treatise remind me of "creationist scientists" desperately trying to reconcile their faith with fact – but like those scientists, he's had to find some rational evidence to back up what he's saying, even if his conclusions are worthless. At the behest of his Enrathi cousins, and in payment for a boon I owe them, I've presented his work to the Idran to procure funding for further excavations and an attempt to find the material site of the city.

By Niccolo's reasoning, Ubar's architecture is anachronistic to defy modern scholarship – Ghemal's construction vaguely resembles *Etemen-nigur*, the Ur Ziggurat, but vastly exceeds and predates it besides by at least four millennia. Even taking the Nomadic Pastoral Complex and cultural movement away from urban centers as a regression for city architecture (and I've got my doubts on *that* scholarship) the city can't predate 2000 BCE. Niccolo's treatise also references a possible translation of the Chronicles of Caine that identifies Lilith as Ishtar and posits that the city was originally populated by Bahari, something that greatly pleases the Toreador *antitribu* amongst the Rawi but, honestly, smacks of bullshit to me.

Here's where Niccolo's scholarship comes through: the excavated sites within the city show

an unbelievably rapid progression from Neolithic to Chalcolithic-style structures. The inner walls, where they still stand, are positively mid-Bronze Age, and the biggest strain to credulity is the Dread Palace itself. Take that out of the mix, and the rest of the sites merely strain belief for as being around prior to 9000 BCE. He goes even further, citing our apocrypha: the version of the Guarded Rubrics recovered from the debased Mitrū makes no mention of Caine's childe Enosch-named-Enoch. It instead records several vampires – Mekhet, Ilyes, Erinye – as "of Enoch", along with the more famed names of Arikel, Malkav, Saulot. Taken at face value, Enoch was by far the most prolific sire, causing the Rawi to wonder if Enoch, not Ubar, was an already extant city that Caine embraced as his own. Niccolo posits that many vampires were literally *of Enoch* – colloquially, vampires of the city.

Curious scholarship aside, three thoughts emerge: the original foundation of the city is very likely the city conquered and advanced by Caine; we might very well be missing a number of Antediluvians *and* Second Generation progenitors; and the Dread Palace Ghemal itself came *after* the Flood, when Enoch had come to rest in the Underworld. I can't say which possibility bothers me more.



and the sect's schism, spent a great deal of time developing rituals that replicated Enoch's passage into the Underworld, and went about stealing ruined landmarks and dead cities – especially those that had been touched by the childer of Caine. They still do so in these nights, though far more carefully and secretly, given the greater prevalence of necromancy.

Like all necropolises, Enoch is no longer a place for the quick – only the dead. The *Book of Nod* describes the history

of Enoch as a city that Caine created, renaming it after the name chosen by his first-Embraced son. No book records how Enoch came to reside in the Underworld, however. The prevailing theory holds that the passage of the Aralu into the Underworld recreated the city, but the Idran deride this element of the Caine mythos, believing the city's physicality to be the linchpin of the cosmos. Several accomplished necromancers advanced the idea that the First City came unmoored from the Shadowlands, drifting

further down until it came to rest atop the then-quiescent Labyrinth. The Cult of Moloch instead holds the city to be a sentient, spiritual composite of the many failed attempts at vampiric praxis, a dread assemblage of Enoch, Carthage, and Chorazin's necropolises. Only the former group truly cares about the city's history. For the sect, Enoch is an invincible stronghold and priceless lore repository, easily accessed by the cult's allies, impossible to reach for their enemies.

After the sect's reunification, the Western Hand was astounded to find that Enoch was far more than it had been in Caine's nights. The city's walls contain a much larger metropolitan area than should be possible, miles of sprawl and secrets ripped whole from the Shadowlands by necromancy and layered over the city, a mélange of necropolises. Much of it is uninhabited, comprised of ancient Korean, Thai, Indian, and Mesopotamian cities, and two *tollans*—the great capital cities of the Maya and other Mesoamerican cultures—have found residence in Enoch. Modern skyscrapers and high-rises also stretch through the city in the form of the Slums.

### **Walking the Streets**

Parts of the city and the Black Citadel still bear the impacts of ghost-cannon and the scorch marks of pyre-flames, grim reminders of Enoch's occupation. Yet the patterns of damage defy rhyme or reason. Rawi poets have often commented on how cities in the living lands have a spirit to them, an attitude. If Enoch has a spirit, it is one of dread vengeance, a composite without a hope of sanity.

A thousand forgotten monuments, vampiric and mortal, rest in the streets of Enoch. Seeing the magnificent sights of Enoch is no easy task, for the city itself defies exploration. The adjacent Labyrinth has gradually warped the city into a variant of its namesake. Corridors and alleys shift and arrange themselves in puzzling configurations, hidden by the vast clouds of incense, rendering the city different every time one turns their head to look. Only roads marked by the Idran and reinforced by their magics remain true, marked by the death's head masks adorning the weathered and featureless statues rumored to have felt the touch of Arikel herself. Still, the Dread Palace Ghemal stands tall over much of the skyline, and the Doomsday Clock allows for a primitive sidereal navigation.

Necromantic anomalies and alien geometries wend their way through the streets, as the city's spirit attempts to grasp the layered necropolis. These spatial anomalies devour the



unprotected when merciful, turning them completely inside-out when not, usually mashing them together with their fellows in a parody of Vicissitude. More dangerous by far than the Spectres and hekatonkhires that shamle out of the catacombs, these cruel angles are the minotaur in the city's labyrinth.

## Unlife in Enoch

Incense-shrouded city misplaced in time, lost library of lore, holy engine of oblivion — Enoch is many things to many vampires, but only rarely is it home. Few make their havens in the Black City. The city's population is comprised largely of transients, journeying to Enoch for specific purposes: consulting the libraries of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, working a necromantic ritual from the edge of the world, or hiding from enemies in a sanctum that will never be found. It's just as well; the living find existence in the Underworld harrowing at best. The Slums house chatterlings, revenant families of the Hand, and ascetic Idran (who need few comforts). Cainites and yamasattva reside in the Citadel, comfortable (if archaic) in its accommodations. Revenants find the Underworld grating, but survivable nonetheless.

Mortals as close to the Labyrinth as Enoch is perish within the span of hours, their spirits breaking under the void's proximity and their blood turning ice-cold and bitter. Few last that even that long — without magic protections, mere mortals are prey to the toxic material raining down from the storms, but they're usually brought *en masse* to slake the thirst of the city's permanent residents.

A hundred thousand ghosts flit through the streets, a mishmashed culture formed from the dead of hundreds of lands over the course of centuries. Some were plucked from the Labyrinth itself, exchanging one grim fate for another, but the majority are immigrants from the Dead Kingdoms or from mortal genocides in the Shadowlands. All persist in fear of the vampires and the city. Even the most steadfast leaders amongst the dead never attempt to negotiate with the Idran from a position of social power, but affect an obeisant and acquiescent attitude. To do otherwise would result in another star within the Doomsday Clock.

Chatterlings endure training and rituals to acclimatize them, and may exist for years within the Black City. The majority are housed within the slave pits of Jrad, a place warded against the evils of the streets but designed by a Second Generation progenitor to break the spirit of all who reside within. Overseen by the Cult of the Erinyes, a Bahari sect that cherishes the idea of Lilith-as-teacher and holds inflicting pain to others as instrumental to the spiritual development of both, most chatterlings live tortured and nerve-wracked lives. They are scourged and suffering, generally following the Path of Lilith somewhat weakly. This isn't due to a lack

ENOCH IS ALIVE  
THE CITY HATES US  
GOD CAST IT DOWN  
FOR THE PERFDY OF CAINE  
HOW MUCH GREATER IS OUR HUBRIS  
THAT WE SEEK TO  
RAISE IT HIGH ONCE AGAIN?

*John — what the fuck is this? I found a dozen of these posted in the slums, just outside one of our "hidden" safehouses. Get Amanda to see if one of the chatterlings lost a son or daughter to the dead gangs, check their hands for recent cuts. Guarantee you we're looking at an aggrieved parent here.*

of belief, but a more gradual spiritual stunting caused by the cult's instruction and exacerbated by frequent stays in Enoch. Their paths are chosen by the cult's hierophant, a revenant named Amanda Ruof-Jones, and their deaths are as devoid of meaning as their lives. The Spires protect chatterlings from the worst of the Tempest, but the chill winds that blow through the streets of Enoch still cleave memory from mind. Those mortals who can't take shelter are forced to rhythmically sway and murmur hymns as the storms wash over them, keeping their souls intact by firmly lashing their wills to religious sentiment.

Revenants fare little better. Though their bloody birthright gives them indefinite purchase within the city, their bodies are still living. Enoch possesses few natural amenities for them, or anyone else. Food and blood must be imported, and the Tempest's water cannot be purified. In history, many revenants turned to cannibalism, feasting on the flesh and bones of those chatterlings chosen for consumption by the vampires of the city, before succumbing to starvation. Naturally-heated rocks sit around the city, allowing for many of the older buildings to host long-term habitation, and they quickly became storied



## Drops of Blood in the Ocean

Habitation of Enoch is limited by many factors, but the Underworld's lack of blood is the most serious issue for a vampire sect. The Eastern Hand largely avoided the matter by utilizing Parting the Veil (see pg. 176), a gift from the Harbingers of Skulls, and by subtly indoctrinating the mortal Idran cult towards kidnapping and blood sacrifice. All in all, though, it was a dry couple of centuries.


The Western Hand truly solved the matter during the Reunification—largely out of necessity, since the vampire population of Enoch increased tenfold. The Enrathi held the answer, ensconced deep within the slave trade since their founding during the Roman Republic. Enoch grew with the transatlantic slave trade, and the revenant family was savvy enough to hammer out a formal contractual relationship.

Forcing a long line of chained slaves to leap into shark-infested waters was a time-honored tactic in quelling shipboard slave rebellions, though uncommonly used due to the financial loss incurred. Nobody thought the practice odder than vicious extravagance, though most slavers did think it odd that they were paid to throw into the cold, black Atlantic. Very few ever questioned the money, and none knew the slaves were destined for a different grave than the watery one most expected.

Slave blood still feeds Enoch in modern nights, though they've evolved with the times. Slavery goes by the more palatable term of human trafficking, fu-

eled by the industrial wealth of Princes Weissmont and Schoenect. The majority of the victims are Russian, Albanian, and Romanian youths, falling into systemic cracks held wide by monsters both Kindred and mortal. Thousands disappear each year crossing the Atlantic, marked for Enoch by Enrathi revenants holding high rank within mafiya-backed trafficking rings. Buyers on the demand end are given fair recompense for their human cargo, and mortal suppliers do the difficult work of covering their own tracks. Though Hand agents are routinely tasked with checking Setite and Giovanni involvement in human smuggling, it's rare for neonates to fully grasp the depth of the sect's involvement—at least, until they move on to a Path of Enlightenment.

This endeavor hasn't escaped the notice of various European intelligence agencies, even if they're baffled as to why anyone would run a trafficking ring with no apparent buyers and a lack of direct profit. While mortal law enforcement can be bought off and constrained by jurisdictional concerns, news organs don't care about borders, and several investigative journalists have set to cracking the trafficking ring's secrets. Nor has it gone unnoticed by the Camarilla, which knows exactly why the rings exist but remains unclear on who the ring feeds. While Sabbat and Independent interference has stifled casual inquiries, the potential for Masquerade violation makes it an issue that's sure to get broached at the next Inner Circle meeting.



combinations of charnel houses, smoke houses, and mess halls. Kaymakli's access to the Underworld allowed for some surcease, though, and now the most common foodstuff is processed candies and military MREs (meals ready to eat), purchased in truly heroic quantities in bulk. Any revenant chef worth the title, however, will have his grandmother's recipe for human bone broth.

### Ubar, the Core

The city's Mesopotamian bricks have long since lost their memory, the only currency besides souls worth anything in the dead realms. Once, the *Rubrics* say, each cobblestone was covered in paeans to Caine's glory. Now they're rubbed smooth by wraith storms and amnesia, words reduced to holy grit beneath the feet of transient pilgrims.

The city's central district, a smaller city contained within the Black Citadel, is deeply marked by signs of vampiric praxis. The streets remain wide and open, showing the same signs of decay as all other structures in the Underworld. Many landmarks retain their storied traits despite the spiritual damage. The city's irrigating canals connect to nonexistent fields and terminate in basins filled with dust and grit. The famed hanging gardens of Malkav, a wonder that would resound through the centuries until Babylon raised a pitiful tribute, is full of flowers long since rotted to withered stalks. Many of the more palatial residences in Ubar are without windows, and while some have been converted into shrines and temples to the Antediluvians, it is considered a singular source of secular pride to reside where one of Caine's own grandchilder once did.

One feature above all others dominates Ubar; were there any sources of light in the Tempest besides the Doomsday Clock and the sheet lightning, the Dread Palace Ghemal would cast the city entire into shadow. Of the original city's monuments, only two were restored by the sect: Zillah's Pool and Brujah's Library. Malkav's gardens remain in use, however.

### **Zillah's Pool**

Marble statues of a proud lioness adorn the plain pit that was once the Zillah's Pool. The wooden beams where convicted criminals would be hung rot quickly in Enoch, but the Del'Roh orders them replaced yearly. While trials are conducted within Caine's court, the executions occur here: in the ancient ways, with the smallest amount of ceremony.

A great deal of art within the libraries depict Caine and his childer drinking from Zillah's pool, fed from no less than three mortals hanging over the pit. According to accounts, the pool would swallow some element of the convict's spirit and retain it within the blood. Human blood and flesh deposited into the deep pool remains fresh and hot, ready for consumption even long nights later. Vampires robbed of their vitae above the pool crumble to dust, their blood in the pool retaining the spirit and potency of the deceased vampire.

### **The Hanging Gardens of Malkav**

Once, the gardens would provide a plentiful harvest of savory herbs, flavoring the blood to fit any vampire's palate. Rows of exotic flowers grew in arcane patterns, arranged by the mind of a mad god. Now the gardens are naught but dust, the trenches that held the sacrifice of dozens dry as their dead bones. All that remains is Caine's frankincense grove, seeded and grown over the course of seven generations. Of all the signs of life and unlife in Enoch, the grove alone has managed to resist the decay inherent in the Underworld— in fact, they heal at a startling rate. Ruof-Jones tasks the chatterlings in carving the trees with great ceremony to harvest sap. The dried resin is

burned in the garden's remaining thurifers, allowing the pea soup-thick fog of incense to roll through the streets. If there's one crack in Ruof-Jones' Baharism, it's that she commands that the incense burnt for the benefit of the chatterlings, rather than the vampires. The thick fog smell of woodiness and pines easily overwhelms Enoch's natural scent of dust, offal, and bilge off the Tempest winds. The fog drifts through the First City, carried by roving anomalies. The Idran and Nagaraja have long ceased to care about how the city smells, but the hierophant has found that it's the little things keeping the chatterlings in line.

Encouraged by their familiar ties to groups of willworkers, the Rafastio revenant family has attempted innumerable times to breed a crop of ghoul'd plants in the gardens, with limited success. Only carnivorous plants will take to ghoul'ing, and with a lack of fresh prey, they grow stubbornly in the Underworld. Enoch's supply of blood is limited even in times of plenty, and the Del'Roh has forbidden the experiments since the 1970s. It's not uncommon to see groups of young revenants gathering in the gardens, though, attempting many different experiments in breeding.

### **Brujah's Library**

The first part of the original city to be reconstructed was the famed library, which still carried a number of tomes that were themselves literally antediluvian. Several True Brujah, in disagreement over the legacy of their progenitor, cautioned that the library itself may be an elaborate mnemonic falsehood generated wholly by the warped dreams of the Aralu. This interpretation has never grown beyond veiled insinuations, however, for to voice it would by extension publicly cast doubt about the authenticity of the city entire.

A large staff, all of whom are ghosts, currently maintains much of the library. Though in prior centuries it was preferable to have any semblance of resistance completely obliterated, the Del'Roh has found a wry humor and pride in their duties preferable to vampiric supremacy. As a result, the current head librarian — a tweed-suited wraith with short, shock-white hair — is empowered to deny access to those who abuse the library. His duties — he has no need of sleep, and thus never ceases his work — involves slowly working through and translating the many scrolls of the city, as well as cataloguing new arrivals.

Rows of scroll-racks stand tightly packed within the cool darkness, sealed from humidity of the city. The contents have never fully been catalogued despite the long centuries, but the library contains many personal accounts of the city, written in Enochian and Ghemalish. Much of the sect's Noddist lore comes from this place, though its authenticity remains in doubt. Both Eastern and Western Hand considers it an incredible resource, if a biased one.

Perhaps the longest-lasting sign of Enoch's occupation was the tendency of ghostly Legionnaires stationed within the inner city to grasp a random tome and pass the time by doodling on the pages. The commentary of bored soldiers, often expressed through crudely-drawn genitals, accompanies a great number of priceless accounts of the original city of Ubar and psalms to the dark pantheon.

## The Black Citadel

Encompassing Ubar and separating the original city and Ghemal from the massive sprawl of the Slums and the Forgotten Necropoli, the Black Citadel contains a large number of temples and stonework, representing the enduring majesty of Caine. Tigers with especially pronounced fangs, hawks with double-sharpened beaks, wolves with truly massive canines — animalistic depictions of the First Vampire remain especially popular. The titanic marble walls rise to great heights around the Citadel, capped with a tremendous bronze seal inscribed with flowing Ghemalish script.

In an attempt to maintain some semblance of tone, ziggurats are by far the most common additions within the Citadel's grounds, not least because ancient Kindred seemed enamored of the structures. Etemenanki, the Babylonian Tower of Babel, now houses the Order of Moloch. The pyramids of El Tajín aren't far; the ancient city's ballcourts are a popular attraction for vampires and revenants alike. The Cult of the Eryines oversees the courts, diligently maintaining the Mesoamerican ballgame *llamalitztli* with the help of poached Piasnob wraiths and trained revenants. The traditional decapitation of the losers bothers the revenants far more than it does the ghosts, but that just encourages them to play harder. The bloodsport remains a must-see spectacle for all visitors.

## The Dread Palace Ghemal, High House of Caine

Towering higher than many mortal skyscrapers, the High House has changed greatly since its humble stone incarnation in Ubar. Murals of Caine and his childer adorn the high walls, depicting the vast and tumultuously political existence of the First City. That they record the city's downfall is yet more evidence that the Dread Palace came long afterwards.

Meeting halls, minor libraries, and museums dominate much of the space within the palace, holding a vast occult treasure trove and armories of archaic (but serviceable) weaponry. More modern weaponry is also kept here, another legacy of the city's occupation maintained by the Hand. The massive central chamber contains the court of

## Ghemalish

Ironically, the Enochian language isn't the original written language of the city, according to Hand scholarship. Enochian is a phonetic transliteration of a partially magical spoken language. Ghemalish, named after the Dread Palace, was apparently derived from the original cuneiform script of the city. The Rawi posit that vampires whose intellect far surpassed mortal men crafted the language, which encompasses far more concepts than the similar Enochian. Flowing and poetic, Ghemalish is highly complex but equally focused: amoral, concerned with power and veneration, focused on blood and dominance. A number of translation errors with Enochian are attributed by Hand scholarship to their sources being rooted in Ghemalish, and cites mastery of the language as yet another reason for sectarian primacy.

Jrad, where the Del'Roh receives her counsel seated upon the Ivory Throne of Caine himself. The murals of this room depict Caine cursing his childer in the Second City — an odd touch, but one mandated by the Hand's leader.

The upper levels contain numerous havens for the vampires of the Hand, as personally appointed as they dare. The Del'Roh herself rarely leaves her haven save to hold court.

The Basalt Throne of Caine, the seat from which Gehenna will begin, sits near the top of the tall ziggurat. By tradition, none but the Del'Roh and the yamasattva gaze upon it. None know if the ruler of the Hand dares to replicate her hubris with the Ivory Throne, but very few vampires of the Hand put it past her, even if they never voice the suspicion of heresy.

## The Temple of Lilith

The first incarnation of Lillith's temple was neither a temple nor properly consecrated to Lillith, but an ironic mockery. It was a breeding center and nursery crèche for the youth of Ubar, where the slaves of the city would be bred for specific traits. The Bahari have reclaimed the black-and-red structure once named in irony, and transformed it into a center of worship for the Dark Queen. Offerings of blood and salt are freshened nightly, and it remains a residence for Bahari in their earliest stages of instruction.

## The Forgotten Necropoli

The core of the city, what was once the mortal city of Ubar, is surrounded and conjoined with the remnants of a thousand destroyed cities. The closest example, blended by Nagaraja magic, is the ancient Pamban city of Dhanushkodi, home to the overseers of the revenant population living in the old city of Pripyat, Ukraine.

Architecturally speaking, Enoch jerks and stumbles from one style to another: the most hallowed monuments and standing stones look vaguely Neolithic, but far more striking is the Mesopotamian influence in the form of the Dread Palace Ghemal dominating the skyline. Porticos and a distinctly Carthaginian appearance comprise the architecture out from Ubar, the core district of the city, though the Nagaraja have long since remodeled the hearts of other districts to their individual tastes. Save for Pripyat district, which resides next to Ubar, most of the city's districts have a sort of geological age to them, dominated by necropoles that sat along the Silk Road or sat in the path of the Golden Horde. Necropolis Baghdad, as it existed prior to the city's sack and burning in 1258, still remains relatively intact. The Baghdad district boasts the most complete library outside of Brujah's, and hosts the more cosmopolitan (but still thoroughly medieval) Idran population. Necropolis Samarkand boasts a similar distinction, and together contain the largest extant wraith population within Enoch, being relatively free of the roaming anomalies and adjoining the black marble of the city walls.

Many of the Nagaraja preferred temple cities, and destroyed treasures abound. Ancient temples, full of grave goods pulled down from the living world by blood-glutted necromancers, still abound the city. Defiant to mapping, casualties mean many of the cities and districts were never been adequately explored. Even in modern nights, treasures of the dead exist untouched by hands mortal, wraithly, or vampiric. The spirit of exploration is not one prized by the Black Hand, however, and there are few signs of that changing 'ere Gehenna's coming.

### Pripyat, the Slums

Of all the areas of Enoch, the Slums are the only ones that could conceivably be called *modern*. Reshaped wholly by Nagaraja magics, the buildings here still retain much of their original memory or shape. Instead, they resemble the urban high-rises of blighted Ukraine in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century – cramped, boxy buildings made for the working class. This is largely because the source of the ghostly slums is the city of Pripyat, Ukraine, abandoned after Chernobyl's shadow darkened the country. Perhaps it's the source material, but





the signs of urban decay run rampant through the rooms. Tempest water drips through cracks and moldy swells in the paint, while the ubiquitous grave dirt and vampire dust lends every surface a gritty texture. Much of the Slums are the work of a single Phansigur, Alexandra Ecce. Embraced for her architectural prowess, the crimson-clad vampire is one of the only permanent inhabitants of Enoch, and is personally responsible for the thefts of architecture from Necropolis Pripyat.

The Slums house the revenant population of Enoch, along with those chatterlings regarded highly enough to be spared the slave pits' indignity. They number in the low thousands. While their homes could be reshaped at any time by a passing vampire — a symbolism Ecce intended and ensures isn't lost on new visitors — the Slums are large enough that every slumdog is allowed a personal residence within Enoch, no matter how decrepit and cramped. Ironically, the slums are the most human part of a vampire's city. Despite the poor accommodations and the inconstant habitation, many revenants and chatterlings regard the slums as a unique community. Religious artifacts and personal mementos adorn the walls of every apartment. At the request of the community, Ecce also brought the Pripyat's famous Ferris Wheel and amusement park to reside within the Slums, along with a few other monuments and amenities.

The Slums are described further on p. 190.

## The Outer Walls

Impossible to reach in the nonlinear streets of Enoch, only by tracing the outermost edges of the Citadel's marble walls can one reach the city's outer edges. They're comprised of sedimentary rock, black and glossy, the same material as the Spires. They're similar to — but distinct from — the structure of the Labyrinth, and even those who quibble about their structure and provenance grudgingly admit the walls resemble nothing else so much as veined black marble. Even to a skilled eye, the walls look almost organic. Arranged in a smooth pentagon, they slope upward to eighty feet on the side with the lowest Spire, ten feet on the other sides — aligning with the Bronze Age walls of Ubar. Strange symbols adorn the inner walls, reminiscent of clan heraldry during the Dark Ages (and many more besides the thirteen clans, with no association other than cryptic passages within Noddist texts).

No guards walk the walls, and the Del'Roh orders none to maintain an active defense. Despite this, Ruof-Jones occasionally orders chatterlings and revenants to train atop the walls to teach acclimation to the harsh elements, and the various ghostly populations occasionally use the walkways on the walls to avoid the dark anomalies within the city, for the black marble permits safe travel.

## Enoch's Fleet

One of the most prominent modifications the dead legion made to the Black City was the Docks, a weathered hardwood structure clashing with the jagged rock aesthetic and extending far enough past the city walls to be relatively free of roving spectral anomalies. At least one of their period flagships remains docked in Enoch's turbulent waters, protected by the Black City's barrier spires — the 300-ton, 40-cannon *Queen Anne's Revenge*, sunk off the Carolina coast in 1718. Piloted through the Tempest during the occupation period, it remains the most prominent ship in Enoch's fleet, dramatically overshadowing the three U-boats that sank into the Underworld fully-crewed during the Battle of the Atlantic. If Blackbeard — who still exists as a wraith — were to find out about his former pirate ship, he'd probably come looking for it. The Hand has no intention to surrender the vessel, which was retrofitted with ghostly weaponry and remains a highly capable warship. Sect members who must travel to the Dead Kingdoms without the aid of the Idran ("Don't piss off the yamasattva," being a cardinal rule of the city) do so by crewing the submarines with the ghostly crew and navigating underneath the storms of the Tempest, but the *Queen Anne's Revenge* never leaves Enoch, remaining a primary component of the city's spectral defenses. The ship's bloody heart flag was replaced with a black hand by a particularly waggish qadi, an ostentatious display of colors permitted in one of the sect's rare moments of levity.

The walls bear the biggest scars of ghostly occupation. The armies of the dead used ghostly explosives to carve out defensive structures, leaving the rubble as strewn as rough blockage in the choppy sea. Turrets topped with crenellations now adorn the walls, crude implants within the glossy black marble flesh. A few bear gun emplacements, accompanied hodgepodge by cannonry and racks of relic rifles, though the Hand has little means to fire any of it.

## The Aralu

At the heart of Enoch lie the Aralu. They are the cancerous growth around which the city evolved like toxic coral. When Enoch's necropolis fell into the Underworld, the Aralu were the first to arrive. Grounded heavily in death, the four sarcophagi lay waiting atop the barren windswept cliff that would become Enoch's Underworld home. The necropolis did not come through clean, though. Projected over and into each other, layers upon layers of catacombs created a nigh-impenetrable maze around the Aralu. Some whispered voices suggest they were always there – ancient before time began and steeped in darkness long before man ever built its First City.

Who are the Aralu? When the Tal'Mahe'Ra claimed the city, the Aralu were already there. What little the Hand knows comes from stories and ancient scripts, and this knowledge is scant and often contradictory. The Hand is unfazed though, as it claims to be both protectors and beneficiaries to the ancient Aralu. Either it doesn't care that the true nature of the Aralu is unknown, or it doesn't even notice.

Upon arriving in Enoch, the Hand was met by an ancient creature named Inauhaten, who claimed to be a caretaker of sorts for the Aralu. He named them Loz, Arikel, Al-Marhi, Nergal, and Ventru. Dozens of other names are written at the tomb entrances though, and the names the Hand commonly uses to identify the Aralu speak of Loz, Nergal, and Ninmgug. This leaves the Hand with four tombs and either three or five named occupants. Is one of the tombs empty? Do some names refer to the same Aralu? Is it possible two sleepers share that one tomb? The Hand doesn't know, and it seems to almost deliberately steer away from any discussion on it.

The effects of the Aralu upon the city are better documented than their origins, as the Hand has experienced them firsthand. Loz comes to members of the Hand in nightmares. Loz appears as a great warrior and is accompanied by overwhelming, mind-numbing fear that lingers long after the dreamer wakes up. Fully clothed and wearing a bronze helmet, Loz's gender is unknown. Ninmgug provides the Hand with prophecies, written in blood in the books of Brujah's library. Cryptic and full of metaphor, Ninmgug's words seem to appear in the books by magic, or at least when no one is watching. Ninmgug uses a variety of languages for these prophecies, varying from Enochian and Hebrew to Spanish and even English. Like Loz, Ninmgug's true form has never been seen, but many of the Hand believe Ninmgug is male. Nergal is said

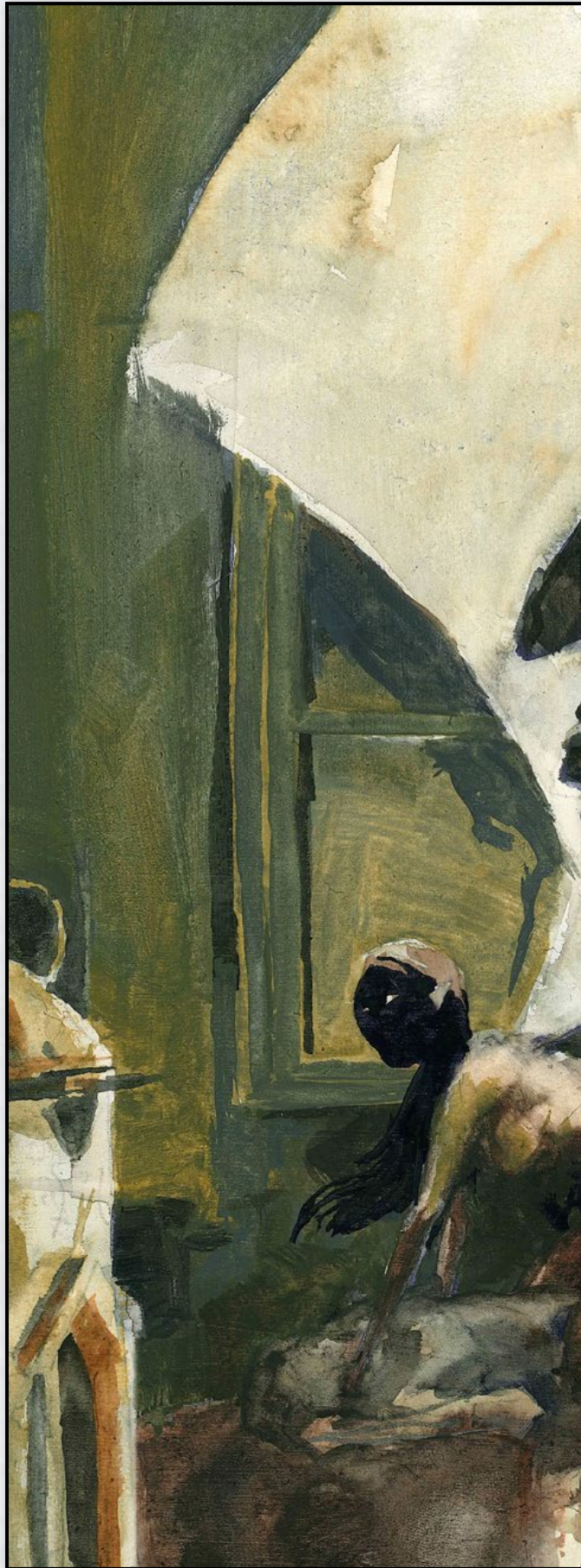
## Inauhaten the... Uncertain

Inauhaten is ancient and undying. Of course, that doesn't really narrow it down. Cainites are undying, though Inauhaten does not appear to be Kindred. Mummies are undying. So are demons, which have existed since the dawn of time and will remain until the end. Ghosts can be said to be undying, on account of already being dead. Fae claim to reincarnate, which is a more metaphysical form of undying. Inauhaten himself, who remains an on-and-off ally to the Tal'Mahe'Ra, refuses to comment on his nature. So like many things concerning the Aralu, the Hand doesn't know exactly what they are dealing with.

to be a beautiful woman who appears in visions to tell her followers what to do to save the world from Gehenna. The Del'Roh claims to commune with Nergal every day while she dreams. The fourth Aralu, for whom the Hand commonly has no name, has neither been seen nor heard, and has left no evidence of its passing. Cainites visiting the fourth tomb report a sensation of being watched, but that might easily be attributed to the catacombs' eerie aura.

## Nosferatu, Toreador, and Ventrue

The most common belief amongst the Tal'Mahe'Ra sees the Aralu as the founders of Clan Nosferatu, Toreador, and Ventrue. The Hand even agrees on who is who: Loz or Arikel is Toreador, Ninmgug is Nosferatu, and Nergal or Ventru is Ventrue. The fourth sleeper is unknown, but most speculation points to him (or her) as a surviving member of the Second Generation or even Caine himself. It's a very neat theory, but it doesn't seem to have any supporting evidence. Nevertheless, most Tal'Mahe'Ra will nod vehemently and insist that "yes, they are Arikel, Absimiliard, and Ventru." This is not because they are stupid (though some younger members might only be parroting their elders), but because the other theories are much more divisive. Besides, making such bold declarations only seek to stifle potential motivations for some sub-sects within the Hand.



## The Lilin

Bahari legend claims that, at one point in her feud with Caine, Lilith reached out for peace. She sent three of her children to serve as treaty hostages to ensure their mother's good behavior. It's unknown what Caine gave Lilith in exchange, or indeed if he gave her anything, and how he was supposed to treat the adolescent Lilin. Whether by Caine's command or against it, the Second Generation Embraced the triplets.

Named Arikel, Malkav, and Nahema, the Lilin were not human, and therefore Caine's blood did not curse them as it would mere mortals. Instead, it allowed them to transcend beyond their flesh and become beings of great freedom and enlightenment. The Lilin opened the Third Generation's eyes to the chains of their sires and led them into rebellion, thus crushing Caine's dreams of peace amongst his childer and delivering their (or their mother's) revenge.

With Caine's empire broken, the Lilin were free to go where they pleased. They could not go home though, for just like they were not fully vampires, they were not fully Lilin anymore either. After millennia of wandering, one by one, they arrived in the great Underworld of Enoch. Far from the Jyhad, they could finally abandon their bodies to torpor as their minds travelled. Arikel remains alive as the passion in every Toreador's heart, while Malkav is the creative spark in every Malkavian's mind. The youngest and least known triplet, Nahema, had the most interesting journey. Her spirit descended into Hell, where she became the Demon Queen of Madness and patron saint of torturers and serial killers. She sired no childer of her own, but her spirit yet manifests as the dark passion of the Toreador and madness of the Malkavians.

Subscribers to the Lilin theory believe the terrifying warrior is Nahema, who has been warped beyond all human recognition by hatred and her time in hell. She shows the Hand her vision for the world, but even to Cainite minds, it is too alien and horrible to grasp upon waking. The beautiful woman is supposed to be Arikel, who tries to prevent Nahema's spread upon the world even if she still loves her sister. Malkav, somewhat detached from the world and drawn deeper into lunacy by Nahema, spends his time penning prophecies in the library.

The occupant of the fourth tomb is unknown. Some Kindred legends cite Saulot as brother to Malkav, or Ennoia as child to Lilith. Neither of them was likely

to participate in the triplets' quest for vengeance – Saulot because he was too gentle, Ennoia because she was notoriously uninterested in anything her siblings did. This might explain why neither is named in the Bahari legend. It also explains why the Aralu have five names but four tombs; as the intended fifth sleeper fell to Tremere Amaranth. This assumes all tombs are occupied. Perhaps the fourth tomb is empty as the Lilin await their dark mother or father to join them.

The large numbers of Bahari in Enoch and dominance of Lilith worship in what is essentially a Cainite cult support the Lilin legend. If Lilith's triplets found their way to Enoch as torpor called to them, their very presence would call to those Kindred that serve Lilith. This would also make the Bahari the rightful heirs to the city. Of course, a less romantic version of events is also possible, as the Bahari may have dug up and dragged the torpid bodies of the Lilin to Enoch after they made it their bastion. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the Lilin as Aralu would go a long way to explain why the Tal'Mahe'Ra is so Lilith-oriented.

## The Baali

In ancient times, the creature named Ashur came across a beautiful slave boy. Enamored with the adolescent, he remade the boy in his image and brought him before his father and siblings. For a long time, the boy remained with Ashur and sang for him, as only his nightingale-song could soothe the creature's tempestuous heart. However, the boy eventually felt the need to strike out and he travelled far and wide, bringing back gifts of knowledge and solace to bestow upon his brethren. Some refused his gifts and began to spread poisonous lies against him. As hate rose against the boy, Ashur had no choice but to banish him.

The boy, exiled and alone, wandered the earth for countless ages until he chanced upon the Well of Sacrifice left by the First Tribe. As he looked into its depths, the boy saw one such as he – scorned, alone, and in pain. The story does not say what motivated the boy – did he seek to comfort the creature, or did he search for an ally in revenge against the Cainites – but it does say he descended into the Well willingly. As he touched the demon and drew it into his body, both of them changed. Despair mingled with hate, blind rage with sharp rejection. The boy could not heal the demon nor ease its pain, but together they grew as each deposited the seed of becoming in the other. The demon remained in the Well, churning and changing as it was slowly remade. The boy traveled beyond the world of the living to Enoch, which had once been home to him and called to him still. Here he laid down to rest.

This story is not true.

Ashur found the slave boy amongst a tribe of demon worshippers who filled the night with blood and screams. Mocking the tribe's attempts at evil, Ashur showed them the true path to horror. One slave boy he did save, for the child was an innocent amongst murderers and a beautiful reminder of what Ashur had never been. It was Ashur who spread the lies against the boy, to demonstrate that everything could be corrupted. It was Ashur who laughed when the boy offered himself willingly to the very demon he had been saved from.

This story is not true.

No one in the First Tribe was pure. Even the slaves waiting to be sacrificed thrummed with dark desire. The boy's beautiful exterior blinded Ashur to the truth, as the ancient took the boy like a viper to his bosom. It was the boy who caused the schism between himself and the other Cainites, as he was ever-jealous of those above him. His words, like honeyed venom, incited the Third Generation to rebel against the Second. When he was found out, the deed already done, the Dark Father stripped the boy of his beauty so he could never deceive anyone again. However, even the father could not strip corruption from the boy's heart, and the child returned to his first lover.

This story is not true.

There was no slave boy. There is only Nergal, who has many identities.

This is not true, either.

The Baali founders lie under Enoch. When the first felt the ennui that leads to torpor, he traveled to Enoch to embed himself at its heart. After all, Enoch is where it all began and it's where things should end. Over the ages, the other founders followed one by one – some on their own power, others carried by followers as their bodies remained in torpor. They hate each other, but cannot abide being apart. They are tied by suffering and blood, which is a bond they cannot break. Even their lost brother, who was lifted up to a life of luxury while they were cast down to die, is part of this bond. They need each other, for no other being can understand the depth of depravity and pain that is their home.

This story might be true.

Adherents to the Baali theory find themselves dealing with a mass of conflicting information. They believe the Baali founders rest under Enoch in the guise of the Aralu, but they are unsure which or how many. Nergal is generally considered to be Nergal, since both the name and behavior matches, but the other Aralu are not as



easily identified. If Moloch is in Enoch, then Troile must be too, given that they melted together after their defeat at Carthage. Does Troile account for the fifth name? Are they one being now, and might this gestalt of Moloch and Troile be the armored warrior, forever ready to do combat? Is the Unnamed One writing prophecies of madness and terror? That would leave the slave boy as the silent watcher – if he even exists. Or might the fourth tomb be home to the Baali creator, Ashur? Despite the many unknowns, the Baali theory is spoken of in dark whispers. It would certainly explain why the Order of Moloch is in Enoch, despite being treated as second-rank by the rest of the Hand, as they would have the means and the determination to keep the founders asleep.

## The Nephilim

The Aralu aren't Cainite. They aren't even four. There is one Aralu, and it is a Nephilim. Thought by some to be children of angels and women, others argue that Nephilim are demon spawn who have learned to disguise themselves to walk amongst men. Said to be huge, six-fingered giants, the Nephilim ruled as lords on earth, were alternately heroes and tyrants. Even these creatures, more powerful than any mortal, could not survive the flood. As the waters rose and swept the First City along with it, one of the Nephilim latched onto the ruins like a drowning man to a piece of flotsam. Ripped into dozens of pieces by the churning waters, the Nephilim still held on as Enoch was dragged into the Underworld. There it reformed, its broken body oozing towards itself and reforming. The healing slowed as every re-stitched piece grew larger and more cumbersome, but still it continues and after countless millennia, only four pieces remain.

Loz, Ninmgug, Nergal, and even the silent watcher are all facets of the Nephilim's persona as it manipulates the Hand into keeping it safe under Enoch so it may finish healing. The Nephilim is the source of the Hand's strong anti-infernalism ideology, though its reasons are unknown – perhaps it opposes them, or perhaps it merely wishes to keep rivals at bay. Eventually, the Nephilim will be reborn and its nature as a hero or tyrant will be known.

## The Unknown

Given that the Aralu are at the heart of Enoch and influence so much of the Sect's workings, how can the Tal'Mahe'Ra not know who they are? The most apparent reason lies in the fact that by the time the Black Hand

settled in Enoch, the Aralu were already there. The Hand has names to go on, but given the way Cainite elders go through aliases, that did not give them much. Even in the case of Nergal, who is a named Baali founder, it would be impossible to tell if this was the Nergal or simply an imposter (or inspiration, if the Aralu came before the Baali). The only way for the Tal'Mahe'Ra to know for sure is to open the coffins, wake the inhabitants, and ask – and they are not that stupid.

Even then, one might expect more discussion on the subject of uncertainty. Instead, most of the Black Hand is willing to name the Antediluvians of the Nosferatu, Toreador, and Ventrue as the Aralu and call it a day. This might be because they want to avoid infighting. Considering that the other popular options are the Lilin (which makes the Bahari the rightful heirs to Enoch) or the Baali (which makes the Order of Moloch the most needed people in the Sect), at least the “traditional Aralu” are a nice, neutral option that no one can really get up in arms about. When maintaining such an eclectic group of Cainites as the Tal'Mahe'Ra, sometimes neutrality is more important than truth.

However, there are other options. The catacombs under Enoch are huge. More importantly, they were not imported from Enoch's necropolis one on one. Different sections overlap each other to create a massive maze that is still shifting after millennia, as the city settles in with the speed of the dead. There might very well be hundreds of tombs down there, with confusion arising as people stumble upon dozens of resting places, with those of Loz, Arikel, Al-Marhi, Nergal, Ninmgug, and Ventrue simply being the ones most often found.

Another explanation might be that the Aralu, who have certainly demonstrated telepathic acumen, present themselves as a group the Tal'Mahe'Ra would protect. Ancient Antediluvians, children of Lilith, infernals that must be kept sleeping at all cost – these are all groups the Hand is likely to guard. And, as members' individual priorities and beliefs change, so does the representation of the Aralu.

Of course all this assumes that the Aralu are real. They might not be. It might all be a hoax perpetrated by the Hand's elders to keep the Sect in line. Such an outrageous claim couldn't possibly be true, though, right?



Pim walked ahead of me down the long, winding stairs, our steps echoing against stones older than him. We had no torch, and the farther we went, the more I could feel the spans of earth and stone above, between us and the rest of the world. The air was dry, and I could smell the cologne Pim favored: heather and musk and dragon's blood, layered over the scent of new clothes over an old body.

"Are you nervous, Blake?" Pim asked me. He didn't bother to turn to look at me when he asked it. I unclenched my jaw, realizing I was gritting my teeth the further we descended. It wasn't the press of earth above us, which weighed heavy on me. I could smell something else, and the closer we approached the slower I walked, until I realized I was many feet behind Pim.

"Yes," I replied, bracing myself by placing a hand on the wall. I could feel despair. I could smell blood. Not just any blood; the blood of other Kindred. Fresh and old. Wet and congealed. More than that, I could feel the pain that stretched before me.

"This is not a bad thing," Pim said, continuing down the stairs. We walked, our steps echoing. I could imagine heads lifting within their cells, looking up to see who could possibly be approaching, and bracing themselves for what may come. I followed close behind Pim, anxiety pressing me closer to him, though something told me I had nothing to fear.

We walked for what felt like an hour before the staircase ended and we came to a long corridor. The tapestries that hung on the wall looked old enough that they too would crumble if exposed to sunlight. On the other side of the hall were metal doors. We walked past other doors, the scent from each room burning in my nose and implicating various fluids and punishments. Pim counted in Dutch as we walked past the doors and tapestries, the long fingers of his hand pointing at each one as he said the number.

"Here," Pim said. He reached past the panels of his coat and produced a ring of keys, which I hadn't heard jingle a single time during our long descent. He rifled through the set and placed the selected key into the lock, turning it slowly, metal against metal.

"You have a visitor," Pim said. I wasn't sure if he was speaking to the prisoner or me. It could have been both of us. He opened the door and motioned for me to follow him in. There was something in his expression that filled me with dread and made me want to run back up the stairs and back up into the night. But I didn't. Pim beckoned me and I followed.

"Pallas?" I stepped forward instinctively, but Pim placed his hand on my chest to stop me. It was like getting hit in the chest with a brick, stopping me in my tracks.

Pim turned to look at me. "Blake, please. Compose yourself."

I saw Pallas shudder. She had started to lift her head, but at Pim's words her head fell, what remained of her hair spilling down limply over her face. I could smell the mixture of blood and iron as the manacles rubbed into her skin, grating against her flesh and muscle and bone, each arm pulled to either side. Bruises on her shoulders and knees told me where joints had been dislocated and popped back into place. And the scars.

I knew the signs of her tortures, since they had been taught to me.

"Why has this been done?" I finally managed the words.

"Don't worry, Blake," Pallas said in her singsong voice. "Don't worry, it's fine." She grimaced. "It's fine. It's fine. Every tenth time I wake up, I get all better, and for a moment I am well and fed. That moment is more precious to me than anything I've ever had before, and they've given it to me." Pallas' head dropped, her body jerking downward with the weight. "Don't worry about me, Blake. Don't."

Pim reached into his coat and pulled out an old handgun. He pulled back the hammer and trained it on Pallas. "Pim, no," I said. "Don't do this."

"I'm not going to do it," Pim replied. He uncocked the gun and held it towards me. "You are."

"What?" I said, recoiling from the gun as if it were something revolting.

"Take this gun from me, Blake," he ordered. "Pallas is a traitor. You are to extract all she knows. When I come back, the chambers better be empty and you better have something for me." Pim smiled, holding the gun out to me. "So take the gun and do this. If you'd rather not, there are plenty of empty cells down here. I could have you tied up like that." He actually snapped his fingers.

"Pim, I thought... Pallas is my friend." I said. "I tried to help her once."

"Don't blame yourself for this," Pim said. "This is just the way it has to be. Now take the gun. This is the last time I will ask you."

I stared into his eyes, dark and matte. Before I could do something I regretted I grabbed the gun from him and trained it on Pallas.

"Shoot her," he said. "She has betrayed the Black Hand."

"How?" I asked. The chains rattled as Pallas trembled.

"She has betrayed the Black Hand," he said, standing close to me. "Shoot her."

I pulled back the hammer and squeezed. The shot was so loud it screamed in my ears. Pallas jerked. Then she laughed. She lifted her head up and laughed and I knew she was not there.

"You think you will be spared when they rise, but you won't," Pallas shrieked. "You will never be spared, not another second of your pathetic unlife."

I shot Pallas again. She twitched, but recovered and screamed again, loudly, feral. I heard others in the hallway, stirring at the sound of it. They were listening, starting to speak as well.

"Have you performed a single good deed since you last drew breath, Blake?" Pallas hissed. "Do you think Pim and Ophelia have anything like love or mercy within them? Love and mercy die when the Beast comes to call. Surely you know this, Blake."

I cocked the gun again and she just begins screaming at me. I fired the gun again and again, squinting against the recoil. The last bullet entered her torso with a loud splat and she shrieked so loud I stepped back, frightened. She screamed and thrashed at her chains, trying to break free, cursing me and Enoch and the Black Hand. Her words began to slur and she began to shake violently, frothing at the mouth. She stared at me while she shook, her trembling finally dying down till she was still once more, her weight pulling against the chains.

I stood there, not sure what to do, not sure what just happened. The gun felt heavy in my hands. The sound of Pallas' fluids dripping to the floor made my skin crawl.

"Good girl, Blake," Pim said. I jumped as he slapped his hand on my shoulder. He pulled out a box of bullets from within his coat. "When I come back, these had better be gone too. You are to report everything she tells you when I come get you."

"How long will you be gone?" I asked, looking at the pile of magazines.

Pim shrugged and put his hand on the door. "I don't know. I have a few meetings. Just... show your loyalty, my dear."

"How am I supposed to know whether what she says is true or not?" I shot back, alarm in my voice.

"You know her better than all of us, Blake, I am sure you will sort it out." He leaned over and kissed me on the forehead. "I know you won't let us down."

"I won't," I said.

"I know," he assured me, raising his eyebrows at me. He opened the door and closed it, not bothering to lock it.

I tried to think. How much time did I have? The box looked like it held 50 bullets. If Pim was at a meeting it would probably go for at least several hours. Meetings always did. Still. Pallas stirred slightly, sighing in her state.

"Pallas," I whispered. I still held the gun in my hands. It seemed too strange to hold one. She was chained. She couldn't get out. I remembered there weren't bullets in the gun anymore and I fumbled as I broke it open. Empty shells jingled on the floor as I slipped in new ones. As the gun clicked back into place, Pallas picked her head up a little.

"Oh, Blake," Pallas said. "Blake, what is it that you want from me? I'll give it to you. We're old friends, you and I. But you left me, didn't you. That's what they told me, that I couldn't have friends. Malkavians don't have friends, they have manipulators."

"No Kindred has friends," I told her. "There is only hierarchy and manipulation."

"But we hope the alliances we forge could be real, don't we." Pallas coughed, and I heard another shell fall to the floor. "We wonder if we could feel some things. The pure unadulterated desire for a friend, for the sake of companionship only. If we could feel a connection which wasn't thinly disguised jealousy. Coveting what another has. We try and we always fail. And the Black Hand will fail you too."

I cocked the gun and aimed it at her. I saw the grin that spread across her face, a ragged smile that revealed broken teeth and cracked lips. "Ah, Blake, you don't believe me. Maybe you should, maybe this is what you should tell Pim. Report back to him. Tell him I said the Black Hand is a pile of lies upon lies. Those in Enoch are lying to them and they drink the sweet liquor of their deceptions like the wine of babes. They grow drunk





on it and they dance with their goblets held aloft, the untruths spilling forth and drowning the truly innocent in its wake.”

I squeezed the trigger. Pallas screamed at me, pulling at her chains. The metal dug into her wrists, scraping away at flesh and metal. I shot her again, in the arm.

She screamed at me to stop, so I shot her again. “They are waiting in quiet, they are waiting and when they come, they will not have mercy. Mercy is among the first to die!” she screamed.

She babbled and screamed at me the names of those I heard whispered about and argued over in covert meetings. Names I used to hear her murmur when we would sit together in the park and I would write them down. She spoke of spells and dark magic and pacts made which should be unmade, lest the oldest among us rise and find our allies lacking and spill their disgust upon us. Her loud rants were punctuated by the sounds from my gun. My hands grew steadier with every round I shot off.

I squeezed the trigger and the gun clicked, empty. I looked to the box Pim had left me and found it empty. Pallas hung between the two chains, her head bowed, body limply leaning forward, her arms bent in strange angles. The gun was hot in my hand. It burned my

skin, but I didn’t care. I stared at Pallas, trying to recall everything she had told me.

I don’t know how much time passed before Pim came back but he did. He entered the cell, looking to Pallas first and then to me. He held his hand out and I placed the gun into his hand, the metal cool now.

“Follow me, Blake,” he said. I gave Pallas one more look and followed him out into the hallway, away from the fetid chambers. I could hear others gibbering behind their metal doors.

“Write down what she told you and then report to Gareth,” he ordered, walking down the hallway. I followed after him. “And come back here tomorrow at 7pm.”

“Yes, Pim,” I said. I bowed to him and left, heading back towards the staircase. I thought about who I would ask for paper and pen up in the main office. Gareth would probably know where the paper was. If he was up there when I got there, I would just ask him. I walked up the steps, counting them as I went, the ringing in my ears and the shaking in my hands quickly fading away. I reached the top of one landing and proceeded up the next, away from the cells and the prisoners. I wrote my report, gave it to Gareth, and left for the evening, my hunger strangely stronger than it had been before I reported to Pim.

The next night, Pim greeted me at the door of the old building which served as the facade for the catacombs and prisons. It was autumn outside, but the inside of the building was always colder. I thought perhaps he would send me on another mission, have me report to Gareth again. Instead I followed him down the stairs again, down, down, into the bowels of the city, below the sidewalk and earth. Back to the hallway, back to the cells. Pim counted again till we came to Pallas' prison. He opened the door and I followed him in.

"We're back," Pim said cheerfully. He pulled the gun out and another box of rounds, handing them out to me. "Again," Pim said. He didn't wait for me to say anything. He simply nodded his head in farewell and left.

I pointed the gun at Pallas. I waited for her to stir. She didn't. I knew she wasn't gone. I cocked on the gun and aimed it at her knee. I waited for her to say something, to look up. I waited and waited.

I let off one shot. It blasted into her knee. I heard the bones and flesh give way to the speed and force of the bullet. She looked up now. Her eyes were maroon, her mouth paler than normal and her skin ashen with dust and lack of drink. Her lips parted and I thought she would say something. Instead, she ran her grey tongue over her lips and looked at me, grinning. I readied the gun already.

"Pallas," I said. "Just speak."

She shook her head slowly, so slowly, eyes closed. I took a step closer. "Do it, Pallas. Talk to me."

She shook her head again.

"Tell me what's on your mind."

Pallas bit her bottom lip. I took another step closer.

"What could she know that you couldn't find out for yourself?"

I looked around the room. Where had the voice come from? I wheeled around, ready to shoot whoever might be in the room with us. "Pallas, don't."

"I'm not Pallas," the voice said. It sounded old. I didn't hear it in my ears. I heard it in the same place my hunger stirred, that place which I knew made me different from the kine I walked among.

"Who is speaking to me, Pallas?" I asked. I put the gun against her head hard, so hard she winced and pulled away from me. "Tell me."

"Who do you want it to be?" the voice said. I screamed and took a few steps away from Pallas before I turned and squeezed the trigger, unloading the first clip into her. Someone laughed.

Pallas just shook her head, her mouth breaking into a grin as she shook her head back and forth, jerking every time I pulled the trigger.

"Are we going to do this again?" I screamed.

"We've never done this before, Blake," Pallas said. "This is all new, baby Blake, with his soft, black hands. That's all I'll say."

"She's not lying," the voice said.

"I'll kill her," I said into the air, looking up and all around me. Was it a trick? Who was doing it? Whose voice was it?

"What do you want, Blake? What is your desire?"

I ran through the bullets quickly. I didn't wait for Pim to come into the room. I reported to Gareth. I reported to all my superiors. I did this for a long time. I saw Pallas every day for ten years. When I brought up the voice, no one could tell me who it was.

What did I desire now? What would make me infinite?





# Chapter Four: Dirty Secrets

*“Somebody down there likes me.”*  
– Gomez Addams, *The Addams Family*

In the following text, we peel back the curtain and look beyond the Cainites we know from **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Here, we deal with stranger things. With ghosts, Abominations, mummies, and other oddities. We also bring rules to play the mortal necromancers of Enoch.

Then, we come back around to the Hand’s Cainites, and show some of their tricks and secrets that don’t align with the specific infernal or Bahari factions in the previous chapters. Here you’ll find Koldunic Sorcery, Merits, Flaws, and other character options. We also feature expanded rules for diablerie and rules for Golconda. We also have a few new Cainite bloodlines, and expanded treatment of signature groups like the Old Clan Tzimisce and the Nagaraja.

## Those Among the Damned

The Tal’Mahe’Ra is a decidedly Cainite organization. However, its willingness to remain on the outskirts of Kindred society and embrace the strange has brought the True Hand in contact with a variety of creatures. This section examines some of the strange beings that share

the Hand’s world: Abominations, fae, and ghosts. For information on demons, see p. 99 under Infernalism, and for mages, see the Idran on p. 144.

This chapter begins with an overview of each creature and how much the Hand might know about it. This is followed by an antagonists section offering unique ideas to introduce creatures in a Tal’Mahe’Ra chronicle that are interesting and relevant to players. Lastly, it offers a player characters section that delves into playing such a creature. This latter part is not intended as a crossover system to introduce, say, a full-fledged **Wraith: The Oblivion** character into a **Vampire** campaign. Rather, it offers a way to loosely portray a ghost in **Vampire** terms. This is deliberate, as it allows for ease of play with everyone using the same system and equality between players as everyone draws from the same pool of powers. The distinction between these characters and a Cainite does not lie in their stats, but in their story.

## Abominations

To understand the wretchedness of an Abomination, one must first understand werewolves. Most vampires don’t – they’re reluctant, as their efforts to speak to a werewolf often ends with the Cainite as an eviscerated crimson paste.

Werewolves consider themselves chosen warriors of Gaia whose mother-goddess speaks to them and compels them to vanquish the unclean servants of a demon known as “The Wurm.” This is the werewolf’s reason for existence, and to die while serving Gaia is a great honor. The crux of an Abomination, however, is a fate beyond death, torn away from Gaia. The Embrace inflicts excruciating physical and spiritual suffering, as vampiric blood destroys the goddess’ touch within him. Worse, he rises as one of the unclean things he was born to exterminate, a creature of the Wurm. He no longer hears the voice of Gaia, nor does he feel her presence. He has become blight upon her. No wonder these half-werewolf half-Cainite creatures usually succumb to madness. Driven by despair and hatred, they live short, violent lives before meeting Final Death — often at their own hand.

Abominations who survive the Embrace are exceedingly rare, and a disproportionate number of them work for the Hand. This has nothing to do with ideology — indeed, most Abominations are manipulated from afar and have no idea of the purposes or greater existence of the Tal’Mahe’Ra. Instead, the True Hand seeks them out as battering rams if they are lucky, or as fodder for medical experiments if they are unlucky. While the latter have no say in the matter, the former often eagerly consent to any activity to release their rage in violence, especially if there’s a high likelihood of their debased existence ending in redemption by taking more than a few enemies of Gaia with them.

## Abomination Template

**Clan:** None

**Disciplines:** An Abominations has three dots to spend on any Disciplines, but has no in-Clan Disciplines.

**Sidestep:** The Abomination retains the werewolf ability to step into the spirit world (called “the Umbra”), though his undead nature might draw hostile attention there. He must spend one turn staring into a mirror or other reflective surface.

Spend two Willpower points and two blood points before making a Stamina + Occult roll (difficulty 8) as the Abomination attempts to cross over physically. If the roll succeeds, he steps into the Umbra. When he wishes to return to the real world, he merely needs to concentrate (requiring another Willpower expenditure and Stamina + Occult roll, difficulty 6). An Abomination who is too deep in the Umbra may need to journey to a place close to the lands of the living in order to cross over.

**Shapeshift:** The Abomination retains the werewolf ability to shapeshift. The sequence of forms an Abomination can take is set and requires one turn plus one blood point per shift. This order is: human, then primal human, then warform, then primal wolf, then wolf. For example, shifting from human to primal human would require one turn and one blood point, while shifting from human to wolf would require four turns and four blood points (to respectively shift to primal human, warform, primal wolf and finally wolf). An Abomination remains in beast form until the next time it sleeps, unless he shifts back on his own.



## Creature Creation

- 1) Follow the rules for character creation as set forth by the Storyteller. This is found in Chapter Three of **V20**, or Chapter One of this book (p. 48). Disciplines and blood work differently, and will be explained for each creature separately.
  - 2) Add the creature's strengths and weaknesses found in Chapter Nine of **V20** – see p. 283 for fae and p. 284 for ghosts. A new template for Abominations will be given below.
  - 3) Add maturation points as determined by the Storyteller, or as desired for Storyteller characters.
- And you're done!

- **Human:** This is assumed to be the starting form.
- **Primal Human:** Strength +2, Stamina +2, Manipulation -2, Appearance -1. The Abomination's teeth and claws inflict Strength +2 aggravated damage, and the difficulties of all Perception rolls are reduced by one.
- **Warform (half-man, half-wolf):** Strength +4, Dexterity +1, Stamina +3, Manipulation -3, Appearance 0. The Abomination's teeth and claws inflict Strength +4 aggravated damage, he can run at double speed, and the difficulties of all Perception rolls are reduced by two. An Abomination in this form can communicate very rough concepts through grunts.
- **Primal Wolf:** Strength +3, Dexterity +2, Stamina +3, Manipulation -3, Appearance 0. The Abomination's teeth and claws inflict Strength +3 aggravated damage, he can run at triple speed, and the difficulties of all Perception rolls are reduced by three. An Abomination in this form cannot vocalize words.
- **Wolf:** Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Stamina +2, Manipulation -3. The Abomination's teeth and claws inflict Strength +1 aggravated damage, he can run at double speed, and the difficulties of all Perception rolls are reduced by two. An Abomination in this form cannot vocalize words.

## Fera Abominations

Whilst in theory some of the non-wolf shape-shifters (known as the Fera) can become Abominations, the kind most commonly to survive the Embrace or live for any period of time are werewolves. As such, this section deals with werewolf Abominations only.

**Weaknesses:** Due to his tortured existence, the Abomination is at +1 difficulty on frenzy checks and may not spend Willpower to prevent or end frenzy. Additionally, he suffers from the following flaws: Vulnerability to Silver (**V20**, p. 481), Lunacy (**V20**, p. 486), Infertile Vitae (**V20**, p. 484), and Conspicuous Consumption (**V20**, p. 486).

**As Antagonists:** Even a single Abomination makes an excellent physical antagonist for Tal'Mahe'Ra agents. The creature is extremely powerful, relentless in his pursuits, violent, and driven. For a classic chase story, consider a renegade Abomination, once a member of the Tal'Mahe'Ra and now feeling used by the Sect, who is attacking True Hand agents. The player characters, closest to the Abomination in the field, must stop the rampaging monster. They track the creature to his lair, only to discover they were deliberately lured there as intended targets!

Also, consider that an Abomination can be more than a blunt instrument – though mad, he can be extremely cunning. Perhaps one such creature is posing as an agent of the Black Hand seeking to bring on Gehenna. Where the True Hand believes Gehenna will herald a new golden age through the rise of the Antediluvians, this Abomination believes Gehenna will end the world and is crafting a ritual to ensure this – suicide by apocalypse. The characters discovering the plot and seeking out the traitor in the Hand could act as the genesis for an entire chronicle.

**As Player Characters:** Abominations combine over-the-top powers with debilitating weaknesses. This can cause many issues in a chronicle. Consider the ramifications before allowing Abomination characters in your chronicle.

## Fae

To say that fae and Cainites do not mix well is an understatement. As far as Cainites can tell, fae embody an aspect of change or possibly even life that withers when exposed to unchanging, dead Kindred. One Tal'Mahe'Ra report, which admittedly reads more like a teenage romance novel than an actual journal, claims that a fae became amnesiac and later catatonic after doggedly remaining with his Cainite lover. Then again, most vampire-fae relations don't last long enough for this to happen, as vampires find fae to be very tasty appetizers. Fae blood acts as a stimulant to some vampires, leading to hallucinations and other mind-expanding effects, and serves as an excellent ingredient for rituals.

That is not to say the level of threat goes only one way; fae are clever manipulators, both socially and mentally, and any vampire seeking to make a bargain with one often finds the price much higher than imagined. In addition, something about fae makes Cainites feel the loss of their life, laughter, and sunlight as acutely as they did right after their Embrace — causing some vampires to commit suicide in a fae's wake.

A fae spending any amount of time in the presence of vampires must be either very powerful, very crazy, or have a very compelling reason to seek out a top predator for company. As it so happens though, the Tal'Mahe'Ra has exactly that in the form of the Maeghar (see p. 167). Just like Cainites don't know much about fae, most fae don't know about vampires. Still, a few fae with darker passions and a taste for living dangerously have been able to gather information about their fanged fellow creatures. These fae find the Maeghar particularly interesting, and often regard them with a mixture of pity or gleeful cruelty, loathing, and rapt fascination. Such a fae might seek out a Maeghar with offers of friendship or help. Whether this friendship is feigned or real is often hard to tell, but it can prove to be very valuable, as a fae ally might go through great lengths to save the Maeghar from danger (either out of genuine sympathy, or because he doesn't want to lose his research subject).

**As Antagonists:** Fae believe in reincarnation, which can lead to all sorts of interesting stories. Perhaps one fae antagonist believes a Maeghar character to be his should-be fiancé or sister, and now seeks to liberate her from the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Can the Maeghar use this to her own advantage? Maybe she can gain the fae's trust and then give him to another member of the Tal'Mahe'Ra in exchange for a boon. Alternatively, the fae might consider the Maeghar a should-be enemy and make her life miserable wherever she goes. Imagine trying to fulfill any

mission for the Hand while being dogged by a deranged and dangerous stalker.

On the other hand, a Maeghar character might be the one initiating interaction. Perhaps she remembers something of his fae self (a rarity) and seeks out a fae to cope with her sense of loss. Maybe she wants the fae to help her plot revenge against her sire, or maybe she just wants to understand what exactly happened. All these scenarios begin by finding a fae willing to talk. Abduction and torture is one way to go, but for friendlier interaction, the Maeghar might consider performing a boon for the fae. In that case, remember that fae requests should hold a mixture of danger and perplexity to vampires — perhaps the creature seeks a kiss (to be passed from the Maeghar's lips to his) of an Aralu. Which begs the question, how do they even know of the Aralu?

Even without Maeghar in the group, there are plenty of ways for a group as eclectic as the Tal'Mahe'Ra to come into contact with fae. The elusive creatures claim to be as old as humanity itself and hold a myriad of knowledge. Perhaps one knows where to find the missing information on the garden of the Elohim that a Bahari is looking for. This could be a classic "seek and persuade" story. Lastly, fae make for cherished (if unwilling) ritual components and research subjects, which could serve as a great test for characters seeking to maintain their Humanity. When a Tal'Mahe'Ra elder instructs the characters to bring her one of the fair folk, will the characters balk once they discover the gruesome fate that awaits the creature?

**As Player Characters:** Any of the above antagonist plots could serve as a great way to bring a fae player character into the group. However, it's important to consider that fae probably won't care about Caine, Lilith, Enoch, or the Aralu. Fae involved with the Tal'Mahe'Ra will likely be connected to the Sect through one of its members, and any such individual relationship is subject to change. As a result, fae involvement with the Sect is often story-based and temporary. Also, any fae in the Underworld or in the presence of Cainites loses one Glamour per day atop of Glamour spent normally. A fae cannot regain Glamour as long as she remains in the presence of vampires, and should she fall to 0 Glamour, she becomes a catatonic husk. If that happens and an ally removes her from the Underworld and Cainite presence, she may make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) per day. If successful, the character regains one Glamour and becomes herself again (albeit precariously, with only one Glamour remaining). If the roll was unsuccessful, the character loses one Willpower point. A fae with neither Willpower nor Glamour enters a permanent state of catatonia. Fae have the additional qualities presented under Powers and Weaknesses on p. 383 of V20.

**Disciplines:** Fae use Glamour in lieu of blood. Glamour is regained by coaching artists and performers in their creative process, and otherwise acting as muses. The player makes an appropriate roll (i.e. Wits + Expression to aid a writer) at difficulty 6, and may harvest up to the rolled successes in Glamour. Reaping more Glamour than half the subject's Willpower drains her creative spirit and makes her unsuitable as Glamour generator in the future.

The following Disciplines can be used to mimic fae powers: Auspex, Celerity, Chimerstry, Dementation, Dominate, Thaumaturgy, Mytherceria, and Presence. The player picks three from this list that come naturally to the character, meaning they are counted as his three starting Disciplines and purchased at in-Clan cost. The remaining powers may be purchased at out-of-Clan cost without the need for a teacher. Any other Disciplines may only be learned with Storyteller permission and an in-game teacher (note that fae can only learn powers from other fae, not vampires).

## Ghosts

Enoch is home to as many (possibly even more) ghosts as vampires. Still, given that Enoch is actually in the land of the dead, their numbers are surprisingly low compared to the rest of the afterlife. The truth is that the location of Enoch, cut off in the middle of the churning Underworld ocean, isn't even known to the average ghost. Outside of refugees brought in by Hand members, Enoch does not have much of a native free-willed ghost population, as most ghosts created in the deluge that destroyed the city have since consumed each other in a cannibalistic frenzy. Ancient spectres, long devoid of humanity and reason, are rumored to haunt the tombs of the Aralu, but curiously, most of Enoch's resident wraith population avoids the tombs at all costs. None have said why, and when the ghostly allies are asked, mute stares tend to be the only response. Likewise, though some Cainites of Enoch insist to have seen impossibly large, dark shapes moving under the roiling surface of the sea, these sightings are not commonplace.

Most ghosts in Enoch are either bound or allied to a Cainite necromancer. The first kind is by far more common, but the majority of Kindred sorcerers in the Hand find the loyalty of an ally to be infinitely more productive than the services of a slave, and abusing the dead is not without cost when outnumbered in the Shadowlands. The vast majority of ghosts would jump at the chance to live under the protection of Enoch outside of the Hierarchy's reach – better a butler in the castle than a slave in the fields. Most times, a deal is usually struck where the ghost

provides services (often by fielding information, acquiring items, or acting as a guide) in return for protection. Sometimes, however, unruly spirits will find themselves locked eternally into the spire-chains of Enoch, floating with thousands of other enslaved ghosts.

Since certain necromancers can both enslave and feed off wraiths, they usually have the upper hand in a conflict between ghosts and vampires. In response, the ghost hierarchy seeks any and all information on the location of Enoch in order to launch an assault and obliterate the dangerous vampiric presence from the Underworld. Additionally, eddies and pathways in the Underworld are hard to navigate, and Enoch's placement in the eternal tempest serves as a natural barrier between it and the rest of the Underworld. The ghost Hierarchy fears the distinct disadvantage provided by this natural defense against their assaults. Despite officially pretending to its ghostly subjects that Enoch does not exist, many ghosts in authority continue to secretly seek out information on the city and the Tal'Mahe'Ra, in the hopes of finding a weapon against the Cainites.

**As Antagonists:** One of Enoch's most powerful necromantic jailers has met Final Death due to the machinations of those in his keep. Free after decades of slavery, the ghosts are targeting Enoch and the Tal'Mahe'Ra for reprisal. The characters might be tasked with quenching this uprising. Of course, should the Cainites in Enoch prove too mighty to exact revenge on, the ghosts will scatter and target younger Hand agents throughout the world instead, as ghosts never forget a slight. If the characters do not reside within Enoch, they might encounter the ghost rebellion now – as harassment and obstruction for reasons they don't even know about.

As an additional encounter to the chronicle in Chapter Five, the free-willed wraiths of Enoch are suddenly attacking anyone who enters the tombs of the Aralu. Their fury makes it impossible to communicate with them about why they've grown suddenly hostile. Can the characters find a way to uncover what's wrong, or will they opt to bind or destroy the ancient ghosts outright? If you add this to the chronicle, consider that the spectres within the tombs may know something about the theft, and the disappearance of one of the Aralu could create a spiritual vacuum that is draining the vitality of Enoch's wraiths. For a stand-alone story, one of the Aralu may be awakening and shielding itself by drawing spiritual guardians to the tombs while it recovers its strength.

And lastly, for a very personal story, consider that one of the characters serves as a fetter to a ghost. Possibly he knew the ghost while she was still alive (husband and wife,



child and mother) or maybe he is simply her last living descendant. His Embrace broke that bond, and now the ghost is looking to reconnect. Will the player go for the easy gain and bind the ghost into servitude, or will he help her out? And what kind of journey will they undertake together to reforge the fetter?

**As Players Characters:** Ghosts make great companions to a Tal'Mahe'Ra campaign, given that the Sect's major stronghold lies in the Underworld and many Cainite members are necromancers. If the current player group does not have a necromancer, the ghost could neatly fill that niche. A player has the option of playing a ghost bound through Necromancy (if so, the Storyteller or another player could provide a partner for the character) or one willingly working with the Tal'Mahe'Ra. There is also the option of a Cainite who has met Final Death returning as a ghost with Storyteller permission, though be aware that ghosts aren't generally as powerful as Cainites. Storytellers may wish to increase the strength of a fallen comrade to ensure it's balanced with the coterie. Wraiths have the additional qualities presented under Powers and Weaknesses on p. 385 of V20.

**Disciplines:** Ghosts use Pathos in lieu of blood, which is harvested through the emotions of the living. A ghost rolls Manipulation + Empathy at difficulty 6 to instill an emotion in a human and gains one point of Pathos per success. Ghosts may purchase Generation: in addition to the other benefits of Generation, each dot they purchase decreases the ability to unwillingly compel, influence, or affect them through Necromancy or other related powers by one step. This clearly has nothing to do with Cainite Generation; it's just an abstraction of their relative potency.

The following Disciplines can be used to mimic wraithly powers: Auspex, Celerity, Chimerstry, Dominate, Flight, Necromancy, Obfuscate, Obtenebration, Potence, Presence, Thaumaturgy, and Vicissitude (Vicissitude, if purchased, affects only the wraith itself, or other wraiths). The player picks three from this list that come naturally to the character, meaning they are counted as his three starting Disciplines and purchased at in-Clan cost. The remaining powers may be purchased at out-of-Clan cost without the need for a teacher. Any other Disciplines may only be learned with Storyteller permission and an in-game teacher (note that wraiths can only learn powers from other wraiths, not vampires).

A ghost is assumed to exist in the Underworld and may only cross to the material world by stepping over themselves (Auspex 5, though the ghost takes her body with her) or possessing someone (Dominate 5).

For Cainites who become ghosts, simply keep the character's stats and any Disciplines if the same as those

appropriate to wraiths, exchanging dots in inappropriate Disciplines or others in the list above.

**Special:** Every ghost has fetters. These are objects, places, or people that hold strong significance to the ghost. Spouses, children, trinkets, and a ghost's physical remains all make great fetters (note that in the case of a person, the Embrace breaks a fetter, though it can be reforged afterwards). A fetter makes it easier for a necromancer to bind a ghost, so most ghosts hide theirs carefully (assuming they can). A ghost with no remaining fetters is destroyed. Two to four fetters is a good average number for antagonists and player character ghosts.

## Idran: The Fallen Necromancers

Two philosophies met in the Himalayas. Sages from the East used acts of concentration to remain ever in the now, beyond the Wheel of Life and Death. They enslaved fearsome gods and paraded them before the people, saying, "They take the shape of your loves and fears. How can they be separate from you?" But from the West, in what would be called India and Pakistan, mortuary priests said the Wheel was inevitable, but one could accumulate virtue by following sacred duties, especially if they forced you to confront impure, terrifying things. "Every necessary thing is holy," they said. "Even corpses are vessels of power." Power was something both philosophies had in common, since both were societies of mages, skilled at sorcery.

In this age, almost 3,000 years ago, children died often enough that their mothers would wait to name them. Without a way to banish infection, small wounds toppled strong warriors, and plagues turned villages to cemeteries. Sorcerers could straighten limbs and banish diseases, but couldn't be everywhere and cure everyone. Then there was the death within, when trauma and spiritual sickness killed the self. What could be done?

The Eastern Sect treated what they could and encouraged people to approach suffering with indifference, to defeat the Wheel at the moment of death. But the Western Sect killed their charges, and why not? The inescapable Wheel would bring them back.

Their arguments flowered into open war. They raised armies of acolytes and trained nests of assassins. The Easterners belonged to one cult they renamed the Warring Hand. It channeled ascetic discipline into the arts of violence, becoming the greatest soldiers of the age. The Western cults only united to defend themselves, under

the name *Chakravanti*. Over 2,800 years later, they would establish themselves as the Euthanatos, but the nascent Chakravanti were barely allied by their common enemy. Yet that was enough to turn them from charnel priests to murderers as adept as Assamite warriors.

Of the old Chakravanti, the *Idran* might have been its greatest necromancers. Their name presaged the Sanskrit *Itarajana*, translated as “the others,” and used as a euphemism for ghosts that haunt the wilds. They believed they could reach enlightenment by uniting life and death within themselves. Although none of them had attained final liberation, they learned enough along the way to rot their enemies’ flesh, curse them with spectres, and swim through the Underworld’s Tempest. This earned the Warring Hand’s wrath. Concerted assaults drive the *Idran* further west, to the edge of Persia.

The *Idran*’s masters took this as a sign that they could never prevail over the Warring Hand with raw force. They needed spiritual superiority: the enlightenment of deathlessness beyond death. They refused to return to the Chakravanti without it. Following legends of true immortals (not vampires, who were considered *asuras*, a type of demonic demigod) they traveled to alien lands. They entered Egypt and studied their sorcery. After contending with crocodile worshipers and native blood drinkers, they proved themselves worthy, and the immortal *Inauhaten* revealed himself to them.

## Duty and Living Death

*Inauhaten* was a mighty sorcerer who freely slipped between life and death. The *Idran* believed him to be the one that could teach them the secrets they yearned

for. He told them of a divine spell that might grant their desires, but that the gods demanded a price: a shared duty. *Inauhaten* had been given scrolls written in blood. These guarded rubrics led him to a city in the Underworld that was built as a citadel of judgment. Those who commanded the city could shape the end of the world. He was tasked with guarding the city, but enemies who would seek it out multiplied around him.

Chief among these were the Followers of Set, who wished to use the city to exalt their vampire god and consign the world to eternal night.

“Share my sacred duty,” he said, “and I will reveal my secrets to you.” The *Idran* swore a sacred oath to do so, and *Inauhaten* led them to the gates of Enoch.

*Idran* sorcerers took up their new duty, and *Inauhaten* taught them his spell. Yet as learned as they were, they could not fully comprehend it. They stitched together portions of this so-called “Spell of Life,” combined it with their necromancy, and created a dark variation. Eight *Idran* cast this new spell.

At its conclusion, they committed ritual suicide, but bound their souls to their corpses. The spell reanimated them, but they were not enlightened. They become “possessors of Death,” or *yamasattvas*.

The *Idran* understood that this was a necessary step to guard Enoch, for their duty required that they survive until the end of the world. Enoch was an apocalyptic mandala – the pupil of the eye of Shiva, perhaps – and even if *Inauhaten* failed to enlighten them, he initiated them into the greatest dharma anyone could be entrusted with. The *Idran* gave their Sect another name to commemorate this sacred trust: The Tal’Mahe’Ra.

Despite its sincerity, their dedication was insufficient. The Followers of Set were numerous, skilled in blood sorcery, and came ever closer to finding Enoch. The *Guarded Rubrics* said the undead would become instruments of judgment, but



the Setites were unworthy — only the Dark Mother and Father were fit to enter Enoch’s throne room. Reluctantly, and with Inauhaten’s permission, the Idran contacted other vampires, particularly the childer of Veddhartha (who would count themselves among the Ventrue) and those who claimed descent from an Anatolian blood god (who would be called Tzimisce). The former were the secret kings of mortals, and their Antediluvian was supposedly deceased, making them trustworthier. The latter were skilled blood sorcerers. They traded access to Enoch for aid against the Setites and secrets of the blood. This held off an invasion but revealed new enemies. The sorcerers told them of Cainites who consorted with infernal powers. The kings warned them of powers rising in Rome and Carthage, which would trigger a war between vampires that would inevitably compromise Enoch. The Idran needed their own brood; asuras to fight asuras.

They refused their allies’ offer of Embrace because they wished to ensure absolute loyalty — and collect the most potent blood. They sent mortal Idran to collect the blood of Setite enemies, for it was a ready supply best divorced from its owners. Collecting it in a bronze sarcophagus, the yamasattva invoked their old gods to destroy its impurities (save for the curse of vampirism itself). Loyal sorcerers slit their own throats and sank beneath the coffin’s blood. They arose, baptized by the Embrace, as the first Nagaraja. No hallowing of the Blood could erase the karma of choosing the Embrace, so they rose with an appetite for human flesh, like legendary *pretas*: hungry ghosts.

The modern bloodline only acknowledges its Setite connections in allusions that could be made about its name, for they believe that they erased the poison of Sutekh’s heritage. In any event, the Idran successfully kept the secret of their origin, for as excellent killers of the living and dead, they concealed all signs of predation from the enemy. Followers of Set believed their missing numbers either joined a heresy to the East or met Final Death by other foes.

These concessions saved Enoch from invasion, but set in motion the gradual transfer of power from Idran to Cainite hands. It may have been inevitable. The *Guarded Rubrics* said Enoch was the city of blood drinkers, and perhaps it called to them, using the Idran as its instrument. The yamasattva had appointed the Del’Roh as a ceremonial regent to acknowledge this, but as Cainites ascended to power, she attained temporal influence. She transformed the Tal’Mahe’Ra from a Sect of passive guardians to an army to purify the Damned. If the yamasattva protested, this has not been recorded or remembered. In any event, yamasattva still sit at the apex of the hand with the rest of the Wazir council, but the Bahari and other Kindred-centric cults have eclipsed the Idran.

## Modern Idran

Modern Idran explore the boundaries of life and death. They believe the barrier between them constitutes a form of mystical energy, sometimes called Nihilistic power by contemporary members. Rotten flesh and ash conceal it with an aura of fear and revulsion, but the enlightened interact with it fearlessly.

As the Idran’s leadership role declines, it has become common to speak of them as one might describe old, embarrassing superstitions. But these most ancient members of the True Hand haven’t shared *all* their secrets, and possess the power of mortal magic — their so-called “Awakened” sorcery.

The cult’s membership includes the following:

**The Yamasattva:** Three of the eight yamasattvas stand with the Wazir council. The rest are believed to have been slain, though the details of their absence have never been revealed. Most members of the True Hand assume they’re vampires — the corrupt Spell of Life that made them has been expunged from the records, lest it be used against them. They rarely appear in person, choosing to act through possessed chatterlings and ghosts or Cainite servitors. They still teach the high secrets of Idran sorcery to mortals in the cult. The Del’Roh occasionally grants the title of “Yamasattva” to vampires of exceptional wisdom and accomplishments as well, but these are generally subordinate to the original three.

**Nagaraja:** The Idran created the Nagaraja bloodline (see p. 163) to study undeath, guard Enoch, and eliminate the True Hand’s enemies. The largest group of Nagaraja belongs to the cult, though others have joined other factions and in some cases, left the Tal’Mahe’Ra completely.

**Itarajana:** This Craft of magi practices the Archaic Sorcery (see p. 147) of the Idran. Many are ghouls or revenants, and most are trained in Enoch. These influences leave a number of them with thin, fragile masks of sanity. They’re the most common Blood Familiars (p. 152) in the True Hand as well. These factors cause Itarajana masters to fear for the Craft’s integrity, and they now demand the right to choose who enters pacts of blood with the Sect’s vampires.

**Followers of the Path of Death and the Soul:** This Path (functionally identical to the Path of Bones on pp. 318-319 of V20) evolved from ancient Idran beliefs, though its Sabbat adherents don’t know that. The cult holds that if a sufficient number of Kindred comprehend it, they will exert a balancing influence on Gehenna, sharpening the decisions of the one who will take the Basalt Throne.

They've been most successful at converting members of the Sabbat. Idran occasionally induct true believers into their cult and the True Hand, and secretly control a number of groups devoted to the Path. Despite the Nagaraja's contempt for the Giovanni, some have also taken up Death and the Soul. They are never invited to join.

**Harbingers of Skulls:** After seeking refuge in the Underworld, Harbingers who joined the True Black Hand found it natural to ally with the Idran. Both groups were devoted to the study of Necromancy, and in sharing knowledge, developed a greater understanding of the Discipline than even the Giovanni are reputed to possess. Respected for their personal power, Harbingers are nevertheless excluded from esoteric studies of the nature of Enoch, the connection between living and dead sorcery, and the yamasattva' insights. While Harbingers are peerless survivors, this must be held against them, as the Idran exist not to endure the War of Ages, but sacrifice its soldiers to Gehenna's pyres once the Night of Judgment comes.

## Itarajana Sorcery

One of the distinct aspects of the Idran is the Itarajana Craft, a group of sorcerers who split off from the Chakravanti (or Euthanatos) millennia ago. Instead of using the "magick" known to contemporary magi, Itarajana practice an Art virtually unchanged since the foundation of the True Hand. Cainites who take Itarajana as Blood Familiars (see p. 152) may also call upon their powers. Although the method is ancient, Itarajana adapt it well to modern applications. They can erase themselves from digital recordings or awaken murderous spirits in their firearms that help them aim accurately.

The following section describes the particulars of Itarajana magic. For general rules, see "Archaic Sorcery," on p. 154.

### Foundation: The Dharma

Itarajana bring a swift end to failed lives or slow, painful murder to those they believe to be poisoned by evil. They guard the gates of Enoch, the apocalypse mandala of the Underworld, until Gehenna comes. They believe they will reincarnate to perform their duties again and again until the night of judgment, unless they're selected for the Embrace to wear a devil's mask and frozen soul in sacrifice to the cause.

These duties are their *Dharma*: their enlightened Foundation, as philosophical as it is pragmatic. The end of the world should be embraced. Death is a friend, and

fear is the only thing that keeps us from seeing beyond life's final caress. Death purifies by propelling mortals along the Wheel. Unite life and death within you, and you could walk to any point on your karmic journey, from devil-haunted depths to the towers of the gods. Vampirism provides such an opportunity, but sorcerers opt for a slower path with considerable power and freedom from the Beast's howl.

**Foci:** Bones, shrouds, weapons, mantras, graveside rituals, drugs that induce deathlike states, drawing yantras and mandalas, images of the gods, their weapons and signs, bloodletting, human sacrifice, cannibalism.

### Pillars: The Lokas

Perhaps the Craft's ancient beliefs presaged contemporary Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, or the Itarajana are not as pure as they believe and borrowed these religions' structure to describe their discoveries. They call their Pillars *Lokas*: "worlds" that represent realms of existence, incarnations, and spiritual states. In addition to the four Lokas of the Pillars, Itarajana recognize the *Manusya Loka* of human existence and the *Asura Loka*, where it consigns the karmic states of earthly supernatural beings, including vampires.

Bereft of the broad perspective that more evolved magi learn, Itarajana magic lacks several capabilities. They cannot easily reshape lifeless matter (including Cainite bodies) or peer into the future, depriving them of easy access to wealth and supernatural foresight. That's the price of dedication to the ancient ways, and it shapes their worldview and relationship with the True Hand. (Note that these pillars are not in alphabetical order, to replicate the hierarchy of worlds in the cosmology.)

### Naraka: The Torment World

Imprisoned in the Naraka realm, these creatures are the darkest incarnations of the Wheel. They suffer and inflict suffering in realms of fire, frost, and pain. The Naraka hells aren't just places, but accursed spiritual states. The sorcerer takes on infernal karma for a time, utilizing dark powers to flay imperfection and sin from the world.

To ensure that Naraka magic doesn't cross the line into infernal worship, skilled Itarajana scholars endure regular (and sometimes painful) scrutiny from the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

**Keywords:** Destruction, Curses, Heat, and Cold

- The sorcerer can sense infernal influence, malefic magic, and imminent destructive forces such as bombs and oncoming storms. He can bulwark his consciousness against possession and his body against the elements, though not open flame and the most extreme cold.



•• Itarajana can call the fiends of Nakara but can't compel them to appear, and the fiends may not be free to answer. They inflict minor curses capable of hindering enemies or inflicting bashing damage, and can generate uncomfortable levels of heat and cold. Such a sorcerer senses the weak points of objects (where they're easy to destroy) and people (where their Natures fail them).

••• The sorcerer can convert any heat source into open flame, or intensify cold to create killing frost. This inflicts lethal damage, though without a source of heat or cold to work with (Itarajana magic treats cold as a force, not an absence of heat), they must be created using the ability of Deva •• to create elements with Quintessence. He can summon a fiend if he knows its name, and unless it is chained, the monster must appear. He can inflict curses that affect objects, so machines fail catastrophically and blades break.

•••• An Itarajana can now convert any significant source of energy into intense fire and cold. He can command it to rain fire or ice spikes. He can bind a fiend to a place, force it to possess a particular person, or command it to do his bidding. He can inspire self-destructive behavior in others so that they act on their darkest impulses. His curses wither limbs and crops, and even kill with disease, inflicting aggravated damage. He can break nigh-unbreakable objects.

••••• The sorcerer can summon metal-melting firestorms or freeze air. He can release fiends from divine imprisonment and visit locked hell realms. He can formulate abstract curses such as "May you never find love," or cause a curse to affect generations. His destructive capabilities can affect concepts, though killing an idea held by millions would require more power than any mortal can muster.

### **Preta: The Underworld**

The Preta Loka includes the Shadowlands, Tempest, and outer edges of the afterlife — go too deep, and you enter the Naraka Loka. Beyond holding ghosts and forgotten things, this realm contains the forces of decay. The Itarajana learns to travel the lands of the dead and channel its entropic energies to any realm.

**Keywords:** Chaos, Death, Ghosts, the Shadowlands

• The sorcerer senses recent deaths. He can peer into the eyes of a corpse to ascertain the manner of its passing. He can see and hear the Shadowlands, though he can't yet touch them. He can sense when rhythms are about to be broken and systems are about to collapse. He can protect himself against assaults reaching from

the other side of the Shadowlands or enter a deathlike trance, where only sorcery and supernatural insight can determine that he lives.

•• The Itarajana can send his voice and touch across the Shadowlands, He can climb objects there (and appears to float in mid-air) or strike ghosts. He can shape chaotic phenomena such as local, ordinary weather, the roll of the dice, and even the storms of the Underworld's Tempest. The last affords him protection from the storms of the dead. He can call distant ghosts, though they need not appear and he cannot directly communicate. They feel a generalized keening and know its source.

••• The sorcerer can enter the Shadowlands as a false ghost. His body falls into unbreathing stillness, and he wears a ghostly Corpus, not flesh – only combining this with Triyagyonī ••• or higher allows him to bodily enter the Underworld. He can now summon ghosts against their will, but he cannot bind them to service. His influence can accelerate rot and corrosion in non-living matter, or ward off decay to keep blades sharp and bodies perfectly preserved. He can even reshape ghosts, smithing them into objects after the fashion of the wraith-smiths, or tear apart a ghost's Corpus with a direct magical assault that inflicts aggravated damage.

•••• Itarajana adepts can distort space in the Tempest, crossing continents by taking a shortcut through the Sea of Shadows. They can put another into the death-trance that opens the way to the Underworld, conjure Tempest storms, or congeal its inchoate substance into weapons. They can thin the Shroud between life and death, easing passage for ghosts who wish to influence the breathing world. They can create new fetters for wraiths or destroy connections to old ones. Picking at the chaos in living systems, they can induce rapid aging and infirmity. They can command ghosts to do their bidding, but doing so tends to bring out their darker impulses.

••••• A master of the Art of Death can force the recently dead to become ghosts and permanently alter them into any shape or spiritual makeup he desires. He can give ghosts and Stygian artifacts substance in the living world, or consign objects to the Underworld. He can influence very large systems that contain random elements, bombarding cities with hail, winning lotteries, and shaping economic trends, though these may all require additional Abilities. The larger the effect, however, the more likely other supernatural beings will notice.

### **Triyagyonī: The Animalistic World**

The Triyagyonī Loka includes the natural world and the spiritual reflections that inhabit what modern mages call

## **The Nihilistic Gate**

One of the primary functions of the Itarajana is to ease passage to Enoch. A magus who has visited Enoch can use Deva •••• and Preta •••• to open a Nihilistic Gate: a portal in the material realm that bypasses the Tempest, allowing bodily travel straight to Enoch (or another location within the Tempest, provided the magus knows it well) for one person at a time for the spell's duration. Seven successes are required to open the gate for one turn, so the Itarajana typically accrue more via ritual to keep it open.

This spell is often bound to an item such as a ritually carved human bone or bronze mask. It's an Unbelievable (p. 158) spell that rapidly collapses under mundane inspection. Magi and items capable of conjuring a Nihilistic Gate are kept under close guard, with shakari ready to retake or destroy such assets as soon as they go missing.

the Middle Umbra. Werewolves are natives of this domain who resent all intruding sorcerers, but especially despise those who consort with vampires and the Underworld. The Itarajana considers nonhuman life categorically inferior to humanity, since they believe humans reincarnate as animals after rejecting enlightenment for base pleasures. However, as humans are carnal beings, this Loka includes the study of mortal flesh.

**Keywords:** Nature, the Middle Umbra, Passions, Spirits

• The Itarajana can perceive, but not enter, the Middle Umbra. He can sense the health of humans, animals, and plants, and with effort, analyze ecosystems. He can regulate autonomic physical functions, read the presence of primal emotions such as terror, rage, and lust, or deduce the archetypal nature of a spirit.

•• The sorcerer can call spirits to his location, but can't compel them to come. He can rouse the sleeping spirits within inanimate objects and thin the Gauntlet between worlds, making it easier for spirits to influence the material realm. He can physically interact with spirits to caress and strike them without crossing over, but when he does so, they can touch him as well. He can command what he considers to be humbler forms of life, such as insects or

other arthropods and worms, but can only inflame fight-or-flight instincts in more complex organisms, excluding humans. He can heal bashing damage in others or lethal damage in himself.

••• The sorcerer can ban spirits from an area or force them to appear, though he cannot control them when they arrive. He can physically cross the Gauntlet to travel through the Middle Umbra. He can utterly command mammals and other “higher” organisms or exaggerate instinctual emotions in humans. He can mutate plants or manipulate humans and animals to enhance or degrade their Physical Attributes. He can grant them new capabilities inspired by natural animals, such as claws or the ability to see in the dark. He can heal any form of damage in himself or others, though it costs one point of Quintessence per spellcasting roll to heal aggravated wounds. Finally, he can attack the energetic foundations of living beings to inflict aggravated damage, but this also costs one point of Quintessence per spellcasting roll. Note that physical enhancements or new abilities tax the subject’s life force, and either cost one point of Quintessence per day to maintain, or inflict one level of aggravated damage instead.

•••• The Itarajana can command spirits to do his bidding, bind them to a place or object, or force them to possess a target. He can open gates into the Middle Umbra to allow many beings may pass through. He can turn animals into humans and vice versa. He can control human emotions based on physiological reactions with great precision to inspire sexual desire, terror, and disgust. He cannot impose specific thoughts, however.

••••• The sorcerer can manipulate life with the disgusting precision of a Vicissitude adept, merging multiple life forms and molding flesh like clay. He can transform material life into spirits and vice versa. Alternatively, using other Pillars, he can incarnate himself or other targets into living flames and shadows, or demons and ghosts. He can alter a spirit’s archetype, appearance, and capabilities. He can even create living beings and spirits from nothing by spending Quintessence and utilizing Deva •••. New spirits can think as other spirits do, but Itarajana cannot create sapient living beings from nothing without Deva •••••.

## Deva: The Divine World

Itarajana believe that the gods not only represent cosmic forces, but possible incarnations. A sorcerer can become a god in the next life or, through self-purification, merge with one. *Moksa*, or final enlightenment, consists of uniting oneself with the forces of creation and destruction, so that one becomes a mover of the Wheel instead of being propelled by its karma. The gods safeguard *Ojas*, the power

others call Quintessence, and dwell in astral Deva-realms of spiritual refinement from which they direct the cycle of creation and destruction. They dwell in many places at once, in many avatars, traveling through the connections between all things.

**Keywords:** Creation, Correspondences, Fate, Thought

• The sorcerer can sense concentrations of Quintessence, as well as when it has been recently disturbed by supernatural forces. He can peer into the near astral reaches to see travelers (such as those using the *Auspex* to astrally project) and thought-forms. He can strengthen his own consciousness to resist mental influence and distractions. He can sense other minds or read auras like a vampire exercising *Auspex* for the same purpose.

•• Itarajana learn to telepathically communicate with willing partners. They can manipulate a target’s emotions. The sorcerer understands how to channel Quintessence so that, in conjunction with other Pillars, he can convert it into non-living material forms at the cost of one point of Quintessence per spellcasting roll. (Itarajana cannot learn to create solid matter this way, but can create fire and ice utilizing the *Naraka Loka*.) He can use sympathetic magic to peer into distant locations or conceal targets from such surveillance. He can spend a point of Quintessence to charge a weapon with power so that it inflicts aggravated damage when it strikes, or enchant objects so that they release a spell upon performing a prearranged action—but once the spell gets unleashed, the object loses its magic.

••• The sorcerer can now forcibly impose telepathic communication. He can stride across sympathetic connections, teleporting from place to place. He can ban targets from entering a place through magic or ordinary travel, though broadening this ban to a class of targets instead of individuals may require the use of other Pillars. He can charge a living being so that its natural attacks inflict aggravated damage, or grant it a temporary enchantment, as he could do to objects using the previous rank. With *Triyagyoni* •••••, he can create living things and spirits out of nothing. The last two functions require one point of Quintessence per spellcasting roll. Finally, he can pull Quintessence out of living things, similar to a vampire consuming blood. Each point taken inflicts one point of lethal damage.

•••• The sorcerer can invoke divine authority to issue mental commands, emulating the *Dominate Discipline*. He can send his consciousness from his body, similar to an astrally projecting vampire, or enhance his Mental or Social Attributes. He can now bind permanent spells to objects. The wielder performs a required gesture, spends a point of Quintessence, and rolls a dice pool arranged

ahead of time when designing the artifact. The sorcerer may store Quintessence in an object for this purpose, or to power other spells. He can create doorways in space so that others can walk shortcuts along sympathetic ties.

•••• The Itarajana can erase a consciousness, rewrite it, or create it from nothing, though this last function requires one point of Quintessence per spellcasting roll. He can astrally project without a cord binding him to his body, and can even survive his body's death — for the spell's duration. On a darker note, he can suppress and (by making the spell permanent) even destroy another sorcerer's Foundation. Like a god, he can distort distance and appear in multiple locations. He can enchant living beings with permanent spells using the same rules as objects. Finally, he can dissolve living things and objects into pure Quintessence. This causes them to vanish, but the sorcerer can consume some of the power so released.

## Awakened Blood

The True Black Hand knows of many forms of sorcery. Vampires practice blood magic, Necromancy, and the mystical convolutions of their Disciplines. Most mortals who practice effective magic at all possess a few limited gifts granted by inborn psychic talent or dangerous research. They manifest a power or two, but never improve. The True Black Hand treats them like tools: good for their exceptional ability, but irrelevant in other contexts. Make them into ghouls, bind them by blood, and remember where you put them when you need them.

A smaller group practice what greater magi derisively call "hedge magic," but is also known as Numina or Mortal Thaumaturgy. **Hunters Hunted II** describes some of their powers. They join the Tal'Mahe'Ra as ghouls, revenants, and cultists. The True Hand treats them like child prodigies: knowledgeable, but lacking immortal perspective.

Their influence is a shadow of that possessed by the Awakened, also called "true magi," who spontaneously reshape the universe by will and belief. They belonged to the Sect from its founding and once dominated it. The True Hand officially treats them as equals, but many feel that the Awakened history of the Tal'Mahe'Ra was but a prelude to its true foundation. Sorcerers who resist the True Hand's purpose and must be brought to heel.

## Embracing a Magus

One of the unbreakable laws of sorcery is that vampires may not practice Awakened magic. The Embrace either destroys a magus' enlightened soul or expels it to its next

incarnation. In any case, the experience is so traumatic that magi emerge from the transformation... damaged. Some are so strong-willed they vomit forth their sire's blood and immediately die. The less resolute often enter undeath insane.

Yet their occult knowledge remains. Former sorcerers learn magical Disciplines faster than other Kindred. To reflect this in a system, calculate the total Experience value of the magus' lost powers. She gains a rebate of half of this total to spend on Necromancy, Thaumaturgy, and other forms of blood magic. The vampire usually requires a teacher for anything learned out-of-Clan, but the Storyteller may make an exception if the Cainite used to practice a form of magic that strongly resembles an existing form of blood magic, or if the player and Storyteller develop a new Path to represent the fledgling's unnatural insights. This may explain how sorcerers such as the Tremere rapidly developed sorcery powerful enough to disrupt the status quo.

## Ghoul Magi

Most Tal'Mahe'Ra sorcerers are ghouls — at least, part of the time. Vampiric blood contains too many advantages to reject, but its drawbacks make it unsuitable for magi who hope to reach the Art's apex.

### Advantages

Magi who are ghouls gain all of the advantages and drawbacks listed in **V20** starting on p. 496, but their Awakened souls provide additional advantages.

**Emulating the Damned:** When a ghoul mage uses magic to emulate the powers of vampires *as known to mortal legends*, the spell is considered Subtle according to the rules of Archaic Sorcery. This benefit does not apply to the stranger powers of Kindred. For example, the ghoul can sprout fangs and claws without special risk, but can't reshape flesh like a Tzimisce.

**Blood as Quintessence:** A ghoul mage can spend vampiric blood as Quintessence — once ingested, the substance becomes part of her living pattern. She cannot spend the blood point used to maintain ghoul status, however; only any excess she ingests.

### Disadvantages

**Damned Backlashes:** Backlashes for spells gone awry may take the form of Cainite weaknesses or those of legendary vampires. The magus burns in the sun or cannot cross running water. Occultists aware of this phenomenon use it to identify ghoul magi for what they are.

**Spiritual Stasis:** Perhaps the worst part of becoming a ghoul is that the magus loses the ability to refine her



occult enlightenment. Such sorcerers can't raise their Foundation. The whisper of the Beast, faint as it is in a ghoul, makes it impossible to attain greater communion with one's Awakening. Consequently, some subject themselves to cyclical "blood fasts" during which they pursue greater enlightenment, but the hardship of aging and nagging addiction often damages their sanity.

Only revenants can avoid this problem, as they have long heard the mad whispers in their corrupted blood, but they still require strict focus to stay the course. They must maintain a Humanity or Path rating equal to 2 + the desired Foundation rank until their chosen morality reaches 10, which allows any rank. If the revenant's morality drops below the minimum, her effective rank temporarily drops to the maximum now permitted. Awakened revenants who degenerate to a Humanity or Path rating of 2 or less lose their Awakening permanently. This automatically imposes a derangement – when you fall far, you fall hard. The Tal'Mahe'Ra traditionally puts such wretches out of their misery not only because mad revenants are inconvenient, but because it is said infernal sorcery can sidestep these morality restrictions.

## Sorcery and the Curse of Caine

In the True Hand, vampires and sorcerers interact as a matter of course. The following systems suggest ways that magic interacts with the Damned condition. They should not be considered the final word for the World of Darkness as a whole, but are tailored to suit a True Hand chronicle.

**The Blood Bond and Blood Addiction:** A mage who becomes a ghoul suffers from blood addiction and the possibility of the blood bond just as any other mortal. To suppress either requires a spell with, at minimum, a number of successes equal to double the domitor's permanent Willpower. This doesn't banish these conditions, but holds them back for a scene. More successes lengthen the duration of suppression, but such a spell cannot be made permanent, and the magic dissolves as soon as the target ingests more blood.

**The Curse:** No known spell can alter any aspect of the Curse of Caine or Clan weaknesses, though it is said that certain legendary grimoires contain the secret. For example, magi can shield vampires from sunlight, but can't remove its power to burn. They can cast an illusion over a Nosferatu to help him blend in, but can't remodel his flesh into something beautiful. Exposing Cainites to sorcery over an extended period of time won't remove disadvantages, but may distort them in unexpected ways. Vampirism isn't a static condition; it changes its damnation in response to attempts to escape it.

**Disciplines:** Spells do not stack their effects with Disciplines unless the spell operates in a fundamentally different way. A spell that toughens a vampire's body doesn't add to Fortitude, but conjuring armor would provide extra protection. Blood magic (including Necromancy) and certain other mystical Disciplines may counter sorcery, as described on p. 156. Magic affects Disciplines as if they were spells generating the same phenomena. They cannot permanently weaken or remove Disciplines, as these are aspects of the Kindred curse.

**Magical Fire and Sunlight:** Sorcery cannot create true sunlight capable of burning vampires, but might transport it from a sunny area via sympathetic magic. Eldritch fire is as real as the naturally generated article, however.

**The Vampire's Body:** Psychokinetically propelled stakes and other external physical influences function normally, but directly reshaping a vampire's body (his so-called "pattern") requires the power to affect living human flesh and inert matter *simultaneously*. This usually requires conjunctive Pillars, but some abilities (such as the ability to dissolve a being into pure Quintessence) sidestep this requirement.

**The Vampire's Blood:** Sorcery can create blood that nourishes vampires at a cost of one point of Quintessence per blood point, but this is considered to be human blood. Magic cannot create Kindred blood, generate a blood bond, or satisfy feeding restrictions such as those possessed by Ventrue.

**The Vampire's Spirit:** Mind-affecting magic need not be concerned with a vampire's Generation. While this is a potent advantage, mind-shaping magic operates more slowly than Disciplines, and elders possess the psychic strength to expel such influences. Finally, a spell that controls a vampire ceases to function once he enters frenzy, though another might be cast to suppress it.

## Blood Familiars

Vampires cannot use Awakened sorcery. This rule is supposedly as inviolable as vampiric damnation. However, this rule can be *bent*.

Over millennia, the True Hand studied the interactions between mortal and Cainite magic. Awakened witches introduced the concept of the familiar, a beast or spirit that acts as a sorcerer's proxy. The True Hand experimented with this concept from a vampire's perspective. What is a familiar but a magus' thrall? What is a mortal but a vampire's familiar?

The Awakened are mighty and insightful, yet draw living breath. Their place is to be ruled and protected, so they should serve Cainites as allies and living symbols of power. Thus, highly placed True Hand elders possess Blood Familiars, magi whose powers they can use almost as if they themselves were Awakened.

Occult experiments yielded two ways to produce this relationship.

### **Offering the Awakened Soul (Awakened Spell: Deva ••••)**

Cast upon a vampire and sorcerer, this spell joins a vampire's intellect to an Awakened magical essence. The magus reverently ingests the vampire's blood, joining their souls so that his undead patron may cast spells.

**System:** This spell requires a combined number of successes equal to the magus' Willpower + Foundation, along with successes to determine its duration. The magus being made into a Blood Familiar need not cast the spell, and may resist it with counterspells or as if fighting a mental attack. By default, the spell lasts for one night.

### **Chain the Enlightened (Combination Discipline: Dominate •••• •, Auspex ••••)**

The Del'Roh devised this Discipline and disseminated it through the chain of command so that elders may take Blood Familiars to better serve the True Hand. The vampire confines the magus, places her hand upon his brow, and invades her mystic soul.

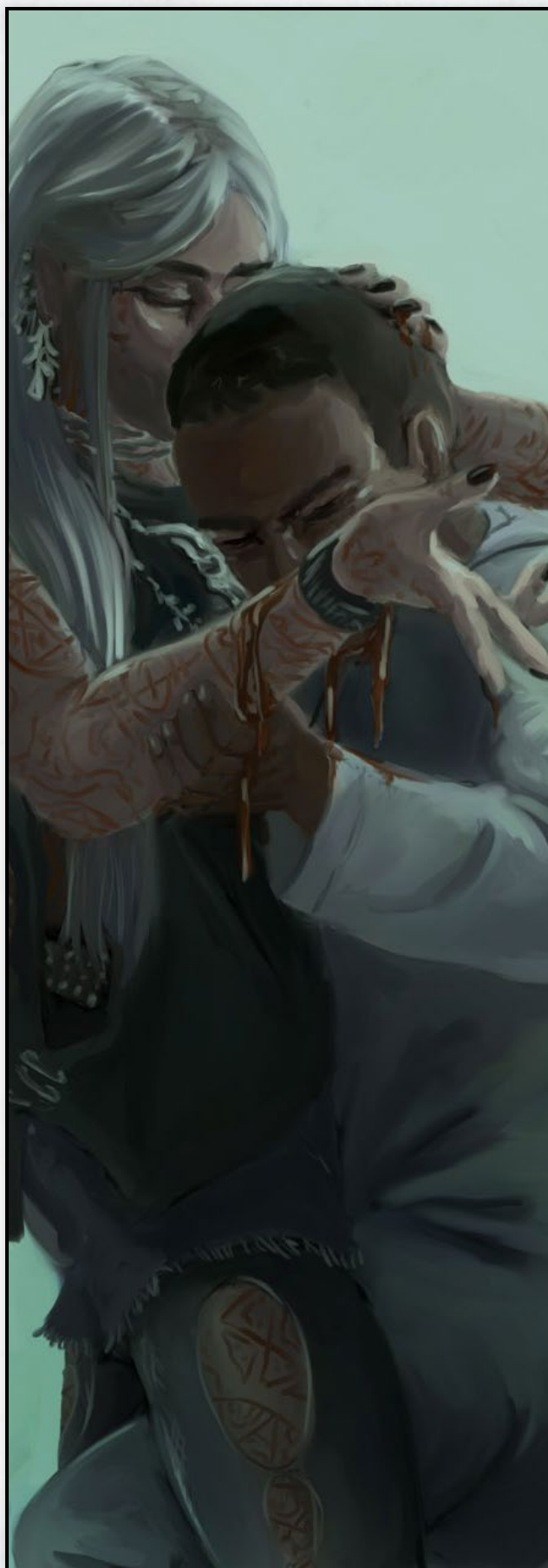
**System:** Roll Charisma + Occult (difficulty 7) resisted by the magus' Willpower (same difficulty, though she can choose not to resist), as an extended, contested action. Each roll represents one hour of concentration, requiring an unwilling recipient to be restrained accordingly. If the vampire attains a number of successes equal to the magus' Foundation, he makes her his Blood Familiar for a year and a night. If the magus attains this many successes first, she throws off the power and it may never again be used on her.

This combination power costs 42 Experience points.

### **Using Blood Familiars**

No matter the method used, a Blood Familiar grants the vampire the ability to use Awakened spells under the following circumstances.

**Occult Knowledge:** The Blood Familiar is no substitute for the understanding needed to visualize and evoke the



Art. To cast a spell using a magus' stolen spirit, the vampire must possess the Occult Knowledge or dots in a form of blood magic (such as Thaumaturgy or Necromancy) at a rating of 2 + the dot ranking of the spell she wishes to use.

**Power in the Blood, and Power Demanded:** The vampire may not use the magus' innate Quintessence, but may use her own blood as Quintessence, at the cost of one blood point per Quintessence point. To use a spell at all requires the use of blood to reinforce the connection, however. Each spell costs one blood point per dot of the highest Pillar required.

**Shared Doom:** The most dangerous aspect of the bond is that if one of the two is slain, the other shares grievous injuries. If the magus dies or the vampire suffers Final Death, the surviving party suffers 10 dice of aggravated damage. The dead party's fatal injuries erupt on the survivor. This is worse for the Blood Familiar, as she is normally unable to soak such injuries, while the vampire may utilize Stamina (and Fortitude, if she possesses it). Mortals are fragile.

**Stolen Sorcery:** The vampire may cast spells using her Blood Familiar's magical capabilities no matter the distance between them, though both must dwell in the same realm of existence (such as the mundane plane or the Shadowlands). The vampire uses the magus' dice pools and is limited by her knowledge. When the vampire casts a spell, the magus is unable to do so; the Blood Familiar's spirit is occupied.

**Sympathetic Proxy:** The vampire and Blood Familiar are joined so intimately that the presence of one is equivalent to possessing a body sample from the other.

**Victim of Backlash:** Scourge accumulates in the magus, but the vampire is the primary target of any Backlash.

**Broken by Enlightenment:** All powers that secure the service of a Blood Familiar are extinguished when the magus grows more enlightened. Any increase in her Foundation breaks the connection. Therefore, it is a common practice to make Blood Familiars into ghouls, making this impossible.

## Archaic Sorcery

In modern nights, a grand conspiracy of mages channels magic (or "true magick," as they call it) through modern Spheres of power. Idran sorcerers and other extremely isolated cults follow an older path. A disproportionate number can be found within the True Hand, so the following systems demonstrate how to create such characters and determine how their eldritch Art functions.

## Creating an Archaic Sorcerer

To create a mortal practitioner of Archaic Sorcery, proceed through the following steps. Consult V20 for any system not explicitly explained. Sorcerers possess special Traits.

### Core Traits

**Attributes:** Assign 7/5/3 dots between Mental, Physical, and Social categories, just as for vampires.

**Abilities:** Assign 13/9/5 dots to purchase Talents, Skills, and Knowledges.

### Advantages

Sorcerers do not possess Generation or Blood Pool. They do not possess Disciplines unless they're ghouls or revenants, in which case they follow the rules for those characters.

**Foundation:** Sorcerers begin with a Foundation Trait of 1.

**Pillars:** Divide 3 dots among the magical Pillars.

### Backgrounds

Mortal sorcerers get 5 dots to spend on Backgrounds. Certain Cainite-centered Backgrounds would make no sense for them to purchase, though some, such as Herd, might be held for a vampire ally.

**New Background—Fount:** The strength of the sorcerer's mystic Self (called a *Fount* by ancient magi and the *Atman* by Itarajana) determines the amount of Quintessence she can hold within herself, and how easily she channels it.

○ Store 10 Quintessence, spend one per turn.

● Store 12 Quintessence, spend two per turn.

●● Store 14 Quintessence, spend three per turn.

●●● Store 16 Quintessence, spend four per turn.

●●●● Store 18 Quintessence, spend five per turn.

●●●●● Store 20 Quintessence, spend six per turn.

### Finishing Touches

**Willpower:** Mortal sorcerers who lack V20 Virtues begin with a flat Willpower of 5. Ghouls and other beings with Virtues calculate Willpower as a vampire and add two points of permanent Willpower, acquired during initiation.

**Quintessence:** Begin with five points plus the sorcerer's Fount Background dots, if any.

**Bonus Points:** Starting sorcerers gain 15 bonus points to spend on Merits and other Traits. The costs for common Traits are the same as for vampires. Special sorcerer-only Traits may be increased as follows:

- *Foundation:* 5 per dot.
- *Pillar:* 3 per dot.

## Character Development

Sorcerers pay the same Experience prices as vampires for the same Traits. New Traits possess the following costs:

**Foundation:** current rating x 8. At four dots, the sorcerer may choose to specialize in one magical focus. This acts as an Attribute Specialty when she uses that focus to cast a spell.

**Pillar:** 10 for the first dot, current rating x 6 for each additional dot. At four dots, the sorcerer may choose to specialize in one Pillar keyword. This acts as an Ability specialty when her spell invokes that keyword.

## Spinning the Wheel of Sorcery

To cast a spell, define what the sorcerer wishes to accomplish and determine the required Pillars, foci, and minimum successes. Roll Foundation + the highest rating among the Pillars required (difficulty 7) and spend Quintessence, if necessary. If the spell twists awry or defies mortal credulity, the sorcerer accumulates Scourge.

That's the summary. Let's explore the procedure in detail.

### Creating the Spell

**Definition:** Describe the spell in narrative terms, such as "I want to animate that corpse" or "I want to pull that house into the Shadowlands."

**Pillar Requirements:** Pillars represent a sorcerer's arcane knowledge. If she possesses the required Pillars (there may be more than one required to cast a spell), she may make the attempt. Inspect her Pillars' keywords, general description, and rank descriptions to determine if the spell would fit them. Itarajana Pillars can be found on p. 147.

**Foci:** Spells usually require specific instruments, gestures, and rites. These may be as elaborate as a sacrifice in the midst of a sacred diagram, or as simple as a mantra. These foci represent belief and occult knowledge producing the spell. To set an enemy aflame, she might invoke its god by praying to him and brandishing his symbol.

Each dot of Foundation beyond the first allows the sorcerer to dispense with the needed foci for one specific Pillar. If the sorcerer still requires foci for at least one of the spell's Pillars, she must incorporate them into the spell.

**Success Requirements:** All spells require a minimum number of successes equal to the higher of the following two options:

- The highest number of required (not known) Pillar dots. Outside the Shadowlands and other supernatural realms, add one to the required successes if the spell couldn't be written off as a coincidence. Add one more required success when casting Unbelievable spells (see p. 158) in the presence of mundane, mortal witnesses: a category that not only excludes obviously supernatural beings such as Cainites, but also ghouls, revenants, and Shadowlands-raised chatterlings. Mortals raised to strongly believe in the sorcerer's occult ideology don't impose this penalty either.
- The total successes required to satisfy all of the spell's Aspects, as listed in "Spell Aspects," p. 156.

This might exceed what the sorcerer can accumulate with one roll, necessitating the use of ritual magic (p. 155).

### Casting the Spell

To cast the spell, roll the sorcerer's Foundation + her highest rank one of the spell's required Pillars at a difficulty of 7.

*Example: Jiddu wishes to exhale a swarm of hungry locusts that devour flesh and ghostly essence. The Storyteller decides this requires Deva ●●●, Preta ●●●, and Triyagyonni ●●●. Jiddu possesses a Foundation of ●●●, and the following Pillars: Deva ●●●, Preta ●●●●, and Triyagyonni ●●●. Thus, he rolls 7 dice: Dharma ●●● + Preta ●●●●.*

**Spending Quintessence:** If the spell requires a minimum Pillar rank that exceeds the sorcerer's Foundation (such as in the example above), the player must spend one point of Quintessence per roll, shoring up her concentration with raw power. Quintessence may also be spent to boost a spell's prospects. Each point reduces the spellcasting roll's difficulty by 1, to a maximum -3 benefit.

**Ritual Magic:** A sorcerer may cast her spell as an extended action. She may cast for up to two consecutive turns. After that, each spellcasting roll requires one scene or hour. The sorcerer may accumulate a maximum number of successes equal to her Foundation *times* Willpower, but the player may only roll as many times as her Stamina + Foundation. If one roll fails, she may spend one point of Willpower to continue, but failing twice in a row or botching once ruins the spell.

**Permanent Magic:** At the Storyteller's discretion, the sorcerer may render a spell permanent for 10 times its base successes.

**Range:** A sorcerer is limited to casting spells at targets she can perceive with her natural senses – with her eyes instead of a camera, or her ears unaided by a hearing aid or speakers. Some Pillars allow for sympathetic casting over significant distances, though this requires additional successes, noted under “Spell Aspects” on p. 156.

## Other Permutations

**Casting in Combat:** +1 difficulty, unless the sorcerer is casting her spell at some distance away from the battlefield.

**Using Foci When Not Required:** -1 difficulty

**Maintaining Spells:** For every two spells the sorcerer casts that are currently running, add +1 to the difficulty of casting subsequent spells. This does not apply if the spell has been made permanent.

**Maximum Modifier:** No amount of modifiers can reduce a spell's difficulty below 3.

## Resisting Spells

Targets might evade spells in a number of ways.

**Countermagic:** Other sorcerers, blood magicians, and certain eldritch beings may counter incoming spells. If the target could use an occult supernatural power that might deflect or suffocate it, roll the dice pool used for that power at difficulty 8. (If a vampire is using the power Thaumaturgical Countermagic, as detailed on p. 228 of V20, the difficulty is 6 instead). If the target's successes exceed those of the spell, he counters it. Otherwise, it takes full effect. If the target's rank in the countering power is lower than the sorcerer's rank in the highest Pillar used, add +2 to the defender's difficulty – tangling with sorcery when you lack the knowledge to do so is a dangerous act.

Sorcerers and certain other beings may counter a spell as an extended action, if the Storyteller approves.

**Dodging:** If the spell directs material power through space, such as a pillar of flame or hurling an iron spike, the target may evade it with a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 6). If the target scores more successes than the spell, he gets out of the way. If not, the full power of the spell strikes. If the attack is invisible, the difficulty increases to 9. Spells that directly manipulate the target's body, mind, or other innate qualities cannot be dodged.

**Resisting Mental Attacks:** To throw off magical compulsions, roll Willpower (difficulty 9). Scoring as many successes as were used in the spell's Intensity + Duration Aspects throws

off control. If the target scores at least one success but not enough to exceed the spell's successes, he may roll again until he fails or accumulates the necessary successes. The first two rolls may be made on successive turns. Additional rolls may be made every hour or scene (Storyteller chooses).

## Quintessence: The Blood of Creation

Sorcerers sense the basic energy of the cosmos and have long referred to it as Quintessence. Sorcerers can tap Quintessence at sacred sites where it naturally collects. These include werewolf caerns, the “dragon nests” of Asia, and the nodes that modern magi guard.

Vampires have known the truth of Quintessence for as long as sorcerers have. They drink it. One blood point is equivalent to one point of Quintessence, whether harvested from a Cainite or her prey. Learned sorcerers develop spells to rip it from the energies of ghosts, spirits, shapeshifters, and at the apex of the Art – though in most cases, the harvest destroys and befouls the source.

A strong mystic self contains more Quintessence. Most sorcerers may store 10 Quintessence within them (in addition to the power they need to live, which some spells may draw out at the cost of injuring the sorcerer) and spend one point per turn. Those with the Fount Background (p. 154) may channel more.

## Spell Aspects

To determine spell's concrete effects, divide successes among its Aspects, as outlined below.

*Example: Jiddu scores five successes to call forth locusts that eat ghosts and mortals. His player spends three successes on the Damage Aspect and two on the Target Aspect to strike two people and their enslaved ghost. His spell inflicts three Health Levels of damage on each target.*

## General Aspects

**Intensity:** This Aspect measures the power of an otherwise undefined magical effect, such as a mind control spell, for the purposes of attempts to dispel or resist it. For example, a five-success Intensity Aspect devoted to binding a demon would require five successes to overcome. If the spell also possesses the Duration Aspect, this must be resisted first.

**Damage:** One Health Level per success, with the type of damage determined by the Pillars used. If the spell augments some other form of attack (such as a knife blow), these become damage dice, not levels. To inflict aggravated damage with an attack that does not normally

## Or Don't Bother

If you don't want to go through the effort of delineating a spell's properties with this kind of precision, simply set a number of successes based on how significant its effects may be, ranging from 3-5 successes for a moderate result such as experiencing a new corpse's last moments of life, to 15, 20, or more to rot the foundations of a mansion, causing it to collapse.

inflict it, or with pure magical force, the sorcerer must possess the required Pillars and spend one point of Quintessence per attack.

**Trait Manipulation:** Increase or penalize an Attribute, Ability, or similar mundane Trait for one success per dot, for the spell's duration. Most spells may not alter permanent supernatural Traits such as Generation.

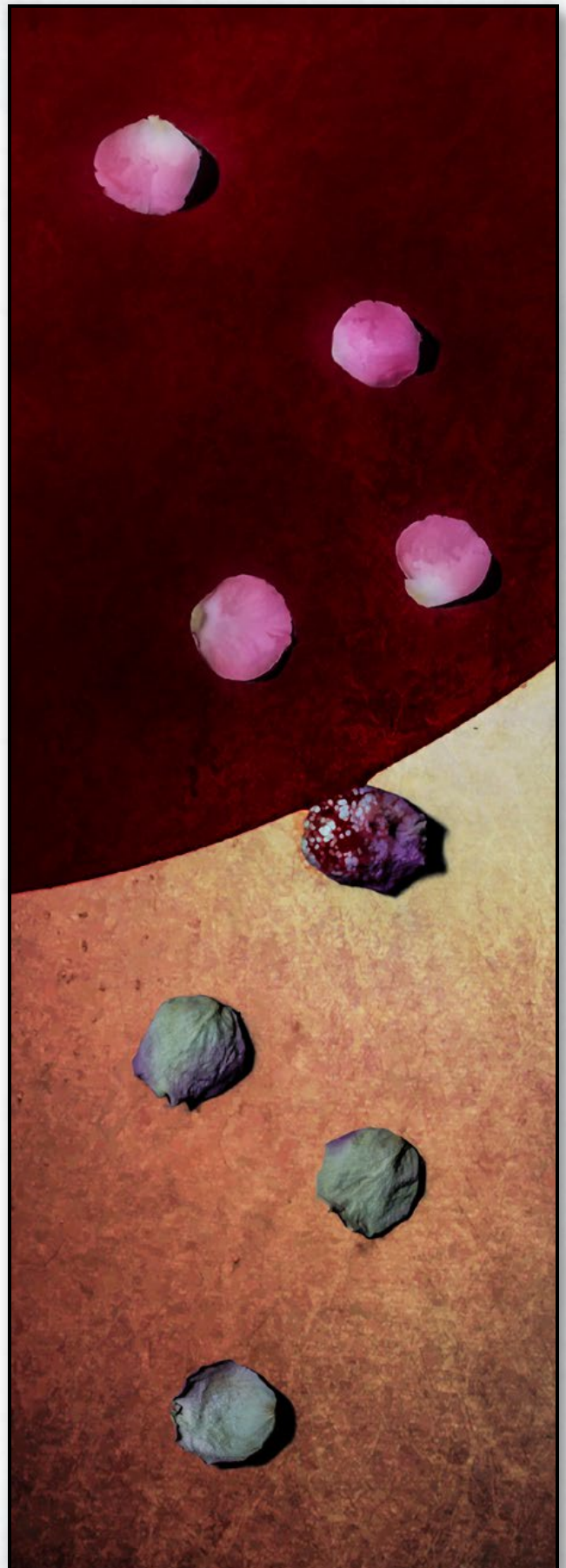
### Scope Aspects

**Area:** One success affects a 10-foot-wide/3-meter-wide sphere or equivalent area. Each additional success doubles this area, up to a number of successes equal to the sorcerer's Foundation. After that, the area increases by that maximum per success.

*Example: Jiddu (Dharma ●●●) spends six successes on Area. The first three successes earn a 40-foot-wide/12-meter-wide area. The next three expand it by 40 feet/12 meters per success, for a total area of 160 feet/48 meters wide.*

**Duration:** Consult the following table.

Aspect Successes	Duration
1	One turn
2	One turn per Foundation dot
3	One scene or hour
4	12 hours
5	24 hours
6	One day per Foundation dot
7	One month
8	One month per Foundation dot
9+	Storyteller's discretion ("A year and a day," "Until you behold the Throne of Basalt," etc.)



**Targets:** If the spell targets individuals instead of an area, the first target costs 0 successes. Each additional target costs one success.

## Mystical Aspects

**Oracular:** Some spells allow sorcerers to glimpse the past or future, or even affect other times. Determine the spell's maximum reach using this Aspect according to the following table.

Aspect Successes	Oracular Reach
1	One turn per Foundation dot
2	One scene or hour
3	One day
4	One month
5	One year
6	Two years per Foundation dot
7	10 years per Foundation dot
8	100 years per Foundation dot
9	Legendary and mythic times, at the Storyteller's discretion (Gehenna, the Time of Enoch)

**Sympathetic:** Some Pillars confer the ability to see and target distant places and individuals, based on the mystical correspondence between the sorcerer, her tools, and her target. The successes required depend on the degree of correspondence noted on the table below.

Aspect Successes	Correspondence Required
1	Possesses body sample (blood, hair)
2	Possesses object of high sentimental value/very familiar (close friend, lover)
3	Possesses photograph or audio recording/somewhat familiar (casual friend)
4	Possesses item regularly used/seen and knows name
5	Possesses item used once/knows name
6	Possesses item touched/vague description

## Success, Failure, and the Scourge

If the spell scores the required successes, it takes effect on the turn in which it was completed. If it accumulates

more successes than required, the player may spend the excess on additional Aspects, such as inflicting more damage or expanding the effect to a greater area.

If the spell doesn't hit the minimum successes, it fails. If no die scores a success and one or more 1s show up on the dice, the spell botches.

Certain spells generate *Scourge*, malefic effects caused through a combination of magical errors, the influence of unbelievers, and enigmatic occult forces. One must distinguish between a *Subtle* spell, which replicates phenomena that could have appeared through coincidence, and an *Unbelievable* spell, which cannot be waved away as mere chance as it rips a hole into hell or performs some other blatant effect. When ordinary mortals witness a spell, their psychic interference makes it less likely to succeed and harder to control. Fortunately, the *Unbelievable* category and mortal interference do not apply outside the mundane realm — all spells are *Subtle* in the Underworld, Umbra, and other mystical locales.

Consult the following table to view the outcomes from casting spells of various categories.

## Scourge Points

Some results cause the sorcerer to accumulate Scourge points. Each point eliminates a point of stored Quintessence (though not the Quintessence of the sorcerer's life force of blood points, which might injure her). Scourge points remain until released through Backlash.

## Scourge Results

**Accumulates, no Backlash:** Add Scourge points to the sorcerer's total, but don't roll a Backlash.

**Backlash:** Roll all accumulated Scourge points as a dice pool (difficulty 6) to determine the intensity of a Backlash: stray magic that turns on the sorcerer, and in severe cases, her allies. Use Backlash successes to construct a "spell" that injures or otherwise harms the sorcerer and perhaps, other unwanted targets. Most Backlashes utilize the sorcerer's own Pillars, but can at times exceed their limits or conjure strange phenomena beyond any Pillar's purview.

If the sorcerer has a moment to meditate, she can voluntarily suffer Backlash to release accumulated Scourge. Spend 1 point of Willpower, then roll her Foundation + highest Pillar and apply Backlash effects.

Each success releases 1 point of accumulated Scourge — the worse the Backlash, the more it cleanses the sorcerer's spirit. If the Backlash roll botches, it eliminates *all* Scourge without causing any unwanted effects.

## Casting and Scourges

Result	Scourge Points	Scourge Effect	Options
Success, Subtle Spell	0	None	N/A
Failure, Subtle Spell	0	None	Spend 1 Willpower, attempt to complete.
Botch, Subtle Spell	1	Accumulates, no Backlash	None
Success, Unbelievable Spell, Not Witnessed	0	None	N/A
Failure, Unbelievable Spell, Not Witnessed	1 per dot, highest Pillar required	Accumulates, no Backlash	Spend 1 Willpower, attempt to complete, add +1 Scourge
Botch, Unbelievable Spell, Not Witnessed	1 per dot, highest Pillar required, +1	Backlash	Spend 1 Willpower to delay
Success, Unbelievable Spell, Witnessed	1 per dot, highest Pillar required	Spell Effect, Backlash	Spend 1 Willpower to delay
Failure, Unbelievable Spell, Witnessed	1 per dot, highest Pillar required	Accumulates, no Backlash	Spend 1 Willpower, attempt to complete, add +1 Scourge
Botch, Unbelievable Spell, Witnessed	2 per dot, highest Pillar required	Backlash	Spend 1 Willpower to delay

### Option: The Dying Art

Magic has changed. The old sorcery has split into the static works of petty sorcerers, and the fluid, grand nature of true magick. Magi change the world and are changed by it, and the Tapestry of occult energies has woven itself anew throughout history, leaving the archaic sorcerers as weavers of old, frayed threads.

The Storyteller may represent this by increasing the amount of Scourge that accumulates when practitioners of Archaic Sorcery cast spells. Each Unbelievable spell cast in the mundane world acquires a cumulative, additional point of Scourge (+1, +2, etc.) until all accumulated Scourge Backlashes or the bonus Scourge equals the magus' Foundation rating. Mages who utilize "modern" forms of magic do not suffer this disadvantage. This problem doesn't manifest in the Shadowlands or other supernatural realms.

### Options

**Spend 1 Willpower to Complete:** If the spell fails but doesn't botch, the sorcerer may attempt to build the successes on future rolls by spending a point of Willpower, as per the rules for ritual magic on p. 155. If the spell fails again, it cannot be cast again on the same night.

**Spend 1 Willpower to Delay:** If the spell would cause Backlash, the sorcerer may delay its onset until the end of a scene by spending 1 Willpower point. When the scene ends, roll the Backlash, including subsequently accumulated Scourge in the dice pool. It's impossible to spend Willpower on successive scenes to indefinitely stave off Scourge.

## Apprentice Blood Familiar

**Prelude:** Your last memory of a normal life in the lands of the living was of the stars. You lived in the country, and above the silhouettes of trees you saw them twinkling, thrown across the night by God's hand. You'd looked up for just a moment before the Enrathi put a hood on you and took you to Enoch, where no stars shone. You were 13.



You weren't quite a chatterling. They'd been taken at younger ages. They were put to hard training and no longer moved like humans. Ghosts had to teach them to smile like normal people again. On your third night in Enoch, a vampire stroked your face with a cold hand. After she took your blood, she said the spark of enlightenment dwelled within you, and here, in Death's city, you'd either become a sorcerer or help the chatterlings improve their studies of anatomy.

They piled ancient books before you. Once, you spent a year in a room covered with tapestries, each describing a mystical facet of the human body. They wouldn't let you leave until you memorized them all. Awakening to your power came in a dream of the stars. The Enrathi who cared for you brought you before three ghosts. By this time, you knew they were extensions of the yamasattva, reshaped into the image of Vedic deities. The one with the aspect of Ganesh asked you about your visions. As they listened, the vampire who'd first fed on you approached. She regarded the ghosts until one of them took the shape of Agni, Lord of Fire, and told her, "You must wait."

You finished your tutelage with a young-looking man who said he was two centuries old and an Itarajana like yourself. He was a ghoul and Blood Familiar to a great Cainite of the True Hand. In time, he said, you would be worthy to serve the same function.

You didn't want to be worthy.

**Concept:** You were trained as a sorcerer to become an elder's Blood Familiar. You Awakened in an Enrathi mansion, and although your memories of normal human life have faded, neither your training nor Underworld's terrors deprived you of a desire for independence. No matter how righteous the True Hand's mission, you don't want to become a vampire's pet magician.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You've seen enough to understand that it might be possible to escape your fate, but you need political capital, fast. You were traded to a Cainite through maneuvering in the upper echelons. Your future domitor

waits for you to mature as a sorcerer before drowning your gift in a ghoul's blood ration. If you can accomplish something exceptional for the Tal'Mahe'Ra, you might become too valuable to sacrifice.

**Equipment:** Iron knife, "sanitized" 9 mm pistol bereft of serial numbers, encrypted smartphone, and a necklace of intricately carved human finger bones.

**Clan:** Itarajana Sorcerer

**Sire:** N/A

**Nature:** Conformist

**Demeanor:** Survivor

**Generation:** N/A – Foundation (Dharma) 2

**Embrace:** Mortal

**Apparent Age:** 24 (Actual Age)

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Perception 3

**Talents:** Alertness 1, Awareness 4 (Ghosts), Subterfuge 1

**Skills:** Crafts 1, Etiquette 2, Larceny 2, Melee 2, Stealth 2

**Knowledges:** Academics 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 4 (Medical Examiner), Occult 4 (Necromancy)

**Disciplines:** N/A – Pillars (Loka): Deva 2, Preta 2

**Backgrounds:** Fount (Atman) 2, Mentor 3, Resources 1

**Virtues:** Conviction 2, Self-Control 4, Courage 4

**Morality:** Path of Death of the Bones 6

**Willpower:** 6

## Kindred Lineages

The following section expands on existing Kindred bloodlines – the Nagaraja, the Harbingers of Skulls, and Old Clan Tzimisce – then offers a new, unique option for Tal'Mahe'Ra characters in the Maeghar.

## Harbingers of Skulls

*“Our kin within the Sabbat sadly obsess over reprisals. If you must pursue an agenda against the Giovanni, make it your hobby rather than your focus. Petty vengeance pales in comparison to the works of great import ahead of you in the Tal’Mahe’Ra.”*

Unsettling is a kind word to use when describing the Harbingers of Skulls, both in presence and practice. Clad in thin shrouds wrapped tightly around their skeletal bodies, rictus grins splitting their faces in two, and skin like paper, sallow and wan; the Harbingers do little to keep up appearances. Little pleases them more than the vivisection and study of a mortal, a wraith’s corpus, or a vampire’s undead shell. They delight in educating guests with demonstrations of their necromancies, happily elucidating on the makeup of both souls and bodies. They claim to be experts on both subjects. They’ve had time to practice.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the bloodline exists comfortably within the Shadowlands. The majority of them were exiled to the Underworld realm they call Golgotha centuries ago, some unwillingly, but many for the purposes of self-preservation. The Methuselah named Lazarus advised the Harbingers to hide in the Shadowlands, to make alliances in the Underworld and, like Anubis, he would shepherd them to their next destination when the time was right.

Time moves slowly in the lands of the dead. The power of the Harbingers grew along with their impatience. Several among their number remained at the gateway to their prison, known as Kaymakli, while others traveled deeper into the darkness. As they journeyed through Golgotha, Lazarus would occasionally appear in visions as a Capuchin friar. His messages were cryptic, but always urged the bloodline to move forward.

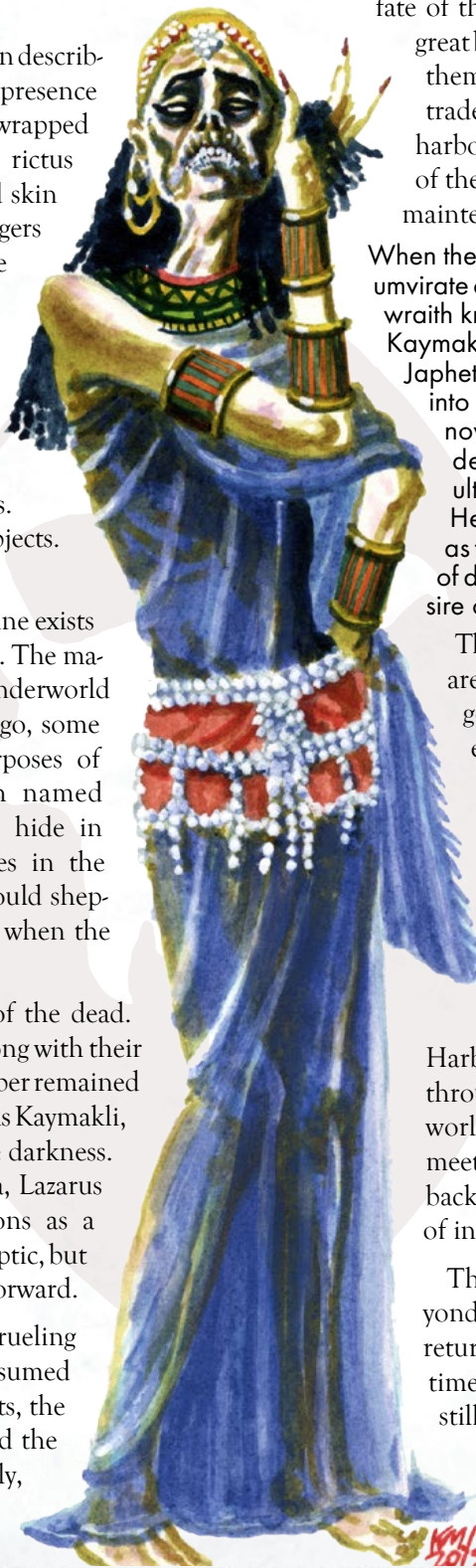
Traversing the Tempest was a grueling odyssey. Many Harbingers were consumed by the endless sea of tormented spirits, the weakest among them dragged beyond the reach of their companions. Eventually, the battered and broken bloodline

found Enoch, though the Nagaraja maintain that Enoch found them. Those who made the journey were treated as hallowed guests, greatly wronged by their Giovanni cousins. In truth, these Harbingers cared less for the fate of their Antediluvian and more for the great bastion of necromantic energy before them. For centuries after, the Harbingers traded with the Tal’Mahe’Ra. For safe harbor and freedom to study the mysteries of the Labyrinth, they would devote both maintenance and defense to Enoch.

When the seal at Kaymakli was rent by the triumvirate of Lazarus, his brother Byzar, and the wraith known as Japheth, the few remaining Kaymakli Harbingers burst free and followed Japheth to the Sabbat. Byzar disappeared into darkness, an old score apparently now settled. Lazarus, however, strode deeply into the Shadowlands and ultimately discovered his lost brethren. He was pleased with what he found, as these Lazarenes had a greater grasp of death and its lands than his destroyed sire or any Giovanni.

The Harbingers within the Tal’Mahe’Ra are not so drawn to the taste of vengeance as their Sabbat kin. Above all else, the Harbingers who serve the Hand remain focused on exploring the land of the dead and the reflections of the world above, developing rituals to manipulate the Shadowlands around them. The Hand has utilized the Harbingers’ proficiency for doing so, setting the Lazarenes to act as spies. The Harbingers spend many nights peering through the Shroud and into the mortal world, voyeuristically observing secret meetings between Kindred and reporting back to the Hand with selective nuggets of information.

The Harbingers’ utility extends beyond reconnaissance. While unable to return to the world above during the time Kaymakli’s seal stood, they were still capable of luring mortals into the Shadowlands thanks to the ritual of Parting the Veil (see p.176).



Most kine stolen from the mortal world are taken for nourishment, but some few are targeted specifically for the Embrace. The Harbingers' numbers are small, but growing quickly as they adjust to their now being able to return to the world above. Many Harbingers require childer or ghouls simply in order to function outside of the Shadowlands, resulting in the Embrace of an array of childer from multiple walks of life.

The relationship between the Hand and Lazarus is unclear, excepting his declaration of gratitude to the Tal'Mahe'Ra for the sanctuary provided to his kin. Rumors abound that Lazarus is either a consort of the Followers of Set or has been spying on them for centuries on behalf of the Hand. Since his appearance in the Shadowlands, the activities of the Harbingers have become ones of aggression against targets set by Lazarus and the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

Using their extensive knowledge of the dark reflections of reality shown in the Shadowlands, the Methuselah and the Sect instruct the Lazarenes to despoil and corrupt locations and beings both. The Harbingers repeatedly use necromancies in certain regions, constantly haunting select locales and causing incidents of mass terror with their dark rituals. The results are swollen, rancid mirrors of entities from the mortal world, projected into the Shadowlands. This campaign has been worldwide, necromantic blisters like Enoch and Kaymakli forming in greater numbers. Gradually the Harbingers contribute to the construction of further shadow bastions for the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Under the direction of the Sect and Lazarus, many of these are reflections of locations controlled by the Setites.

The Harbingers do not claim to be wholly in league with the Tal'Mahe'Ra, but they do recognize a debt that must be paid. For as long as the Sect and bloodline find common ground, the Lazarenes of Enoch are likely to stand by the True Black Hand.



# Nagaraja

*“Do not fear blood, for it is a holy river that purifies you. Do not fear dying flesh, for it kindles the fires of immortality.”*

Born to bolster the ranks of the True Hand, most Nagaraja remain out of a commitment to the Idran and its philosophies – but that number, while still the majority, is declining. As more renegades provide necromantic services to clientele from other Sects, Nagaraja lose face. Some join the Bahari, closer to the Sect’s center of power, or refuse membership in any particular cult to serve the whole. However, loyal Idran members tend to be older, stronger, and privy to necromantic lore found nowhere else, so despite the cult’s diminished state, other Cainites respect their personal power.

The Nagaraja were born within the True Hand. Ancient Idran realized that even with the help of the yamasattva and other Kindred, they could not safeguard Enoch from infernalists, Setites, and other corrupted beings without a cadre of vampire necromancers who answered to them alone. This makes defections especially painful to loyalists, but they refuse to condemn renegades to Final Death unless they share True Hand secrets. The Idran are mystics at heart and believe that preserving their lore is critically important. Even rogue Nagaraja practice the ancient ways. This is an obvious security concern for the Sect, however, so any “free” Nagaraja should assume she’s being monitored.

Idran believe that Enoch is a representation of the Wheel of Life and Death, and the judgment the dead will soon impose upon the living. The yamasattva claim that, according to the Guarded Rubrics, if evil claims the

Basalt Throne, Gehenna will change from a moment of liberation to the unleashing of Naraka-hells on Earth. Thus, loyal Nagaraja fulfill the holy duty of guarding Enoch and researching its secrets, as part of a broader mission to study the cycles of life and death. They’ve have been entrusted with the city’s secrets, made aware of certain omens, and are sent forth with enigmatic tasks by elders and yamasattva.

The bloodline claims no Clan as its founder, but its elders know that Setite blood was magically altered to produce them. This blood was supposedly cleansed of Sutekh’s malign influence. Though the yamasattva are mighty sorcerers and Inauhaten himself helped design the rite that made them, Nagaraja are particularly knowledgeable in the occult and know that once broken, mystic sympathies can be remade. Thus, they fall on the Followers of Set as anonymous executioners, refusing to ever speak to Snake-Charmers.

The eldest Nagaraja belong to the Sixth Generation. Some of them believe that through ritual diablerie, they might regain the standing they once held in the True Hand, while further confusing attempts to trace their origins. The Tal’Mahe’Ra forbids diablerie without the express permission of the Wazir council, and have thus far refused to authorize the assassination of an appropriate target. Yet others have made bold moves that were blessed by the Del’Roh after the fact, and this tempts elders to act first and demand approval later.



The first Nagaraja were sorcerers, and rapidly developed necromantic blood magic to compensate for the lost Atman. They invented the Vitreous Path (see V20, pp. 174-176) and primarily practice it, the Cenotaph Path, and the Sepulchre Path, though they have access to others. Nagaraja Necromancers may be unequalled in breadth of their knowledge, even if it is limited by the elders' strength of blood.

### **Stereotypes**

**Bahari:** Death has no gender, and life is dust with pretensions.

**Idran:** Keepers of the true way. We must remind the others of that before Gehenna's pyres illuminate the truth for everyone.

**Order of Moloch:** Demons exist to punish an impure existence; yet calling upon them is the essence of self-degradation. This should be a self-correcting problem, but sometimes it's a good idea to hurry karma along.

**Tal'Mahe'Ra:** Do you think a man will judge us? No, we have already been judged. Even if the Basalt Throne were to be cast into the Tempest, the Wheel abides.



## Old Clan Tzimisce

*“God is mysterious, but hell is efficient and lingers; inescapable, inhaling and exhaling in that darkness when your eyelids seal.”*

In the end times, the Eldest will gather the Clan unto itself, sparing only those whose talent has the strength to stand on its own without depending upon the master’s brush to complete its work. So say the Old Clan. To them, Vicissitude is a crutch preventing true enlightenment; a cheat bypassing genuine comprehension of the intricate frailties of living matter; a crude tool lulling one to lassitude as a lover’s delicately-sighed assistance encourages co-dependent reliance upon him. The Eldest gave the Clan Vicissitude in order to separate the wheat from the chaff by design; through the ease it provides, the perfect tool weakens the skill of the artist and the art. The Tzimisce have grown brittle, pathetic, homogenous, uncreative, unsophisticated, and inferior. Their obsessive, crippling addiction to Vicissitude stunts their growth in diminishment of the Clan. The fools cannot see to grasp their birthright, for fear of dropping the bottle.

According to Old Clan lore, before Enoch was swept from the firmament by the wrath the Deluge wrought, the Eldest, in his wandering, found a well. Around the well he found a city in veneration to entities who, like he, enshrouded themselves in the bowels of the earth, possessed of a horrific grace rivaling his own. The city’s kine cried out in forbidden tongues against him, but the language therein supplied only succor and soothed the Eldest. Their rituals he found wanting, their depravities and atrocities no more than children dressing in the cloth of their parents’ emulation. He educated them, and was in turn enlightened.

Infused with this new wisdom, the Old Clan guided by the Eldest bored deeply into the heart of the Carpathians; there the Eldest caged, bound, and tamed the demon Kupala, crucifying the spirit to the Clan and shackling it to his will. Cleverly, by intent of the Eldest, the demon found purchase in the Antediluvian and spread itself through his blood – only the Old Clan was spared the indignity. Taking their cues from the master with fervor, they researched,

catalogued, and subjugated Hell’s minions. Applying the awareness gleaned from dissecting the plucked fruit from the Qlippothic tree to elevate their crafts, careful never to imbibe the bitter juice it offered, inevitably their studies crossed paths with the Molochim, and the two entwined like lovers long lost.

In the eyes of the Old Clan, their kinsmen have not the clarity of vision to see the lesson of the master, adrift in bowed supplication to the manipulations of his pet, Kupala. They are the medium exercising the Eldest’s own grand and beautiful project. They are not his students; they are his art, blind to their true purpose, and unworthy of his teachings. It is the Tzimisce’s dominion to rule, not to serve. The Tzimisce are the seeds of Caine the farmer planted in the Earth, and each Tzimisce must carve themselves into their land, individually.



All Clans have their place in the pecking order: the Ventrue gardeners guide the kine, the Lasombra shepherd Caine’s get, and the Tzimisce, by right, are the land and rule it – all who tread upon it belong to them. Hell and all divine fugitives, from Namtaru’s fallen to the outcast kine of Eden and Caine’s

cursed children, are broken only to render them a better bend before the Tzimisce.

Over the course of millennia, the Old Clan has silently borne witness to the single greatest failing of their decadent, Vicissitude-laden Clansmen: hypocrisy. For all their pontificated cawing about evolution, they cannot adapt. Their desperate clinging to staid pantomime, ceremony, and the tradition of the Voivodate nearly destroyed them in their war with the Tremere. Following that, their antiquated values found no shelter from the modernizing world around them. Their fiefdoms no longer protected them from the constant progressive fury of the kine's flowering scientific expansions. The superstitious fear they had erected their kingdoms upon were walls made of sand when faced with the wonders of the steam engine, the telephone, and the computer. Thrust out by an inferno of irony they could not contain, the Tzimisce are now the ones naked, hiding, and afraid of the kine. The Old Clan smile when reflecting on the poetic symmetry in the Eldest's ever-blossoming composition.

Relations between Tzimisce are inadvertently held together by a loose confederation of independent Eastern European Old Clan Tzimisce adhering to the Tradition of Hospitality in an effort to combine their forces to form the Oradea League in opposition to the Sabbat. The Old Clan pity the main Clan, recognizing them as vessels of the Eldest and not individuals in their own right – speaking *at them*, rather than *to them* in meetings, regarding any interactions as a means of direct communication with the Eldest.

As the central core of the Order of Moloch, the Old Clan carry on the Eldest's example, spending the bulk

of their time and enormous resources on the capturing and enslavement of demonic entities and the hunting and destroying of infernal Cainites for the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Old Clan Tzimisce are facilitators who lead and command by example, taking no interest in political games or maneuverings and ignoring "official" designated roles in their dealings with others. Many would see their lack of respect for established bureaucracies as shortsighted, ego-driven, and stemming from an impractical nature with no appreciation for structure. Quite the opposite is true; their lack of care in contrived hierarchies is an arrogance derived out of inability to see anything for them to respect. Titles are words: calling a duck a chicken does not grant it the ability to cluck. The Old Clan, in essence, is above such concerns. Leaders lead because it is intrinsic to their being, it is what they do, and it is no more a matter of choice than instinct.

## Stereotypes

**Bahari:** The dissonance in the gravitas of your comprehension does not mean it is not so. Any fool can know, and those who know, do. The point is to understand. Those that understand, teach.

**Harbingers of Skulls:** Gratitude is the key to unlocking all doors.

**Nergali:** We know who controls the Ivory Tower. A sewer drain rejects nothing and accepts everything.

**Order of Moloch:** The housekeeper's irony: others notice only when it is not done.

**Tal'Mahe'Ra:** It is important for the left hand to know what the right hand is doing. Always bite the hand that feeds you and extend it to the other.



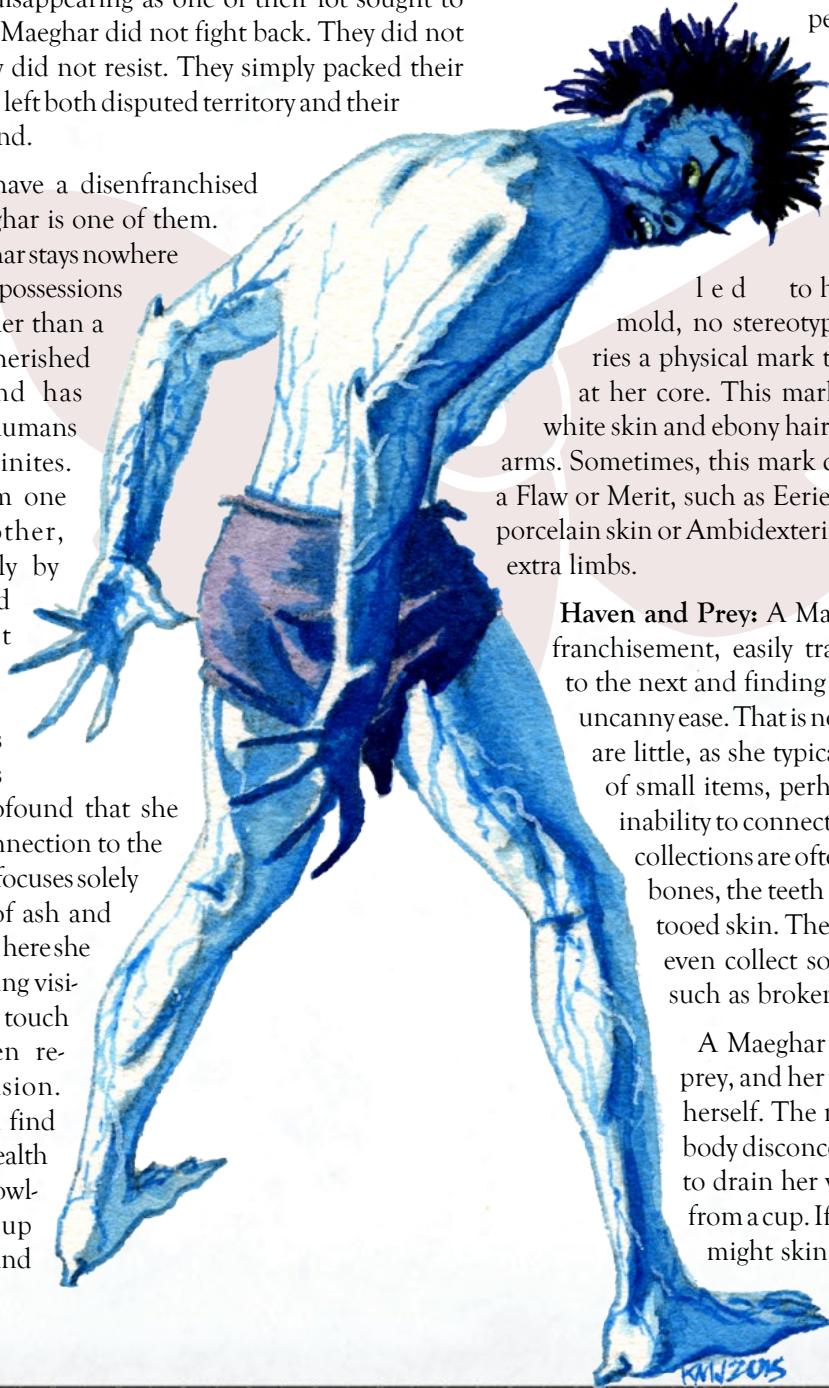
# Maeghar

*"Keep moving. Do not grow attached. You cannot lose what you do not have."*

The Maeghar were never a bloodline. Most share no common ancestry with each other, and many do not even hail from the same Clan. They are merely a collection of accidents, a mixture of blood and fae-blooded wyrd that should never have been possible. There is no kinship here, no sense of shared destiny. So when the Middle Ages drew to a close, the Renaissance picked up, and the Kiasyd began disappearing as one of their lot sought to rule alone, the Maeghar did not fight back. They did not speak out; they did not resist. They simply packed their belongings and left both disputed territory and their old name behind.

If Cainites have a disenfranchised class, the Maeghar is one of them.

A typical Maeghar stays nowhere for long, has no possessions to speak of other than a single, most-cherished collection, and has ties to neither humans nor other Cainites. She drifts from one place to another, consumed only by her own self and seemingly lost to the world. For some Maeghar, this disconnect has become so profound that she has lost her connection to the living and now focuses solely on the world of ash and death, and even here she remains a fleeting visitor whose light touch hovers between reality and illusion. Often, she will find herself with a wealth of eclectic knowledge, picked up as tidbits here and there.



The Maeghar has since found their way to the Tal'Mahe'Ra. They might not be interested in the Sect's ideology (this depends on the individual Maeghar), but the two are a very good match in the practical sense. The True Black Hand offers the Maeghar a way to remain disconnected from the world at large yet have a modicum of backup, whilst she brings a unique combination of knowledge and power to the table. More importantly, though a Maeghar might visit Enoch, her willingness to travel makes her a perfect representation for the Sect in the world.

**Sobriquet:** Relics, Lost Butterflies

**Appearance:** Each Maeghar is as unique as the circumstances that led to her conception. She fits no mold, no stereotype. Yet every Maeghar carries a physical mark that exposes the wyrd lying at her core. This mark can be subtle, like snow white skin and ebony hair, or obvious, like having six arms. Sometimes, this mark can lead to the purchase of a Flaw or Merit, such as Eerie Presence (V20 p. 495) for porcelain skin or Ambidexterity (V20 p. 482) to represent extra limbs.

**Haven and Prey:** A Maeghar embraces her disenfranchisement, easily traveling from one location to the next and finding abandoned buildings with uncanny ease. That is not to say that her possessions are little, as she typically owns a large collection of small items, perhaps to compensate for her inability to connect to (un)living beings. These collections are often disturbing, such as finger bones, the teeth of children, or pieces of tattooed skin. The occasional Maeghar might even collect something more ephemeral, such as broken dreams.

A Maeghar seems to have no favored prey, and her victims are as unique as she herself. The nearness of a warm human body disconcerts her though, leaving her to drain her victim and drink his blood from a cup. If she is particularly fussy, she might skin her victim first to prevent blood touching the dirty skin as it pours out.



**The Embrace:** A Maeghar herself rarely Embraces. She feels little need for companionship, so why should she curse another with her existence? If she does Embrace, it's usually because the childe has a very specific skillset that suits her purposes. When that purpose is met, the childe is either destroyed or set free. There is no consistency to which childer are killed and which released, as some Maeghar might see freedom as a reward for good services, whilst others view blessed death as such. To create another Maeghar, a sire must embrace a fae-blooded mortal. If she does not, the resulting childe is always a Caitiff, since he lacks the unique spark to become a Maeghar.

**Clan Disciplines:** Mytherceria or Necromancy (player's choice), plus two others from sire's Clan Disciplines.

**Weaknesses:** Due to her fae-marked physique, rolls to recognize the Maeghar as otherworldly are at -1 difficulty. Secondly, her fae heritage makes her vulnerable to cold iron: not only do weapons made from cold iron inflict aggravated damage to her, but such damage triggers an immediate roll to avoid either frenzy or Rötschreck as befitting the context. Lastly, a Maeghar feels such revulsion at feeding from a warm, smelly, and sweaty human that she must drain her victim's blood in a clean container before consuming it. This restriction does not apply when feeding from vampires.

**Organization:** A Maeghar is an independent creature who values her solitude. Should she meet another of her kind, both engage in a non-committal, albeit exceedingly

polite, discourse to determine if the other party is interested in exchanging information or boons. If so, the two take it from there. If not, both continue on their way with no hard feelings. Recognizing the need for some form of support in a dark and dangerous world, many Maeghar have fallen in with the Tal'Mahe'Ra and will provide services to that Sect.

## Stereotypes

**Camarilla:** Lofty ideals and pretenses. Such a thin veneer. "All Cainites are Kindred?" We know better.

**Kiasyd:** Not our fight. Give Marconius and his brood a wide berth. Do not even let them know you exist, and you'll be fine.

**Nagaraja:** We might learn a lot from these powerful necromancers. If only their feeding habits weren't so revolting.

**Old Clan Tzimisce:** Oh yes. Very polite. Good grasp of etiquette. An appreciation for the fineries of life. I wonder if he's interested in my collection of human eyes?

**Sabbat:** Stay away. Not only are they unmannered and crass, but this is Marconius' playground.

**Tal'Mahe'Ra:** A collection of old relics steeped in death. Yes, this will do nicely for us.

**True Brujah:** Scholars. Excellent academics. Just a tad boring, but they are forgiven for that.



## New Disciplines

In this section, we showcase some of the unique Disciplines available to Black Hand characters

### **Koldunism (Koldunic Sorcery)**

Life is predatory, feasting on itself to endure indefinitely. Life and death are one, as the land and the Tzimisce are one. This is the meaning of the ouroboros, the dragon devouring its tail that serves as the symbol of Clan Tzimisce. Life obtains its nourishment from death, just as death derives its banquet from life, the two eternally encircling each other. The Tzimisce are the personification of life and death, and so they are true gods of flesh, bone, land, and the blood that sustains it.

Life and death, the land, and all beholden to it, are their dominion. The Kindred who fill their gullets with the blood of mortals, who work the earth to produce the seeds that ripen the cattle they dine upon for their own sustenance to extract their fruit from the land. All life is beholden to the land; when the land is feeble, no spring comes to life. When Tzimisce childer resurrect to deathless everlasting vitality, it is the land itself that fills them. Tzimisce fuse to the land that claims them. From branch to stem, the two are wedded inseparably.

In ancient times, the vows of this wedding were expressed through the kraina (the sorcerous Path) that would arise and mature within the Tzimisce who cultivated koldunism. In those ancient days, the Genius Loci was a tool attainable by all koldun to enhance their kraina, and for the butter it glazed on their bread most koldun labored to know it. The chaos that beset the Clan during the formation of the Sabbat made entrance for the demon Kupala to entreat promises of tremendous might to those desperate enough to listen. And many did, soliciting the demon for assistance to defeat their enemies.

By defiling the Genius Loci (known to the modern koldun as the Way of Spirit), the demon spread its primal, dark, elemental, and depraved sorcery throughout the Clan to any who agreed to divorce themselves from their ancient kraina, trading their godhood to bow and pledge themselves in veneration to the new demon-god.

But some in the Old Clan did not desert their kraina or betray their land to the whims of Kupala and still practice these hidden arts (which they zealously protect from those outside of their kind in the modern nights). These Old Clan koldun set free the raw energy of the land that claims them, nourishing it with their blood to mingle their spirit with that of the land. Each kraina is

unique to the land and the Old Clan Tzimisce that births and nurtures it, evolving within the koldun as the land takes hold of him. The spirit of Detroit's decaying cityscape will not manifest its witchcraft in the same way as the koldun claimed by the Ganges River or the unspoiled peak of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Koldunism is always learned as an out-of-Clan Discipline. Koldun may acquire the power of multiple lands by learning the kraina of other koldun, but their primary kraina will forever be that of the land whose soil they must rest in each day to replenish their strength. The maximum level a koldun may attain in any secondary kraina is limited to the highest level they have achieved in their primary kraina, and may not surpass it.

The koldun unlocks the skill of their primary kraina through trial and error, one power at a time. Primary kraina are unreliable and unwieldy during their development, sometimes displaying powers so extreme their potential burns out almost immediately and fails to stabilize, or the sorcery is so weak as to prove unworthy of pursuit. When designing primary kraina, players and Storytellers should work together testing each new power thoroughly in play before graduating the kraina to a more advanced state. Powers of primary kraina always serve to either bend or twist aspects of the environment directly or embody them within the koldun herself.

To animate their magic, all kraina usually involve the koldun spilling her blood in tribute to the earth, river, or sky (usually 1 blood point), followed by an Attribute + Occult roll against a difficulty of the power's level + 4 – the flexibility of the kraina make it more difficult to control than “normal” Koldunic Sorcery. The difficulty is reduced by two if the power is within the koldun's primary kraina. The Attribute rolled is indicated in the power's description; koldun always use their unaltered Attribute score, ignoring enhancements by blood, Disciplines, or anything else. With exception to Kraina of the Well (see below), if the power is within the region associated with the kraina, no tribute of blood expenditure is asked for by the spirit of the land, allowing the koldun to trigger the power if succeeding at the activation roll without spending blood to fuel it.

The following are two secondary kraina: the Kraina of Enoch and the Kraina of the Well. The Kraina of Enoch is accessible to any Old Clan koldun initiated in the Tal'Mahe'Ra, while Kraina of the Well is reserved for those Old Clan belonging to the Order of Moloch.

### **The Kraina of Enoch**

Old Clan Tzimisce Embraced within the Underworld who claimed Enoch for their territory pioneered this kraina. The

Kraina of Enoch is as unique in methodology as the land that birthed it. Koldun and their land are one; all kraina awaken the nature of that land. Whereas most kraina require that the koldun grant an offering of blood to the land, the Kraina of Enoch reflects the heart of the Underworld itself. The koldun seeking to rouse it must first become one with the lands of the dead by sacrificing a portion of their body.

In the Underworld, koldun with this kraina always have an intuitive sense of Enoch's exact location within the Tempest.

### • Shroud of Oblivion

Existence in the Underworld grants Cainites certain advantages not available on the Earth; the koldun tears out a piece of the Underworld's fabric to saturate the area around him with its attributes.

**System:** The koldun spends a Willpower point, then makes the activation roll (Attribute: Stamina). With a success, the koldun's skin turns to ash and crumbles to nothing, exposing his meat to the elements. He plunges his hands into the earth, parting any impediment as if it were fresh tilled soil, and wrenches forth an insubstantial sheet of inky night, yanking out a piece of the Underworld with which to wrap himself. Once donned, the appearance of anything blanketed by the shroud becomes visibly muted; in the physical world, all beneath its shield resembles black-and-white television images in a full color world, while in the Underworld, things take on a more ghastly hue of deeper darkness and decay.

Shroud of Oblivion centers on and follows the koldun. The power has a radius of five feet/two meters per success scored on the activation roll, and a duration (in turns) equal to the successes. All those within the radius benefit from the shroud's effects. The effects of this power differ according to what land the koldun is currently located (see the sidebar "Vampires in the Underworld" on p. 119): while in the mortal world, damage from sunlight lessens to bashing. If anywhere in the Underworld, the faint sun deals no damage.

When the duration of the power expires, the koldun bleeds out, losing one point of blood each turn until he expends a blood point to rejuvenate his skin (unless in the Underworld, in which case no blood is lost). Penalties sustained to activate this power are tallied after the duration ends. Healing prior to that time suspends the power's effects.

### •• Spectral Cloak

By harnessing the sight of the dead, the koldun grieves those in the vicinity with a glimpse of the world

beyond that of the living. Spectral Cloak conceals the koldun from unfriendly eyes and drives away unwanted observers in terror.

**System:** The koldun plucks out her eyes, crushes them in her hands, and extends her palms to the sky, then makes the activation roll (Attribute: Perception). With a success, the pulp turns to dust and takes flight on an eerie howl of wind that pours from a fathomless darkness within her empty sockets. Shadows drawn from the surroundings engulf the koldun who vanishes, rendering her invisible to standard vision (for those with Auspex, see the sidebar "Seeing the Unseen" on p. 142 of V20, using the koldun's rating in this kraina). Though the koldun sees normally inside the radius of the power's effect, she is blind to anything outside of this area. Others within the radius must succeed on a Willpower roll (difficulty equal to the koldun's rating in the kraina plus successes scored on the activation roll, maximum 9), or be afflicted with the Deathstare Flaw (V20, p. 494) and attempt to flee in fright for a number of turns equal to the successes scored on the activation roll.

The power's radius centers on and follows the koldun, allowing her to move about and act on others, even violently, without being revealed. Spectral Cloak has a radius of ten feet/three meters per success scored on the activation roll and a duration (in turns) equal to the successes. When the duration of the power expires, the koldun is abandoned to blindness until she expends one blood point to heal (unless in the Underworld, where the koldun may continue to see indefinitely, despite the loss of her eyes). Penalties sustained to activate this power are tallied after the duration ends. Healing prior to that time suspends the power's effects.

### ••• Pond of Malevolent Dread

Nestled just above the abyss in the Underworld, no place is more frigid, devoid of light, tenebrous, or bleak than the Sea of Shadows, an ocean of souls on the precipice of total annihilation. The koldun forms a shaft to sup from the doom of this sea and release its flow.

**System:** The koldun spends a turn eviscerating himself, thrusting his hands deep in his abdomen to expel his entrails onto the ground, then makes the activation roll (Attribute: Stamina). With a success, his bowels bore through the earth past any obstruction blocking their path, then cross over the threshold which separates the vibrant lands of the living from the desiccated lands of the dead. His entrails touch the very depths of the Underworld's bottom layer, taking root in the Sea of Shadows. The vampire drains its essence into himself and discharges it outward in pulsating waves of despair that bubble up

through the earth to ring him in a liquid pool of seething, writhing spectres. Ghostly arms stretch out to clutch and feast upon those walking through the circle's radius. The rippling pool centers below the koldun, who remains locked in place from the waist down until the power ends.

The power has a radius of fifteen feet/five meters per success scored on the activation roll and a duration (in turns) equal to the successes. All those within the radius have their speed slowed to  $\frac{1}{4}$  and must succeed at a Willpower roll each turn (difficulty equal to the koldun's rating in the kraina plus successes scored on the activation roll, maximum 9) or lose 1 point of permanent Willpower.

When the duration of the power expires, the koldun severs his viscera buried in the earth and incurs two levels of unsoakable lethal damage. This damage cannot be healed by any other means other than by spending blood. Additionally, the koldun loses an amount of blood points equal to half the successes scored on the activation roll, rounded up (unless in the Underworld, in which case no blood is lost). Wounds sustained to activate this power are tallied after the duration ends. Healing prior to that time suspends the power's effects.

#### •••• Wrath of the Tempest

Permeating most of the Underworld is the Tempest: a roiling, limitless typhoon made of fractured memories, broken dreams, nightmares, fear, and misery. The koldun summons the death rattles of all whom she has vanquished, pricking a hole in the barrier between worlds to let bleed the metaphysical storm.

**System:** The koldun spends one Willpower point and lifts her head to the sky, then makes the activation roll (Attribute: Strength). With a success, she opens her mouth and a choir of voices not her own issue a deafening cry that blends into thunder as storm clouds gather above her for the remainder of the turn. A still silence follows as the koldun stands frozen, her expression transfixed, echoing the call. Moments later, a roaring hurricane explodes around her, breaching forth from the land of the dead with all the fury of the Underworld. Its eye, a focused funnel, descends into the koldun's mouth, causing her to convulse and writhe as she rises thirty feet into the air.

The tempest has a radius of twenty feet/seven meters per success scored on the activation roll and a duration (in turns) equal to the successes. All those within the radius must succeed on a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) each turn or gain a derangement and enter a strange fugue state (described on p. 291 of V20) called a



“Harrowing” as the storm warps memories, trapping those within in an internal labyrinth of regret, depression, and hopelessness for the rest of the scene. While the storm rages, the koldun is mindless and completely unaware of her surroundings; she sustains one level of unsoakable bashing damage each turn as the tempest pounds her from within (unless in the Underworld, in which case the bashing damage may be soaked normally). Penalties sustained to activate this power are tallied after the duration ends. Healing prior to that time suspends the power’s effects.

#### ••••• Hunger of the Void

The koldun embodies the distortions of the Tempest, torturing his soul to cleave a pit of perfect destruction into reality.

**System:** The koldun spends a Willpower point, reaches down his throat, and pulls out his own soul. He spends a turn tormenting and stretching the spirit’s mouth ever wider as it mutely protests, clawing impotently at its violator in shocked disbelief. He tosses the contorted soul to the earth at his feet, then makes the activation roll (Attribute: Strength) before diving into it. With a success, the giant maw transforms into a cavity five feet in circumference that begins sucking in all it can to appease its insatiable appetite.

The power has a radius of twenty five feet/eight meters per success scored on the activation roll and a duration (in turns) equal to the successes. All those within the radius are dragged ten feet/three meters per turn toward the Nihil, and have their speed slowed by half every five feet/two meters nearer they are to it. If consumed by the maw, they disappear and must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 9). After the power ends, the Nihil implodes, leaving an enormous crater in its wake. At the base of the crater lies the koldun with all the maw has consumed resting on top of him. Characters who have failed the roll are turned into mindless creatures, their virtues and morality stripped from them completely and reduced to zero. Vampires succeeding on the roll enter a Harrowing (see Wrath of the Tempest) for the rest of the scene and gain a derangement. Regardless of success or failure, any mortal consumed by the pit has its soul obliterated and enters a permanent coma.

A vampire’s undead stasis cannot incarnate this otherworldly energy. Upon the power’s conclusion, fissures of unfiltered nothingness shred the koldun’s soul from within as searing chars erupt to split the flesh across his entire frame (inflicting two levels of aggravated damage).

### The Kraina of the Well

Legend holds that this kraina is the very first kraina, developed by the Eldest upon its discovery of the original

Well of Sacrifice. Unlike others of its ilk, the Kraina of the Well is not harbored in exclusivity by the Old Clan alone. The Old Clan also instructs those Baali on Via Hyron dedicated to the Order of Moloch’s mission to conquer or slay the demonic with zero tolerance for all who’ve fallen into its infernal maw. Baali students do not cultivate a primary kraina and cannot learn other kraina other than the Well.

In order to enact the power of this kraina, the koldun is obligated to establish a sympathetic bond to the original Well of Sacrifice by building a duplicate for her own use and anointing it with her blood. Wells of Sacrifice are often constructed in secluded areas hidden from potential disturbance (see Wells of Sacrifice on p. 102), and their spiraling pattern is reminiscent of (and pays homage to) the symbol of Clan Tzimisce. In the wilderness, the “roots” of a mountain, in a cave, or the base of a tree are traditionally favored locations. A koldun abiding in the sprawl of a modern city might choose a deserted rooftop water reservoir, the remnants of a retired or never completed subway system, or an abandoned building or elevator shaft open to the sky.

The construction of a Well requires six hours of uninterrupted work every night for one full week, followed by enchantment and a mortal sacrifice each month thereafter to maintain. During construction, the koldun gives six blood points per night to the Well and makes an extended Manipulation + Occult roll (difficulty 7). If a night’s work is missed or if the seven rolls do not accumulate at least 25 net successes, the Well remains dormant and the koldun must begin anew from scratch. To maintain a Well, the koldun prepares her sacrifice and again makes a gift of six blood points, then rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7, needing a minimum of three successes). A sympathetic Well constructed in this manner lasts indefinitely unless its structure is ruined. Should a koldun’s Well be destroyed, she loses access to all powers in this kraina until a new Well is erected.

#### • Call the Children

In order to command a thing, one should venture to know it. Demons, much like dogs, always endeavor to come when called by their masters. The technique of conjuring forth Hell’s dwellers has ever been a staple at the table of infernal practice.

**System:** Necessitating a full scene of uninterrupted focus and the expenditure of one blood point to enact, the koldun performs a long series of incantations while tracing glyphs surrounding a circle in his own blood around the entrance to his Well of Sacrifice. The power and strength of a demon the koldun is capable of summoning rises proportionate to the level of his advancement in the kraina.

As the koldun's skill in the kraina rises, so, too, does his ability to invoke demons of increasing power. Over the course of the scene he makes an extended invocation roll (Attribute: Wits), requiring an amount of successes equal to the difficulty level of the demon summoned.

Maximum Power	Difficulty Level	Type/Freebie Points
Kraina Level 1	5 Successes	Fallen Tempter
Kraina Level 2	6 Successes	Fallen Tempter: +30
Kraina Level 3	7 Successes	Fallen Tempter: +55
Kraina Level 4	8 Successes	Earthbound Defiler in Darkness
Kraina Level 5	9 Successes	Earthbound Defiler in Darkness: +30

Demons use the statistics presented on pp. 386-387 of V20. Storytellers should freely exchange specific Abilities and Disciplines for others and vary Attribute scores to suit the needs of their game. Demons invoked through Call the Children are not in possession of a mortal host, retaining the countenance of their Apocalyptic Form described under Powers and Weaknesses. Without being bound, a demon cannot exit the confines of the summoning circle within and will be ripped back into Hell after a number of turns equal to the difficulty level of its conjuration have expired. The demon can communicate, but generally demand an exchange of goods or services (sometimes even a contract) for any information asked of them, and even then, there's no guarantee they need answer truthfully. The player may choose to summon the same demon again at a later date if a bargain was struck but unfulfilled before the conclusion of the power's duration. Two or more koldun with this power may elect a primary summoner and work in concert to invoke an entity. The difficulty level is reduced by one (minimum 4) for each koldun assisting in the invocation.

### •• Heed the Hell-bound Heart

Whether by blessing or familiarity, a koldun who drinks from her Well gains a supernatural sense that alerts her when demonic influence is near, wielding the ability to scan places, objects, or beings corrupted by the stamp of infernal company.

**System:** By sipping a blood point directly from her Well, the koldun adds her levels attained in Kraina of the Well to her Awareness Ability for detecting demonic influence in areas tainted by its presence or souls stained by its touch. This effect last for as long as the blood point

remains in her system. Blood is always consumed in the order it was ingested.

### ••• Aegis Alighieri

Named in the modern nights for the famed Venetian poet, Aegis Alighieri shields the koldun from violating onslaughts, predations, and defilement by demonic forces.

**System:** The koldun lacerates a vein, spending one turn and a blood point to coat an amulet in her blood, then makes the activation roll (Attribute: Charisma). For the remainder of the scene, the koldun adds successes scored on the activation roll to the difficulty rating for supernatural attacks and influences of infernal origin used to target her (such as infernally blessed objects, Investments and Gifts, or any Disciplines and blood sorcery powers wielded by infernalists and demons). She also gains an amount of extra dice on rolls to resist those same effects equal to the amount of successes scored. Any mundane or mystical object may be consecrated as an amulet; popular choices include ceremonial daggers, shamed crucifixes, or decapitated heads that animate to scream endlessly in silence. However, only the koldun benefits from the protection granted through Aegis Alighieri and must have the amulet on her person for this power to function. Prior to activating this power, the koldun is required to have dipped the amulet in her Well, letting it soak therein for one full night. Two or more koldun working together in close proximity (within 50 feet/15 meters) grant each other one extra success on resistance rolls and increase the difficulty to target by one (maximum 9) for all koldun present with this power activated.

### •••• Heave the Host of Hell

After learning to call, to sense, and then to defend against infernal marring, the koldun now may erase its scars entirely.

**System:** The koldun creates a link to his Well by molding or digging a bowl-shaped impression (minimum one foot/30 cm in diameter) into the earth and christening it with one blood point. He chants a litany of admonishments and curses while sprinkling the blood on the area or baptizing the subject he intends to exorcize, then makes the activation roll (Attribute: Manipulation).

To cleanse an area, being, or thing of infernal imprint or evict a demonic entity, an amount of successes are required relative to the degree of corruption infused (1 to 2 for minor blemishes, 3 for subtle infections of noticeable evil, 4 or more for objects and spaces radiating a palpably potent malevolence). Infernalists imbued with the diabolical and demonic spirits disgracing an area with their presence (or directly in possession of beings, locations, or things)

may resist by spending a Willpower point, then rolling Willpower (difficulty equal to the koldun's permanent Willpower rating). Demons failing the roll are dismissed and banished back to Hell. Cleansed infernalists do not regain their damned souls, but any infernal mark that once permeated there being is permanently expelled.

One or more koldun with Heave the Host of Hell may assist a primary exorcist to negate an infernal blight. The difficulty level to cleanse or evict is reduced by one (minimum 4) for each koldun aiding in the exorcism.

### ••••• Reap the Well

Kolduns who attain full mastery in Kraina of the Well earn the sobriquet of "Hellreaper" by their peers, and for good reason.

**System:** Upon summoning a demon or discovering an escapee unfettered and loose outside the prison of Hell, the koldun may attempt to bind and enslave the creature to her will. The koldun cuts her wrists, taking a turn to pool one blood point in her cupped hands in order to fabricate a connection to her Well. When ready, she spends a Willpower point and makes the activation roll (Attribute: Strength). The blood leaps from her hands in the form of six interlocking hooked chains anchored beneath her slit wrists which lunge toward the target with unerring precision (maximum 100 feet/30 meters). If the roll is a success, the blood-hooks painfully latch into the entity, creating gory wounds (no damage) regardless of whether the creature possesses a physical form. An ensnared creature may struggle to break one chain per turn by spending a Willpower point, then rolling Willpower (difficulty equal to the koldun's permanent Willpower rating).

For as long as the hooks penetrate the entity's body, once per turn the koldun may demand its True Name, tormenting the demon by rolling Intelligence + Intimidation against the target's current Willpower points to wrack its soul with excruciating pain. With a success, the victim cries out the answer in supplication. The koldun has two choices: she may unshackle and dismiss the demon through Heave the Host of Hell, or absorb it into herself.

A koldun that has acquired a demon's True Name reduces the difficulty level by two when evoking it at a later date through Call the Children. Demons bound by their True Name may exit the confines of a circle they've been invoked within, and can be commanded by a koldun to complete a number of tasks for a number of days equal to the successes scored on the invocation roll. The demon will answer any of the koldun's questions, and the koldun does not need to offer an exchange of services for questions or tasks.

If choosing to absorb a chained demon, the koldun may spend a blood point to instantly call it forth again. Chained demons are wholly compliant and serve the will of the koldun in whatever capacity she demands, but must remain in bondage (maximum 100 feet/30 meters) to the koldun. A koldun can control up to six chained demonic thralls; each chain divided decreases the amount of chains available for future binding and increases the difficulty to torment untamed demons by one.

A demon who disobeys or lies to a summoner who knows its True Name when conjuring it causes a demon crippling agony. Should Reap the Well be used to perform a violent exorcism on a living host possessed by a demon, the host rolls Stamina against a difficulty equal to the amount of turns taken to tame the demon into revealing its True Name. A failure results in the host dying of shock. Multiple koldun may Reap the Well together, collectively decreasing the difficulty to torment a demon by one per chain (minimum 4). The Hellreaper who successfully extracts the demon's True Name on their turn may choose to bind it or dismiss it. All koldun present hear the demon howl its True Name, and if dismissed, may individually conjure it. A demon in thrall to a Hellreaper cannot be evoked until released from service.

## Necromancy

### Path of Haunting

As the Maeghar fell farther away from the world and into darkness, their powers of illusion and trickery were warped by the shadows of Oblivion. Slowly they kindled within themselves the dark spark that would grow into the Path of Haunting. Other necromancers may also learn Path of Haunting and, indeed, Clan Giovanni has created it on its own.

#### • Song of the Dead

The necromancer weaves death and silence into a haunting song that instills an obsession with death in her listener. The victim becomes sure that death stalks him and sees ill omens everywhere. This constant threat can eventually lead a mortal to suicide or drive a vampire into torpor.

**System:** The vampire chants to the victim while her player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty of the target's current Willpower). A botch indicates the vampire affects herself as though she had gained successes equal to the number of 1s rolled.

For a number of nights equal to the successes rolled, the target suffers depression and morbid anxiety. This fixation



adds +2 to the difficulty of Social rolls (except those involving Intimidation) and +1 to the difficulty of all other non-reflexive rolls. If a target suffers the effects of this power for more continuous nights than his permanent Willpower, he loses a dot of permanent Willpower. This cycle continues after an interval of the new rating in days, with the victim losing a dot of permanent Willpower after each such iteration. Once a character drops to zero permanent Willpower, he commits suicide (if living) or falls into torpor (if a vampire). If the power is interrupted for at least one night, the victim recovers his permanent Willpower at the rate of one dot per week. A vampire who falls into torpor from reaching zero Willpower awakens with his original rating.

### •• Summon Wisp

Straddling two worlds, the necromancer does not truly exist. She is here, yet she is not. Reaching into herself, she infuses a spark of her own ephemeral nature with dark, necromantic energy. The result is a dancing light, which is as hypnotic as it is treacherous.

**System:** The player spends one blood point and rolls Charisma + Occult (difficulty 5) to conjure an orb of pale light that lasts one scene. The wisp can take any color the vampire chooses and has no substance or weight. It may fly as fast as the vampire can run, casting cold illumination

as bright as a candle. Mortals who behold the wisp must roll Willpower (difficulty 4) and achieve more successes than the caster or fall into a mild trance, which adds +1 to the difficulty of all actions due to distraction. If the vampire's successes are double the mortal's, he follows the light without regard for any but the most obvious obstacles. He walks around trees and rocks, but falls prey to quicksand or a high parapet. Any loud noise or other distraction immediately breaks the reverie.

If the vampire's player botches the conjuration roll, the wisp appears and acts with its own malevolent agenda. Such a creature is only a nuisance, but can display remarkable cunning in luring enemies to the vampire's haven or giving away her position.

### ••• Harrowing

Even dreams offer no respite to the enemies of the necromancer. Restful sleep becomes pure terror as Song of the Dead continues to haunt the sleeper through nightmares.

**System:** The vampire makes eye contact with the victim, while her player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty of the target's permanent Willpower). If successful, the victim feels a slight sense of unease. When he next sleeps, he suffers horrible nightmares about his own demise. Even though he cannot fully



remember the content of his visions after he wakes, the emotional trauma prevents him from regaining Willpower. In addition, his twisted déjà vu and unnatural paranoia give him the Nightmares and Eerie Presence Flaws (V20, p. 495) for the day. A botch in casting this power inflicts the same terrible dreams on the vampire when she slumbers.

#### •••• Phantasms

The necromancer recognizes the passion of the dead as an illusion. Drawing upon her insight, she may turn these illusions to haunt the living.

**System:** The vampire envisions the desired apparition, while the player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7). These creations have no substance and cannot speak or perform complicated actions, though they emit a surreal cold. Each success allows the vampire to create one phenomenon, or add one characteristic or condition to another phantom. For example, three successes could animate shadows to shuffle and writhe (one success) and create an illusion of dripping gore that bursts into a spray of flies when someone draws close (one success for the gore and one success for the condition). This power may create apparitions anywhere in the caster's line of sight. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of what is or is not possible with this power.

A botch calls the attention of a malefic ghost, giving the vampire the Haunted Flaw (V20, p. 495) for a number of nights equal to the 1s rolled.

#### ••••• Torment

The distinction between life and death means nothing to the necromancer – it is another illusion, created for the comfort of the living. She may rend this veil and call upon malicious apparitions to haunt her victim.

**System:** The player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 8). On a botch, the vampire permanently gains the Haunted Flaw (V20, p. 495), attracting the vilest and most hateful ghosts. If successful, the victim feels a sudden chill. The difficulty for ghosts to affect the target with any power decreases by one for every success rolled, to a minimum of difficulty 4. Malicious ghosts flock to the target, eagerly inflicting every horror at their disposal. The difficulty reduction diminishes by one every day at dawn until the victim returns to normal and the spectres lose interest. Multiple applications of this power may not be stacked to increase duration or intensity of effect. The statistics and powers of spectres are left to the Storyteller, but the experience should terrify the character utterly and may well result in derangements at the least.

## New Necromancy Ritual

### Parting the Veil (Level Two)

Subsisting on souls is a harrowing affair, leaving morality in tatters with each feeding. In more practical terms, the corpus of wraiths are sufficient nourishment for the fuel of Disciplines, but leave a vampire hollow upon waking each night. When the Harbingers of Skulls first entered the Shadowlands, it became apparent that a source of blood would be required, otherwise torpor or diablerie would be left as the alternatives.

The ancient Lazarene Abraham long ago studied a relic known as the Black Torah. This set of scrolls illuminated much of the mystery of the Underworld, and through its review he developed understanding of how the dead interfered with the world of the living. Through recollection of the Black Torah's words, he successfully practiced Parting the Veil on a Christian temple in Tarsus, temporarily weakening the Gauntlet sufficiently to allow mortals to pass into the land of the dead. None returned, but the Harbingers were fed for the first time since their exile.

The rite is enacted in the Shadowlands reflection of a location. The necromancer must sacrifice blood in order to obtain more, holding her wrists over open flames until skin begins to crack and part. She must then snuff the flames with her own blood. The heady mix of pain, will, and necromancy allows the world of the living to become more visible to the necromancer. Mortals on the other side who are unfortunate enough to pass between the two doused flames unknowingly enter the Shadowlands.

Although kine can cross over, Kindred cannot leave. Abraham theorizes this restriction is placed on his bloodline rather than the ritual, and craves to find the shadow of the Black Torah in order to ascertain the truth of this notion and create a ritual allowing two-way travel. The Black Torah of the world above was destroyed in an inferno when Abraham faked his own demise to deter his Giovanni hunters.

In the present night, many Shadowlands necromancers strive for this ritual. It's never been shared with the Giovanni, but the Harbingers revealed it to their hosts in the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Wherever the ritual is practiced, mortals disappear with a greater propensity, at least until the veil closes.

**System:** To successfully cast the rite, the necromancer will first need to find the Shadowlands reflection of a location of spiritual resonance, such as a temple, graveyard,

or murder site, or a place where passions run highly, such as a sports stadium, drug den, or adolescent's bedroom.

After lighting flames in the Shadowlands version of this location and exposing the flesh of her wrists to them (typically one either side of the caster), the necromancer will need to make a Courage roll to resist Röttschreck with a difficulty of 7. If Fortitude is used to mitigate the damage dealt by the fire (V20, p. 297), the ritual fails.

The caster must expend two blood points in order to douse the flames (more points must be spent if the flames are larger than those of torches). The Gauntlet is weakened for hours equal to the caster's number of points in her highest Necromancy Path, and allows a translucent view into the mortal world.

A number of mortals equal to the number of blood points spent can pass through between the flames used in the rite, becoming trapped in the Shadowlands. The veil closes after either the requisite number of mortals passes through, or the hours run out.

## Merits and Flaws

These Merits and Flaws are open to Tal'Mahe'Ra characters. At Storyteller discretion, they may have a place with characters in other Sects.

### Physical

#### Discerning Palate (4pt. Merit)

Your naturally selective palate allows you to discern specific traits inherent to a sample of blood. With but a taste, you can determine potency, freshness, species, or whether a blood sample is contaminated, as well as attempt to identify the Generation, age, and even Clan of other vampires. If you sample even a single drop of blood, roll Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8).

- One success allows you to identify the relative potency and freshness of the blood, a species whose blood you have previously tasted and know to be of a specific kind, the Generation of another vampire within two steps of your own, if the blood is either under one hundred or over one hundred years old, and if it is of your same Clan.
- Two successes identifies whether the blood is contaminated by disease or poison, the Generations of vampires within four steps of your own, the approximate age within fifty years (if less than three

hundred years old), and any Clan whose blood you've previously tasted.

- With three or more successes, you identify specific contaminants you've sampled before, Generations within six steps of your own, the vintage of blood within twenty-five years (if less than six hundred years old), and any Clan as well as family of vampires whose blood you've tasted previously.

#### Methuselah's Thirst (7pt. Flaw)

You can no longer sustain yourself on mortal blood and must feed on the blood of Kindred or other supernatural creatures with potent reserves, such as lupines or fairies.

### Mental

#### Grand Library (2, 4, 6, or 7 pt. Merit)

Throughout the years, you've managed to amass an exquisite collection of books, both common and rare. Choose 3 Knowledge dots for every 2 points taken in this Merit, or 10 Knowledge dots for 7 points. While working in your library, the difficulty rating for any rolls involving those Knowledges is reduced by 2.

#### Berserker (3pt. Merit)

You possess the ability to willingly enter a berserker state for a scene. While berserking, you ignore wound penalties and reduce the difficulty of all combat rolls except for dodges by -3. You also can take no complex actions other than combat, dodging, or running.

### Social

#### Arcane (1 to 5 pt. Merit)

Some vampires have a strange ability to slip from notice, which manifests as an aura of forgetfulness. Those trying to remember the vampire experience a sensation of *jamais-vu*. The ability may be deliberately developed, or the Kindred could simply be too ordinary to pay attention to. Though not similar to Obfuscate, Arcane doesn't help in combat situations – the vampire can't literally vanish. However, someone searching for them may well fail, as no one remembers the vampire or can give a reliable description.

Each point taken subtracts one die from any dice pools used to actively locate the vampire or recall her from memory. Those with this Merit can choose to "turn off" Arcane if they wish. As a passive trait, it doesn't help on Stealth rolls or other overt attempts to hide. If you have

any dots in Status or Fame, Arcane ceases to function while you possess them.

### **Entrepreneur (2pt. Merit)**

Making money comes naturally to you, and you know what it takes to succeed. All rolls involving acquiring money through business dealings have their difficulty reduced by 2.

### **Paragon (7pt. Merit)**

Others find you particularly compelling. Select one Background from the following group: Allies, Contacts, Domain, Fame, Herd, Influence, Mentor, Resources, Retainers, or Status. You receive one free dot in that Background, and your maximum Trait score in that Background may exceed normal Generational limits by one.

### **Vulgar (1pt. Flaw)**

Tact is a foreign concept to you, and you're famous for being abrasive and generally unpleasant. Rolls involving social graces or delicate situations suffer +1 difficulty.

### **Oathbreaker (4pt. Flaw)**

Once you swore fealty to a lord or organization, or made a binding contract. You've broken that promise and everyone knows about it. Now it's near impossible to earn the trust of others. The difficulty of Social rolls to convince someone of your trustworthiness is increased by three, and even members of your coterie may have reservations about you.

## **Supernatural**

### **Apostate (2pt. Merit)**

Since their inception, Nergali Baali have subverted members of other Clans into their own ranks. Known as Apostates, initiates are first drained completely by a Baali nest-master, who then extracts the still-beating heart from a mortal victim, fills it with his own blood, and buries it in a pool of gore within a Well of Sacrifice. The initiate swims through the dismembered bodies and viscous remains to find and consume the heart. In this way, Nergali



do not make a victim of those they Embrace; prospective members must claim it through strength of will.

Apostates replace any one in-Clan Discipline with Daimoinon, but in turn gain the Baali Clan weakness on top of their standard Clan weakness. Apostates can still pass with relative ease for members of their former Clans, but any childe they Embrace is indistinguishable from a standard Baali. Further, such a childe shares none of the Clan Disciplines or weaknesses of their sire's former Clan, save those Disciplines that are innate to the Baali. Apostates do not lose levels in the Discipline they choose to exchange for Daimoinon, but further levels in that Discipline are purchased at out-of-Clan costs. Baali may not take this Merit.

### **Without a Trace (2pt. Merit)**

When in the wilderness, the earth fills in your footprints. You leave no noticeable traces, not even a scent. Normal attempts at tracking automatically fail. Supernatural attempts are done with a +2 difficulty.

### **Psychic Leech (5pt. Merit)**

At the cost of one Willpower point, you may feed on the Willpower of your victims from a distance. The consumed Willpower strengthens the potency of your own blood, effectively transforming it into temporary blood that dissipates at the end of the night. These temporary blood points may be spent just like regular blood points, but cannot be lost due to damage or blood drain, do not affect hunger rolls for frenzy, and may not be used to create or sustain blood bonds or ghouls. To activate this ability, the target must have at least one of your blood points in their system, and must be engaged in eye contact with you.

### **Kiss of Death (2pt. Flaw)**

Should you drain a mortal vessel of all blood minutes after their heart stops beating, the corpse rises as a zombie (using the statistics for zombies on p. 164 of V20). These zombies are free-willed, hostile toward you, and cannot be directed without some sorcerous or necromantic means to command them.

### **Devil's Mark (3pt. Flaw)**

Whether product of your Embrace or gained through exposure to infernal or other unholy power, you've been branded with the "Devil's Mark," an anatomical aberration that manifests the taint of the demonic. Possible deformities include, but are not limited to: bestial or inhuman eyes, hooves, horns, unnaturally colored or scaly skin, a birthmark in the form of a sigil, parasitic infestation, claws, misshapen teeth. or ineffectual (perhaps additional) limbs. You may never remove or "improve" these disfigurements, although magic or Disciplines can hide them from plain sight.

A Devil's Mark confers the following mechanical effects: Lower the maximum rating in one Attribute by one (if the maximum rating is 5, it becomes 4), while the cost to raise said Attribute increases by one (1 + the current rating x 4). If the mark becomes visible or is known to a mortal, it confers a -1 difficulty on Intimidation rolls when dealing with her, but in turn increases the difficulties for all other Social die rolls by one. Players should work with a Storyteller to determine an appropriate Devil's Mark, and the Physical Attribute best suited to their mark.

### **Lord of the Night (3pt. Flaw)**

In your presence lights dim, tiny flames extinguish, and shadows cling to you or languidly move about with a surreal unlife, making it impossible to pass as anything other than inhuman. The particular shadow you cast is a malicious entity with a will of its own. It lashes out at friends and enemies alike, tearing at the scenery, and snarling at passers-by. These effects can be suppressed for a scene by spending a point of Willpower.

### **Vassal of the Clan (6pt. Flaw)**

Through natural predisposition or a curse, you bear a permanent one-point blood bond to those one Generation lower, a two-point blood bond with those two Generations lower, and a three-point blood bond to those three or more Generations lower than you within your own Clan. These blood bonds override any other blood bonds you may earn during play. This can be a great risk for Hand members, as the blood forces allegiances to potentially risky vampires, or worse, to heretical ideologies.

# Diablerie and Golconda

The following optional advanced play systems and story ideas expand upon the standard rules presented for diablerie (pp. 293-295 of V20) and Golconda (pp. 299-301 of V20). These tools provide step-by-step rewards and perils to supplement an existing narrative through guided effects. Both offer in-depth mechanical accuracy that may not be suitable for every table, and Storytellers should not feel obligated to incorporate these systems if they prove disruptive to their chronicle. Be forewarned, the devil is in the details, and minutiae can just as often enhance a game as collapse it.

## Diablerie

After successfully completing the standard rules for diablerie (see “Committing Diablerie” on pp. 293-294 of V20), the roll to avoid losing control to euphoria (found under “The Rewards of Diablerie” on p. 294 of V20) instead determines whether or not the diablerist becomes permanently addicted to diablerie. If the roll is a failure, make the notation “Addicted to Diablerie” under Flaws on the character sheet. A character addicted to diablerie will indulge in drinking vampiric blood whenever possible. When she is given the opportunity to consume vampiric blood, the player must roll Self-Control or Instinct (difficulty 6). If this roll fails, the character frenzies, attacks the target, and drinks as much blood as she can.

Regardless of success or failure on the addiction roll, the diablerist is lost in euphoria and numb to the external world for the remainder of the scene, ignoring wounds (though still sustaining damage), and any attempt to engage their attention fails until all of the following challenges have been met. Each challenge takes one turn to complete.

### Generation

If the victim is of a lower Generation than the diablerist, the diablerist automatically lowers her Generation by one. Additionally, if the victim was two or more Generations lower than the diablerist, the diablerist rolls Stamina once per turn for each additional Generation after the first, until they fail a challenge or run out of rolls (difficulty 9). Each success lowers the diablerist’s Generation by one and permanently grants them all benefits attributed to the Generation achieved.

### Disciplines

Next, compare the Disciplines of both vampires, ignoring blood sorcery powers (such as Thaumaturgy, Necromancy, Koldunism, and the line), the Disciplines they have in

common with each other, and levels that exceed the diablerist’s newly-acquired Generational maximums. The diablerist gains half the total amount (rounded down) of Discipline dots, after the above deductions.

*For example, if an eighth generation vampire with Celerity ●●, Fortitude ●●●●, Potence ●●●●, and Thaumaturgy ●●● commits diablerie against a sixth generation vampire with Celerity ●●●●, Fortitude ●●, Potence ●●●●, and Thaumaturgy ●●●● ●●, the difference is three dot. Two come from Celerity, and one comes from Potence. The diablerist’s Fortitude is higher, and Thaumaturgy does not count, as it’s a sorcery power. Half that, rounding down, is one. The diablerist gains one Discipline dot.*

The diablerist may purchase levels in any Disciplines possessed by the victim (though not blood sorcery powers) up to the maximum level the victim achieved in a Discipline, within the newly acquired Generational limits of the diablerist. If the diablerist acquires levels in an out-of-Clan Discipline, any future levels after diablerie are still purchased as out-of-Clan.

## Possession

The victim and diablerist now perform contested Willpower rolls against each other. The difficulty for each roll is equal to the permanent Willpower rating of the opponent. Each Generation the diablerist achieves adds +1 to the difficulty level of her rolls (maximum of 9), and lowers the difficulty level of rolls for the victim by 1 (minimum of 4). The first to achieve a total amount of successes equaling their opponent’s unadulterated, permanent Willpower rating wins. Botched rolls count as successes for the opponent.

Regardless of success or failure, diablerists gain a tainted aura marking them of their crime (see “The Perils of Diablerie,” V20, pp. 294-295). Furthermore, the diablerist deducts an amount of temporary Willpower from their sheet equal to the permanent Willpower rating of the victim. This deduction cannot put them below 1 point of temporary Willpower.

Should the diablerist win, no further rolls are necessary, and they exit the blinding euphoria imposed upon them. Diablerists on Paths of Enlightenment that do not normally condone diablerie must make a test for moral degradation (difficulty at Storyteller’s discretion) if the act cannot be justified by the circumstances and motivation behind it.

If the victim wins, she possesses the diablerist’s body. The severity of possession depends upon the number of dots in Generation the diablerist gains. With three or more Generations, the character has the option to acquire the Dark Secret Flaw (V20, p. 489) in order to retain the

Social Merits and Flaws, as well as Backgrounds of the diablerist, while abandoning his own (even if exceeding maximum amounts for Merits and Flaws). Should the ruse be revealed, depending on who becomes aware and whether or not they care, the character regains the Social Merits and Flaws, as well as Backgrounds (save for Generation) of the victim, and loses those of the diablerist (save for Generation). If Scholar of Enemies or Scholar of Others (V20, p. 489) are possessed by the victim, they are held regardless of the choice.

If the diablerist drops one Generation, the diablerist's Nature and Supernatural Merits and Flaws are exchanged for those of the victim (and may exceed maximum point costs for Merits and Flaws). The diablerist acquires one new permanent derangement.

If the diablerist lowers his Generation by two, he suffers the same effects as gaining one dot in Generation, and additionally, half the character's memories are replaced with the victim's. The diablerist's newly acquired permanent derangement is Multiple Personalities (V20, p. 292), and his secondary personality is that of the victim. On the character sheet, record the victim's Demeanor, Mental Merits and Flaws, permanent Willpower rating, Morality Path, Virtues (and ratings), blood sorcery powers and Rituals, and mark a slash beside all Abilities, Charisma, Manipulation, and all Mental Attributes possessed by the diablerist. To the right of the slash mark, record the amount possessed by the victim in that Attribute or Ability (including Abilities not possessed by the diablerist), deducting amounts to levels proportionate to the newly acquired Generational maximums of the diablerist. When the secondary personality is triggered, all newly recorded notations change to those of the victim and become accessible to the character. The Storyteller then takes control of the character, while the primary personality blacks out and remembers nothing for the time that the secondary personality is in charge of the body.

If the diablerist lowers his Generation by three, he suffers all of the effects listed above. Additionally, the diablerist gains total and complete amnesia up until just exiting the euphoric state that accompanies diablerie. Add the Amnesia Flaw to the character's sheet (V20, p. 486). The diablerist retains all information and experience, though he cannot recall how he knows what he knows. Their Demeanor switches to one assigned by the Storyteller. The character's Path of Enlightenment reverts to Humanity (if on an alternate Path), and his Virtue scores and permanent Willpower reset. He receives one free dot in each Virtue and may spend 7 points amongst his Virtues as he sees fit. His Humanity rating equals his

newly acquired Conscience + Self-Control Virtues, and his permanent Willpower is equal to his Courage Virtue.

If the diablerist lowers her Generation by four, the victim wholly consumes the diablerist's soul. The victim retains none of the diablerist's memories and continues play as the hybrid character. On the diablerist's sheet, all Abilities, and the point totals for Charisma, Manipulation, and all Mental Attributes change to those of the victim, up to the newly acquired Generational maximum of the diablerist. Permanent Willpower rating, Nature, Demeanor, and derangements change to those of the victim. The entire victim's previously acquired blood sorcery powers and rituals are transferred to the diablerist. Path of Enlightenment and Virtues changes to that of the victim at the victim's full rating. Mental and Supernatural Merits and Flaws possessed by the diablerist are changed to those of the victim (and may exceed maximum amounts for Merits and Flaws).

If the diablerist lowers her Generation by five or more, the victim wholly consumes the diablerist's soul. The victim retains all of the diablerist's memories and continues play as the hybrid character. On the diablerist's sheet, Nature and Demeanor change to those of the victim. The point value totals for Charisma, Manipulation, all Abilities, permanent Willpower rating, and all Mental Attributes take on the higher point value between the diablerist or the victim, up to the newly acquired Generational maximum of the diablerist. The entire victim's previously acquired blood sorcery powers and rituals are transferred to the diablerist. Path of Enlightenment and Virtues changes to that of the victim at the victim's full rating. For overlapping Virtues, take the higher score of the victim or diablerist. Derangements, as well as Mental and Supernatural Merits and Flaws possessed by the victim, are added to the diablerist's sheet (and may exceed maximum amounts for Merits and Flaws).

## Seeking Golconda

Enlightenment from the viewpoint of one on the Path of Caine resembles something vastly different than what a vampire managing to elevate their Humanity seeks. The grey landscape of morality and absolutes of right and wrong are as much dependent on context as they are the subjectivity of the judge. The object and goal of any moral viewpoint is to ground the adoptee, granting him a sense of identity and purpose. Cast adrift as all conscious entities are when thrust into existence, morality acts as an anchor within a sea of conflicting abstraction, attaching meaning to existence and providing guidance for interaction with the world through ethics. Justification comes in many

forms, each flavored by personal faith. The slaughtering of an innocent to a vampire on Humanity is a grievous sin, but armed with the knowledge that the victim was a serial killer targeting others based on the date of their birth alters the context. Any action, right or wrong, is simply a matter of perspective.

Attaining Golconda requires tremendous effort. Most vampires fail to glean even a hint of enlightenment from their Path, or worse, fall to the ravages of the Beast during the process. Characters must meet specific criteria in order to begin the journey of elevation, or transcendence, of the vampiric state. They must attain a Path rating of 7 and a Conscience or Conviction rating of 4 or higher, and must maintain those ratings, displaying behavior consistent with their Path over dozens of stories.

To even hear rumor of Golconda, it's necessary to have spent prolonged time among the childer of Caine. Should she catch word of it and desire to seek it out, the vampire must spend her free time actively hunting for lore on the subject over a three-month period. Once a week, the vampire rolls Intelligence + Investigation (difficulty 9), and cannot spend Willpower to gain an automatic success. At the end of the three-month period, all successes are tallied. Should the vampire acquire 4 net successes, she discovers the ritual of Suspire. No matter how far along she is in their pursuit, a botched roll or failure to achieve the necessary successes results in the vampire's effort being wasted. To proceed, she must undertake the search again from scratch.

### **Invictus: The Unconquered**

While Golconda means two hundred things to a hundred possible vampires, there's one common thread: Golconda means true freedom. Golconda means breaking the shackles of hunger, of tearing down the walls that limit a vampire.

What does it mean to a vampire who is no longer slave to her nature? Simply examining this question, let alone trying to answer it could be the source of numerous chronicles. Since vampirism means something different to every vampire, so too should Golconda.

Opponents believe this "freedom" is a nonsense ideal, since maintaining Golconda would only serve as a new set of chains. And indeed, why would a vampire wish to be freed of her nature? Would a bird beg for stronger legs, and no wings? Should a vampire who has achieved Golconda even be embraced as Kindred, or as a defector?

### **Difficulties in Storytelling for Golconda**

If a player wishes to pursue Golconda, you have your work cut out for you. The simplest answer is, "look to your player's character, and cater the experience to them".

That's not very good advice.

For one, that ignores everyone else. Unless your whole troupe is on board with pursuing that path, Golconda is an intensive story that requires a glut of attention to do well. So if you're doing this, it should be approached early as possible, with full consideration for what that'll mean for everyone at the table. Ideally, this should be addressed during character creation. If you do, then everyone can offer a facet, a foil, or an aspect of what Golconda could mean, to help challenge the pursuer.

Is the pursuit of Golconda going to disrupt your stories? Even amongst the Tal'Mahe'Ra, Golconda is a fringe idea that doesn't face warm acceptance. Pursuing Golconda tends to be a path of extremes, and already intolerant monsters buck even harder at extremes. Golconda is dangerous; vampires tend toward conservatism and pragmatism so as to not risk the eternal struggle. To say the Black Hand's cause is time consuming would be an understatement; many leaders accept nothing short of full adherence to the cause.

Golconda also means answering questions that may be better off unanswered. When we as a people looked to the stars, we told beautiful stories. Once we realized those stars were unthinking balls of exploding gas, we stopped telling new stories about them. In our case, that was beneficial because it furthered science. But in *Vampire: The Masquerade*, we're telling stories. So, sometimes, it's better to leave questions that can be explored instead of answered. Once you understand something, you're less likely to wonder about it.

These problems aren't mentioned to say you shouldn't look to Golconda for your stories. However, to build a successful story, you have to consider these issues before they become irreconcilable.

### **How To Cater Golconda Stories**

Ultimately, since Golconda is a unique experience for each vampire, you should ask what Golconda means to the player pursuing it. What questions does she want to address and answer with her experience?

As noted previously, paths to Golconda tend toward extremes, and that's one main reason many end up hermits the closer they get to ascendancy. This could alienate the character. It also means stories will have to specifically challenge those expectations, but truly cater to them. For example, a follower of Humanity will have to refrain from most traditionally "immoral" acts in pursuit of Golconda. Many chronicles simply won't allow this to be an option, and many troupes' characters will inherently limit that possibility. How does that character reconcile a relationship with characters on the Path of Caine, for example?

For this reason, ask what extremes the player expects to take on the path. This should be addressed up front, and communicated clearly and in no uncertain terms to the other players. As with any chronicle decision, everyone has to be on the same page, so they can weave a collaborative story. **Vampire: The Masquerade** assumes there will be at least some ideological antagonism between characters, but by and large, the players should be playing characters who generally get along and can work together. Irreconcilable differences make for very frustrating chronicles.

Another consideration in catering chronicles to the Golconda-pursuing player is such: Does she expect to succeed? The answer is likely yes, but isn't necessarily. Golconda is a great place to tell stories of tragic failures, bittersweet lies, and painful truths. If failure is something the player is comfortable with, many of these differences and complications won't be such big issues. So, working with that in mind is actually quite liberating.





"There she is," Anahita whispered. "Keep her safe, Blake."

The scab on my face where my eyes had been cut itched, but I didn't scratch at them. They were healed and that was all that mattered. I looked at the person I was to follow the next two weeks. Five feet and five inches tall, a bit under two hundred pounds. She had a portfolio in one hand and a large purse. She pulled her hood up obscuring her face, but I had seen a picture on Anahita's phone. Big brown eyes, a nose ring. Tattoos on her hands. Shouldn't be too hard to keep track of.

"Good hunting," she said, turning and walking the opposite direction down the street. I pulled my own hood up and started after her, walking slowly. If I got close enough, I could smell her, and that would help me find her. I was hungry, so smelling her would be easier. I walked behind her, pretending to talk on my phone as she walked into a bodega.

I watched her pull the MetroCard out of its plastic wrapper and shove it in to her pocket as she looked down the street towards the train station. Not too quickly I followed behind, sticking to the shadows when I could. I made my way onto the subway, sitting at the other end of the car while she listened to music, loudly. Something like anxiety nagged at my mind. I knew better than most the terrors that could lurk within the New York City subway system. If she took the train every evening, there could be many opportunities for potential enemies or even allies to test me. I saw her get up from her seat and stand in front of the door, holding her portfolio in her hand. I stood up a few seconds after and exited the train, tailing her as she went.

The woman walked west and then north, the smell of rain hinting at the weather to come. She walked quickly, as if she was running late, and I glanced at my watch. 6:47pm. I looked up and saw her stop at the corner, not dashing out into traffic as I had feared she might. She waited and resumed her quickened pace down the street.

I shook my head as I saw where she was going. The art museum. "Anahita," I muttered, shoving my fists into my pockets and following after her, easily scaling all the steps without growing tired. I went in through another door and paid to get in, despite the donation being a suggestion.

There was a special drawing class being held in the museum, in the newly-returned Blake exhibit. I wanted to bite the program in half. It had been decades since that day. I was still a young vampire by the Kindred's reckoning, but that day seemed so long ago when this had started. Did whomever Anahita answer to know about the museum and the art exhibit and our talk? Who had told her to meet me there? Had I been her intention, or had it been a chance meeting? These

thoughts clouded my mind as I followed her through the museum. Not all the exhibits were open now, but I could easily trail her through the shadows and halls.

I watched her draw. I watched her talk to other humans. I watched her pack up to leave. I followed her home, following less closely. I watched her home until I had to leave. Anahita showed me where I could sleep while keeping my watch. I found it cramped, but serviceable. I woke the next evening and waited for her to come home from work, scratching my nails against the bricks of a building as I waited. I followed her home. I watched her through her window. I walked the perimeter of her building and waited on the roof, listening at the pipes. My hunger heightened my senses, and I knew of any non-human who came within five blocks of her home. My fingers clenched into fists at their presence.

Two weeks passed. It was the final day. I was weary and hungry. It was early evening, and the woman I was protecting, Rani, was coming up the street.

I smelled someone familiar. I turned and stepped out of the alley. Anahita was coming down the street from the opposite direction of the woman. Was she coming to relieve me? I watched as Anahita stopped the woman. They spoke for two seconds. Anahita reached forward and a flash of metal made Rani drop her groceries, their contents spilling to the concrete. I stepped forward, my mouth hanging open but unable to speak. The smell of blood made my hands shake and my muscles tense as I fought the urge to rush forward and lap it up.

"You're not done yet," Anahita mouthed. She licked the blade and then walked away, leaving Rani gasping on the sidewalk. I looked both ways before I rushed forward.

"Please, please, help me," she said. She was crying. It was a cut to her abdomen, but I could smell blood only, not bile or other fluids. My mouth felt so dry as I stared down, my hands shaking.

"I'll... where's your phone?" I asked. She gasped, her purse flopping open. I reached in and pulled it out, dialing the number quickly.

"911, may I help you?"

"I've got a stab wound victim on the corner of Canal and Hester," I said, my voice trembling.

"Yes ma'am, we'll send someone over. Is the victim stabilized?"

"She's awake," I offered. I put my arm behind Rani and eased her down so she could lie on the sidewalk, her body shaking. Her blood seeped through her clothes onto my coat and shirt. I could feel it seep through, so hot and rich. I started shaking.

"Ma'am, are you still there?" the voice on the phone asked. I dropped the phone, unable to speak. I held Rani and thought about the feeling of my teeth in my mouth, the sharp edge of them and the beast that danced at their edge. I thought of how the desire to sink my mouth into her neck felt. The want. I let it spread through me. I sat in my greed as I cradled her, focusing on not digging my fingers into her skin, not pulling her apart. I waited for so long I thought the sun would come up and she would die in my arms.

The sound of the ambulance made me look up, the red and blue lights approaching. People had gathered around us, and I had somehow blocked them out. The EMTs parked and quickly came to our side, pulling her away from me and putting her on a stretcher. With a clack of metal they had her in the ambulance. I vaguely recall being asked to come along. I entered in a daze, barely hearing the door slam behind me.

We rode to the hospital. I tried to answer any questions they threw at me as best I could without saying anything about Anahita. I said she was a strange woman. I said I hadn't seen her. It was so fast. I don't know why she did it. Maybe it was racially motivated. No, I was not her girlfriend.

I waited until they got her inside. I wasn't allowed in after that. I stayed outside the hospital, knowing her scent. I felt her blood begin to stiffen in my clothes as I walked the perimeter of the hospital, entering through some side door and getting in that way. I found my way to the emergency room and listened in, watching for anyone who might interfere or worsen her situation.

I slumped down against the wall. I put my head in my hands. I thought about Pallas and others I had

tortured in the name of the Hand. I thought about this woman and her blood, which smelled so fragrant on my clothes. I thought of Anahita. I thought of Enoch and dying without dying. Transcending without ending. The names and not knowing which of them to call of them for help, knowing full well there was no help there. Only one type of end. One which would be less painful, less treacherous. Where hiding would be no longer needed, and all would be in the open.

What of this did I want? Was I just happy knowing these things were true, no longer passing my days in hungry shadows, waiting for my sire to send me on an errand, to fight with the Camarilla in an attempt to stop their pathetic seeming, to find some purpose in the night? I knew my place was not like most of my age. I had been chosen. Was that enough? To be chosen, yet again, for some special eternity?

Was eternity even promised? I knew it wasn't. But something like it stretched before me, before us all. It was smeared with blood and gore, and the winds that blew were secrets so old they reeked of bones and limestone. At its foundation were the histories of those in Enoch who lay dreaming. Or perhaps they were awake and biding their time until we were ready. When would be ready to receive them? Was I ready?

Was I?

"You are ready."

I turned to Anahita. She was wearing something different. She had fed recently and her eyes shone with pride. In me? In herself, for bringing me this far?

"I am," I said. "I am ready."

"Let's go."





# Chapter Five: Stealing the Dead

*"But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?  
No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living."*

-The Book of Job 28:12-13

In this chapter, we feature a full sample Black Hand chronicle. This is meant to introduce the Sect and send the story spiraling into the heart of conspiracy. Then, we finish off with characters. Some of the characters are mentioned in this chronicle. Some are other examples of Black Hand agents, which can seed stories for your own games. Our chronicle intentionally lacks a bit of subtlety; it throws the characters right in with power players for a fast-paced story. However, that's just to touch on a lot of topics in a small space; many chronicles favor slower, more layered approaches.

## Introduction

**Stealing the Dead** is a chronicle intended to highlight activity within the Tal'Mahe'Ra, with characters joining the secret society through the course of the chronicle. Set in the streets of Enoch, the characters are forced to choose sides in a political struggle for power and possibly help guide the fate of the Tal'Mahe'Ra as unwilling pawns. Characters of any experience level are appropriate for this chronicle, though characters should be ancilla or neonates. Storytellers may use any or all of the following scenes as part of an existing chronicle, or use this chronicle as a

starting point for a longer campaign for characters as an introduction to the Black Hand.

## Backstory

The tombs of the Aralu have long been an unspoken mystery among the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Few claim to know for sure who resides within the catacombs, though most will agree that they are the resting place of Antediluvians. The Bahari believe that each of the tombs holds one of Lilith's children, gifted to Caine and turned monstrous through the Embrace. The majority of the Bahari who reside in Enoch have convinced themselves (and more than a few others) that they have definitive proof that the four Aralu tombs house Lilith's children. The leader of this group, Antoinette Sauveterre, is conspiring to open one of the tombs to prove once and for all that the Bahari are the true rulers in Enoch, and claim the position of Del'Roh. She knows that dethroning Anadja, who has held the position of Del'Roh for over 250 years, is not something she can do overnight.

Antoinette gained a rather large group of Bahari conspirators by promising them that when the tomb opens,

the sleeping Lilin inside will grant Lilith's followers power and draw them closer to their Dark Mother. The conspiracy runs deep within Enoch, touching any who worship Lilith, even if they do not openly prescribe to the Cult of Lilith and claim the title Bahari. Even some members of the Idran and the Order of Moloch take direction from Antoinette.

While Antoinette's involvement with the conspiracy is well known to those inside the group, the Del'Roh and her informants are unsure as to the real leader behind the movement, yet she is aware of some of their plans. The Del'Roh actively works against the Bahari's goals, knowing that revealing any of the sleeping Aralu will throw the Black Hand into such turmoil that they will lose sight of their goals and ultimately fail. To ensure the future of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, she is intent on keeping the nature of the Aralu a secret.

Over the years, Antoinette has concocted an elaborate plan to open the catacombs, remove the tomb of Nergal, who is believed to be Arikel, and open the sarcophagus in front of a crowd of Black Hand observers. To do so, the Bahari have worked for years to acquire a sacred relic that opens the way into the catacombs beneath Enoch; one of a few pieces of stone from the Aralu tombs. Though the rocks look like ordinary stones with ancient writing, they are made of the living labyrinth that makes up the tombs. Once removed, the stones became inert and started to decay rapidly, but the liches cast a spell to preserve the stones. Normally, the area around the tombs repels and repulses would-be invaders. These stones abate that effect, if Antoinette's story holds true. The stones are attuned to the labyrinth below and act as a key to open the entrance to the catacombs below the city. When these properties were first discovered, the Del'Roh had the stones locked away in the Dread Palace Ghemal. Through much work and cunning, the Bahari managed to steal one of these stones. According to Black Hand records, all pieces are accounted for within the palace, though both the Del'Roh and Antoinette know differently.

For years, the piece has traveled between Bahari loyal to the cause. Antoinette is the current keeper of this relic, and she is finally ready to enact her plan. She wants to send the relic to co-conspirators who can keep it closer to Enoch. Antoinette needs to remain as far from the conspiracy as possible to prevent Anadja from stopping her before it's too late. The time of the ritual awakening is upon them, and so far everything has been moving exactly according to schedule.

## Chronicle Map

This is a rough, high-level path for the chronicle. Of course, stories rarely survive the players, so use these scenes as tools to plug and play as you need to accommodate player actions.

### Hook – Antoinette's Task

The characters in this chronicle should all know the same elder, Antoinette Sauveterre, who has called in favors to have the group transport an artifact from her estates in France to New York. The artifact is touted as some kind of priceless antiquity, and is important enough that she wishes the thing to have a constant watch, even while in transit. She would send her own family to make the trip, but politics demand she remain unassociated with the item. Antoinette Sauveterre is a well-known independent Toreador who is rumored to work with both the Camarilla and the Sabbat equally, though her ties to the Sabbat are rarely substantiated. Characters can be from either Sect, but must work together seamlessly or risk her ire.

Go to "The Crash."

### Scene 1 – The Crash

While on the flight to New York, the character's plane suffers a malfunction and must make an emergency water landing in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. As the plane descends, the fuselage breaks apart and the plane crashes into the Atlantic. From the depths, the characters can see a large city from which six vampires emerge, who threaten the characters. The characters have a chance to explain their situation and join up with the Black Hand members, or to kill them. Either way, the plane is descending into the catacombs of Enoch even as the characters decide.

Go to "Entering Enoch."

### Scene 2 – Entering Enoch

The plane crashes into the catacombs below Enoch, trapping the characters in the Underworld. As they make their way through the labyrinthine corridors looking for an escape, they realize they are not alone in the tombs. The sounds of stone scraping on stone echoes through the catacombs, and by the time they reach the main chamber they find one of the sarcophagi there is missing.

As they look around, several surprised Black Hand vampires confront them. The vampires apprehend the characters and take them to the Del'Roh's palace for interrogation.

Go to "Meeting the Del'Roh."

### **Scene 3 – Meeting the Del’Roh**

The Del’Roh is unhappy to see the characters, but does not threaten them. She interrogates the characters and demands they hand over Antoinette’s artifact, citing it as a Tal’Mahe’Ra sacred stone. Once she is satisfied with the veracity of their answers, she accuses them of stealing the Aralu tomb.

She finds it very suspicious that the characters show up in a crashed plane with a seemingly lost artifact at the same time that the catacombs open and one of the Aralu’s tombs goes missing. She insists that if they are not the perpetrators of the crime, they are involved in the conspiracy. She does give the characters a chance to prove that they had nothing to do with it by turning in the true culprits.

Go to “Antoinette’s Contact” or “Encountering the Idran.” Also potentially “Bahari Ambush.”

### **Scene 4 – Antoinette’s Contact**

Henri Leclair approaches the characters as a contact from Antoinette, tasked to help them in any way he can. Henri leads them to Safe Haven and gives them information about Enoch and the different groups of the Black Hand living there. He tells them that Antoinette still expects them to continue in service to her despite this setback, but he is there to help them.

Go to “Encountering the Idran.”

### **Scene 5 – Encountering the Idran**

After entering Enoch, the Nagaraja members of the Idran make themselves known to the characters. They are also looking into the Aralu’s disappearance and are convinced that the characters had something to do with it. They would rather just kill the interlopers and be done with it, but that does not solve the problem of where the tomb is hidden. Instead, the Nagaraja knock the characters around a bit to let them know they mean business. The characters have a chance to negotiate with the Idran and convince them that they are on their side.

Go to “Antoinette’s Contact” or “Bahari Ambush.”

### **Scene 6 – Bahari Ambush**

The Bahari know the timeline for stealing the Aralu’s tomb is askew, but they have heard rumors that the

characters came in with the artifact that opened the catacombs. They assume the characters have instructions from Antoinette and abduct them to get new orders. The characters meet the local Bahari leader, Irina.

Unfortunately, the characters don’t have the information the Bahari want from them, and instead attempt to press the characters into service to assist them in transporting the Aralu’s tomb out of Enoch and into the Shadowlands. They promise the characters’ escape from Enoch and Anadja if they help. The characters can decide to help the Bahari in their thievery, or they can betray the Bahari to try to win Anadja’s favor.

Go to “Bahari Instructions.”

### **Scene 7 – Bahari Instructions**

Irina gives the characters a list of tasks to complete within two days, and on the third day she plans to move the Aralu’s tomb through Enoch and to a nearby Byway, a route that guarantees safe passage to the River of the Dead. The characters must contact Bahari conspirators in both the Idran and the Order of Moloch to assist them as they organize their efforts. They must also reclaim Antoinette’s artifact from the Dread Palace Ghemal. Once these tasks are complete, they are given a time and place to meet Irina in the Slums of Enoch to escort the sarcophagus through Enoch.

Go to “Contacting Allies” or “Palace Heist.” If the characters wish to betray the Bahari, go to “Working with Pietro.”

### **Scene 8 – Working with Pietro (Optional)**

This scene is only available to the characters if they chose to betray the Bahari. The characters contact Pietro to inform him of the Bahari’s plans. He sends tells them that they need to continue working with the Bahari to prevent them from growing suspicious, but report their activity back to him. He wants them to collect information and names of all those who are involved in the conspiracy. He is willing to help the characters, but first wants them to get additional help in the form of Larux of the Idran.

Go to “Contacting Allies.”

### **Scene 9 – Contacting Allies**

The characters must go to both the Idran and the Order of Moloch to give instructions and seek assistance out of their Bahari contacts. If the characters are working with

Pietro against the Bahari, they should visit with Larux first. Then they can either meet with Zeke, the Idran contact, or Isobel, the Order of Moloch contact. Both have tasks for the characters to complete for them.

Go to *"The Getaway Car"* or *"Palace Heist."*

## Scene 10 – The Getaway Car

When the characters are ready to help Zeke, they must assist him as he crafts a boat for the Aralu's tomb to travel down the Byway. Zeke intends to summon ghosts and then craft their souls into the boat for the sarcophagus. The characters must help Zeke subdue the ghosts and protect him while he performs his ritual.

Go to *"Palace Heist,"* or *"Race to the Byway."*

## Scene 11 – Palace Heist

If the characters are working for the Bahari, they must break into the Dread Palace Ghemal and steal Antoinette's artifact hidden in its dungeon. They must deal with guards outside the dungeon as well as traps sealing the doors to the dungeons.

If the characters are working with Pietro, they have the choice of stealing the real stone or creating a replica. If they choose to steal the real stone, they must face all the dangers they would have to if working with the Bahari. If they wish to make a fake, they must break a stone from the catacomb, which is a living creature intent on protecting itself.

Go to *"The Getaway Car"* or *"Race to the Byway."*

## Scene 12 – Race to the Byway

The characters go to their designated meeting place with Irina on the day of the move, but she is not there. The characters have been set up to be a diversion for the Idran while the sarcophagus is moved safely through another part of the city. The characters must fight their way to the Byway through the Order of Moloch's own diversions and attacks from the Idran. Once they get to the Byway, they must protect those who are loading the sarcophagus from attacks by Larux and the Idran attempting to stop them.

If the characters are working with Pietro, they must still fight their way to the Byway, but this time they must make it directly through the diversions and the Molochians creating them. Once at the Byway, they must quickly defeat Irina and her compatriots if they wish to stop the Bahari's escape with the Aralu.

Go to *"Aftermath."*

## Scene 13 – Aftermath

After the fight at the Byway, the characters are brought to their respective patron. Characters working with the Bahari are brought to Antoinette's estate in France, where she offers them a chance to join her in the Tal'Mahe'Ra or lose their memories of the past few days.

Characters working with Pietro are brought to the Del'Roh who makes the same offer, though she is also willing to kill the characters if they do not accept her offer to join the Black Hand.

## The Slums of Enoch

Enoch contains a few distinct regions. The oldest part of the city, *Ubar*, is closest to the entrance to the catacombs, and all its buildings are as real as anything found in the material world. This is partially because the oldest buildings of Enoch are actually grounded in places by the material world, allowing the fallen necropolis to still maintain its physical form. The rest of the areas nearby are made up of memories of necropolises from nearly every age, yet their proximity to the stones of *Ubar* lends them a substantial quality much like the central city. Everything else in Enoch consists of half-remembered cities, ghosts, and the soul-stuff of the dead. The city vaguely resembles a series of concentric circles, with the oldest part of the city on the inside and the newer areas radiating outward. Of course, Enoch has no distinct city limits, and the transitions between the newer areas of the city and the old do not conform to mundane geometries.

The further from the center of Enoch one travels, the less solid and stately the city seems. Buildings have a more modern look, but are also more decrepit and decaying. These areas are called the Slums of Enoch, or simply the Slums. Passage through the Slums is inevitable as one travels through Enoch, since not all locations touch the center of the city, yet every direction leads back there.

From their many years living in Enoch, the Nagaraja have developed a ritual to shape and mold the memories and soul-stuff of the city, crafting items and even buildings out of less concrete concepts in the Slums. This ritual allows the Nagaraja to carve niches and strongholds around the Slums for the various factions of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. From these strongholds, the vampires have taken advantage of the strange physics of the city to craft roads and streets that shorten the distance needed to travel from one another and to center of the city. Each of these areas is a bastion of order and repair in an otherwise desolate wasteland of crumbling walls and buildings. Enoch is large enough to

comfortably support twenty times the number of vampires residing there, so the uninhabited areas act like wilds in between the strongholds and the city center, with some sections adapting to mimic the Tempest the city sits within.

The characters are given a small space within the Slums to call their own, crafted quickly and without premeditation by Henri Leclair. Though Henri does not normally reside in the Slums, he has crafted a residence near the characters' own safe haven to be on hand when they need to find him.

The following are areas of interest around Enoch and strongholds within the Slums of Enoch.

## **Safe Haven**

The characters have a small area that Henri refers to as Safe Haven. It consists of five sky-rise apartment buildings in four city blocks, two of which are missing their top halves. Henri has crafted a single path leading out of the Safe Haven into the rest of the Slums, near an already established road to the city center. The Safe Haven is an abandoned area of the Slums near one of the Tempest-like wastes, infrequently traveled and unlikely to be discovered by other members of the Black Hand living in the city. This makes it a very safe and private location for the characters to rest and discuss events as the chronicle progresses.

## **Bahari Stronghold**

The Bahari maintain a small stronghold in the Slums, mostly consisting of a few buildings and a couple of houses that Bahari residents use on a temporary basis. The stronghold is little more than a public front used to cover for the secret sanctuaries the Bahari conspirators use to work out plans. The only Bahari that use the stronghold for its intended purpose are those who are not part of the conspiracy. Otherwise, Bahari only go there and act within its confines as a show to placate the Del'Roh.

Anadja has her loyal informants keeping tabs on the stronghold, though she is fully aware that it is not where the conspirators do most of their business. She monitors the main stronghold in hopes that someone will slip up and lead her to the others. Over the years, Anadja has discovered and bugged at least one or two secret meeting places, but somehow the Bahari keep finding out and relocating shortly after.

## **Bahari Secret Hideouts**

The Bahari maintain single buildings scattered throughout the Slums, using them on a rotating basis for secret meetings and personal dealings. The Bahari rarely do anything to hide these buildings from prying eyes. Instead,

they simply use what is available in the area without creating roads or shoring up the buildings. Any one Bahari hideout may look like any other structure in the untamed wastes of the Slums, making them very difficult to find without proper instructions.

## **Idran Stronghold**

The Idran stronghold is made up of many miles of urban sprawl, with tall buildings wedged in so close to one another that in some areas even the streets are covered. All the buildings are connected to one another through footbridges, allowing passage from one building to another without ever stepping outside.

The Idran stronghold has passages to all other areas of Enoch, as well as a road that leads directly to the Dread Palace Ghemal. The stronghold is the most established and well-connected one in the Slums, built up by the Nagaraja who developed the soul-shaping technique in the first place. The Idran use the stronghold as a hub of activity for policing Enoch and maintain a constant vigil for the safety of the city and its inhabitants.

## **Order of Moloch Stronghold**

The Order of Moloch maintains a small holding within the Slums for when their agents need to spend any length of time in Enoch. The few members of the Order who are also secret conspirators know about the Bahari hideouts, but rarely meet there. Most Order of Moloch members are secretive by nature, but know that they are the most scrutinized of all Black Hand members, so they tend to try to stay out of Enoch politics. Their stronghold is connected to the Dread Palace Ghemal.

## **The Dread Palace Ghemal**

Located in the very center of Enoch, the Dread Palace Ghemal is the haven of the Del'Roh. Constructed upon a hill in the middle of the city, it is the only building visible from anywhere in Enoch, and all other areas of the city can be seen from its high walls.

Within Ghemal's walls, the palace stands as an exercise in the same labyrinthine logic that governs the rest of Enoch. It looks like a series of towers set in concentric circles around larger and larger towers still. It's a tower built of towers, and finding a proper path through could take centuries for the uninvited. The Dread Palace's system of wings makes little sense without extensive explanation; cardinal directions mean nothing within those black walls.

The Del'Roh maintains the central tower as a sort of fortress within a fortress. One cannot simply walk into



the central tower; it requires an extensive path through a handful of the other towers, caves beneath them, and skyways between them.

## The Entrance to the Catacombs

The entrance to the catacombs and the tombs of the Aralu lies between the oldest areas of Enoch and the Slums. Few people travel to the catacomb entrance, and the large, ornate double doors that stand guard are the only structures untouched by the ravages of the Tempest of the Underworld. These doors stand both inside the Underworld and somewhere within the material world, though few know its location in the mortal world.

Along with its anchoring to the material world, the entrance to the catacombs is always one mile to the southeast of the entrance to the Dread Palace Ghemal. This relation remains true no matter what direction one travels to reach either the catacombs or the palace. Most of the Black Hand believes this is because the palace is an extension of the catacombs, though only the Del'Roh and the Wazir council know the truth of that claim.

## The Labyrinth

When the characters enter Enoch, they do so through the catacombs beneath the city. The doors leading from the catacombs into Enoch stand open and remain so long after the characters enter the city. These doors are normally closed and sealed against any who would attempt to enter the catacombs below. The Black Hand has posted guards against intruders into the catacombs, but the fact that they remain open has everyone in Enoch on edge.

Inside, the catacomb is an ever-changing labyrinth seeming to grow and constrict at random. Particularly if you intend to have an extended chronicle in Enoch, present the Labyrinth as a character of its own. The halls have personality and opinions, so use it to communicate themes and moods through symbolism.

## Cast

Note that while some of the cast feature full character sheets, some do not, as their roles aren't likely to feature direct mechanical engagement or combat. For those characters, if the players' characters choose to engage, present their roles in the story as challenges to overcome with normal actions, as opposed to direct contested opposition. The vampires of Enoch are of a much different caliber

than the average Kindred on the streets, so they should be handled accordingly as plot devices and more conceptual threats, lest the story simply devolve into competitions to destroy increasingly powerful elders.

### Anadja

**Clan:** Ventrue

**Sire:** Belisarius

**Generation:** Sixth

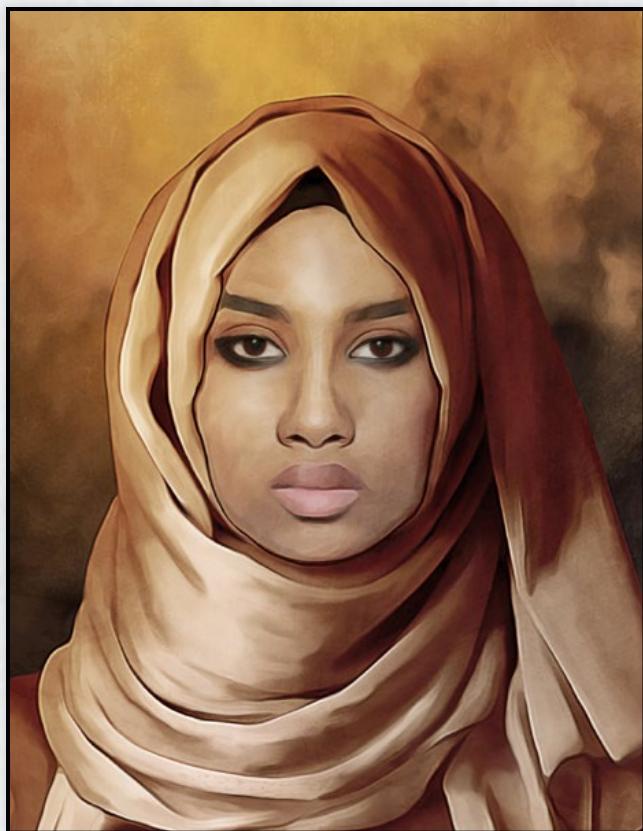
**Embrace:** 1000s C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Early teens

**Background:** Anadja was born and raised in Alexandria during the Muslim occupation and control of Egypt. Her mother was native Egyptian, and her father a wealthy merchant of Persian descent. She was barely old enough to marry when she caught the eye of Belisarius. Though the old Roman was traveling with his then lover, Shabah, he took a liking to Anadja's quick mind and independent personality. Shabah agreed to her Embrace, and the two treated her as a mutual child. Anadja traveled with her sire and his lover for several years before he was called away to Constantinople. During their time together, Belisarius and Shabah taught Anadja to be a soldier and a fighter. Shabah taught her to use her femininity as a weapon against those who underestimated her power. Belisarius taught her tactics and military discipline. When Shabah was also called away to Constantinople, Anadja struck out on her own.

While traveling, Anadja met up with Pietro, who recognized Anadja's shrewd intelligence and warrior training. Pietro first inducted Anadja into the Tal'Mahe'Ra and acted as her mentor and elder benefactor during her first few years within the Black Hand. Anadja's excellent military training worked in her favor as she scoured the world of infernalism and those with diseased blood. Anadja spent only a few years under Pietro's tutelage before leading her own kamut. She spent fifty years as a Seraph and the Camarilla Prince of Yerevan, Armenia, commanding vampire armies in the constant land struggles happening there before she was elevated to Del'Roh of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. She retired to Enoch and cleanly transitioned to running the Black Hand. Anadja's calculating attitude and focus on her goals has kept the Tal'Mahe'Ra running smoothly for over 250 years.

**Image:** Anadja is a mix of North African and Middle Eastern descent. She has long, thick, black hair, dark brown eyes, and light olive skin. She often wears Persian period dress or what she believes to be modern clothing, depending on her mood. She has been known to hold meetings



with her Wazir council wearing nothing but jewels and gossamer fine drapes. Anadja has not left Enoch during the entire time she has been Del'Roh, and her sense of fashion and clothing style has definitely been affected by the time away from the material world.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are intelligent, calculating, and capable, taking in every bit of information you can about a situation before making a decision. You favor acting too slow to acting in haste, but your training in military tactics has made your intuition for timing frighteningly precise. You are an ancient creature, and your time in the Underworld has not helped your grasp on the world.

**Haven:** Anadja resides within the Dread Palace Ghemal on the third floor of the palace. The entire floor is both her haven and her meeting space. She only leaves the Palace in dire emergencies or terrible calamities. When she does leave her haven to deal with Tal'Mahe'Ra issues, the whole Sect stops and takes notice.

**Influence:** While Anadja claims the title of Del'Roh, she does have her detractors and those who would gladly take her position from her. However, through years of work and leadership, she has earned the loyalty of all three of the liches and several Seraphim on her council. Pietro, one of the most powerful and influential Seraphim, is also completely loyal to her, and he does not suffer his colleagues to disparage her in his presence. Other than

that, the Noddists continue to support her loyally as long as she keeps the Bahari at bay, fearing that if they take over Enoch, the Noddists will no longer find safety in the city.

## Antoinette Sauveterre

**Clan:** Toreador

**Sire:** Unknown

**Generation:** Sixth

**Embrace:** 983 C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Mid-20s

**Background:** Antoinette Sauveterre is an Independent elder Toreador with connections all across the globe. She is well respected by the Camarilla as an frequent benefactor and trusted informant – so much that they often court her to join the Sect – and she has a reputation among the Sabbat as one who demands respect and attention. Few deal with her lightly, but those who do work with her find themselves richly rewarded. Other Independents often look to her for guidance and protection when traveling among cities held by either the Camarilla or the Sabbat. Her influence over the Anarch Movement is limited at best, as she prefers to work directly with the Camarilla and views the Anarchs as petulant children, keeping her interactions with them to a minimum.



Antoinette's true power comes from her association with the Tal'Mahe'Ra. She is a long-time member and the only Seraph not affiliated with a major Sect. She is a member of the Cult of Lilith and controls a large faction of Bahari intent on gaining control of Enoch, though those associations are a well-guarded secret.

**Image:** Antoinette is French through and through, with pale skin, blue eyes, and dark brown hair. She dresses in modern styles, preferring business casual and street casual to fancy dress or formal business attire. She wears her long hair down, flowing around her shoulders and back. She holds herself with utmost care, belying a time when posture was just as important as dress and style.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You're a powerful creature with an extensive network of allies and those who owe you favors. You rarely get ignored or denied your wishes, and you are impatient with those who do not follow your commands. You can be polite and civil when necessary, but your worship of Lilith has made you cruel and contemptuous to any but your closest allies.

**Haven:** Antoinette makes her home in a large sprawling estate just outside of Montreuil, France. She keeps a few guards around the perimeter of her estate, but the seclusion of the area provides ample defense. She is careful to only take what she needs from the nearby city, keeping a dedicated herd within her estate to prevent unwanted attention from the locals.

**Influence:** Antoinette is a Seraph within the Tal'Mahe'Ra and commands quite a bit of respect among the Sect. She can also mobilize allies throughout all the other Sects if need be, utilizing Black Hand contacts as necessary, but often preferring to use her own considerable collection of favors. Her influence in vampire society is far-reaching, making her a powerful ally or adversary.

## Pietro

**Clan:** Lasombra

**Sire:** Unknown

**Generation:** Fifth

**Embrace:** ~ 250 C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Early 30s

**Background:** Pietro originates from somewhere along the Mediterranean Sea. To hear him tell it, he grew up in the sea itself. Most know better than to question that claim, as the ancient vampire is sometimes prone to bouts of rage when it comes to remembering his youth. What is known is that Pietro was a soldier for the Roman army before his Embrace, and he spent a considerable amount of time afterward sailing the Mediterranean with his sire.



Pietro has been a member of the Tal'Mahe'Ra since before the formation of the Sabbat, though he did join the Sect after the Anarch Revolt. He pushed for the Sabbat's Black Hand and supported its formation, taking a role of leadership within the group rather quickly. His strangely likable personality and ability to lead any ragtag group made him a favorite among the younger vampires. Pietro's appointment as Seraph in the Tal'Mahe'Ra is one of convenience. His activity in the Sabbat's Black Hand and the respect and position he has gathered there reflect within the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Of all the Seraphim, Pietro is the most approachable and likely to listen to even the most junior of members.

Despite the appearance that Pietro's position within the Wazir is a pretty fiction, he controls a large number of the Tal'Mahe'Ra's assets and is deeply loyal to the Del'Roh. In fact, he is often seen in her presence and has not left Enoch since her appointment to the position. Rumors float around Enoch that Pietro and Anadja are lovers, but no evidence supports such fancy.

**Image:** Pietro carries classic Mediterranean features with dark hair, dark eyes, and dark olive skin. He prefers to wear modern business suits, but sometimes favors traditional Roman garb around Enoch. His stay in Enoch has affected his mentality on the Abyss and shadows. Before Enoch, Pietro would only call upon shadows when necessary,

developing his mastery as far as he believed functional. Since his time there, he has become fascinated with the Abyss and has even rediscovered Abyssal Mysticism, long thought lost to his memory. He is constantly surrounded by shadows that move of their volition, and often detach at his command and follow others through the city.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are renowned for being approachable and down to earth. This doesn't mean you puts up with nonsense or indulge those who you allow to speak to you. Instead, you listen and weigh the words you hear, seeking key words and phrases that could indicate widespread trends in the nature of the world. Few understand your interest in idle conversation, but you know that people speak their truest intentions and thoughts only when they feel comfortable, and so you provide that comfortable space for people to share their innermost secrets. This allows you to ferret out betrayals and coups before they have a chance to foster. You have discovered the nature of the Bahari's plan, though as of yet, you have been unable to discover their true leader.

**Haven:** Pietro all but lives in the Dread Palace Ghemal at Anadja's side. He makes his home somewhere within Enoch, though few know where to find it. Of course, if anyone is looking for him, he is likely to be found in the palace, near at hand to the Del'Roh.

**Influence:** Pietro is a Seraph in not only the Tal'Mahe'Ra, but also the Sabbat's Black Hand. He has considerable influence within both Sects, and has a large number of Cainites at his command.

## Henri Leclair

**Clan:** Ventrue

**Sire:** Marguerite de Paris

**Nature:** Survivor

**Demeanor:** Autocrat

**Generation:** Ninth

**Embrace:** Late 1800s C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Early 20s

**Background:** Henri Leclair was born during the height of the Victorian Era in England to a family with lots of history, social clout, and little money. Henri joined the military soon after finishing school, looking to make a life for himself. His time in the British military was short-lived, as he was found and Embraced by Marguerite de Paris while stationed in France. She spirited him away with her to Paris and began training him as her newest project. Marguerite had a habit of Embracing new vampires and drilling them in the etiquette of the Camarilla to serve as vassals to the court, fulfilling some duty or another with the utmost efficiency. Marguerite's methods were intense



and cruel, designed to break the spirit of her children and reshape them into perfect loyal subjects.

Henri's will proved too strong for Marguerite's methods. He was clever enough to play along, but plotted his revenge against her every night. Henri bided his time and waited until she was ready to present him to the Paris court. That night, instead of Marguerite presenting Henri as her newest loyal slave and gem of the Camarilla, Henri presented his sire's head to the Prince, declaring his independence from the Camarilla and all it represented. The Prince of Paris declared a blood hunt on Henri, who fled the city. Shortly after this scene, rumors of Henri's debut at court reached the ears of the local Sabbat, who approached him for membership. Henri fit in very well with the Sabbat, finding his new comrades agreeable to his own calculating disposition. Henri gained the reputation of being a fixer, someone able to cover up mistakes or take care of problems with minimal muss or fuss.

Henri was tapped to join the Tal'Mahe'Ra by Antoinette in the 1950s and has served under her since that time, though he maintains his membership within the Sabbat. Recently, Henri was sent to Enoch to protect Antoinette's interests there, as she has pressing business in France.

**Image:** Henri is tall and pale with bright blue eyes and soft blonde hair. He dresses in business suits and classic male fashion whenever possible.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are a practical vampire who takes pride in his work. When you do a job, you do it well. You pride yourself on that sense of accomplishment, professionalism, and honor.

**Haven:** Henri doesn't have a permanent haven, preferring to stay in small nondescript locations for short periods of time. He pays for these places in cash, and ensures that his comings and goings are not noticed. He is as untraceable as a vampire can be.

**Influence:** Henri has little influence within the Tal'Mahe'Ra. He is one of Antoinette's thugs at best. Within the Sabbat, he leads a pack dedicated to taking care of problems. He is well respected amongst his Sabbat brethren. He has considerable influence in the mortal underground all over the world, ensuring that he has contacts no matter where he happens to be working.

## Larux

**Clan:** Nagaraja

**Sire:** Rajama

**Nature:** Conformist

**Demeanor:** Idealist

**Generation:** Tenth

**Embrace:** 1900s C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Early 20s

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Expression 2, Intimidation 4, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 3

**Skills:** Firearms 4, Larceny 2, Melee 5, Stealth 3, Survival 5

**Knowledges:** Academics 2, Investigation 4, Medicine 2, Occult 5

**Disciplines:** Auspex 3, Dominate 3, Necromancy (The Sepulchre Path) 4, Necromancy (The Ash Path) 5, Necromancy (The Bone Path) 3, Necromancy (Vitreous Path) 3

**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 3

**Virtues:** Conscience 3, Self-Control 4, Courage 5

**Morality:** Path of Honorable Accord 8

**Willpower:** 6

**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 13/1

**Background:** Larux was born in Enoch as part of a ghoull bloodline. She has lived her whole life in the city, rarely leaving for anything other than short missions for the Tal'Mahe'Ra.



She was Embraced as a reward for good behavior and loyalty after many years of living as a ghoul. Larux's loyalty and service to the Idran have earned her respect and rank within the Tal'Mahe'Ra, where her age never could.

She is the leader of a cell of Idran who patrol and monitor the city, taking care of any stray ghosts who make their way into the city and dealing with internal issues.

**Image:** Larux is an albino. She has constantly bloodshot pale blue eyes that look almost white, thin and soft white hair and pale, nearly translucent skin. Her coloring doesn't seem to bother her at all, but might be the reason she rarely leaves Enoch. She prefers to wear form fitting clothing that moves and breaths as she makes her way through Enoch.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are absolutely loyal to the Tal'Mahe'Ra and the Del'Roh. You have never known anything but their indoctrination and tutelage. You are not a monster per se, but you have no real concept of mortal morality. You are brutally efficient in your job and expect everyone around you to follow suit.

**Haven:** Larux makes her home in the Idran stronghold in the Slums of Enoch. Other Idran surround her, keeping her safe and following her orders.

**Influence:** Larux has been given considerable influence within the ranks of the Idran, leading teams and performing

independent operations around Enoch and out in the mortal world when necessary. The Idran respect her and listen to her instructions. Because she has little interaction with the outside world, Larux has no contacts with mortal society.

## Derrick

**Clan:** Nagaraja

**Sire:** Larux

**Nature:** Curmudgeon

**Demeanor:** Soldier

**Generation:** Eleventh

**Embrace:** 1984 C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Mid-30s

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 3

**Skills:** Drive 2, Firearms 2, Melee 4, Stealth 3, Survival 4

**Knowledges:** Academics 2, Computer 3, Investigation 4, Occult 4, Technology 3

**Disciplines:** Auspex 2, Dominate 3, Necromancy (The Ash Path) 3, Necromancy (Vitreous Path) 3, Potence 3

**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 1

**Virtues:** Conscience 3, Self-Control 4, Courage 3

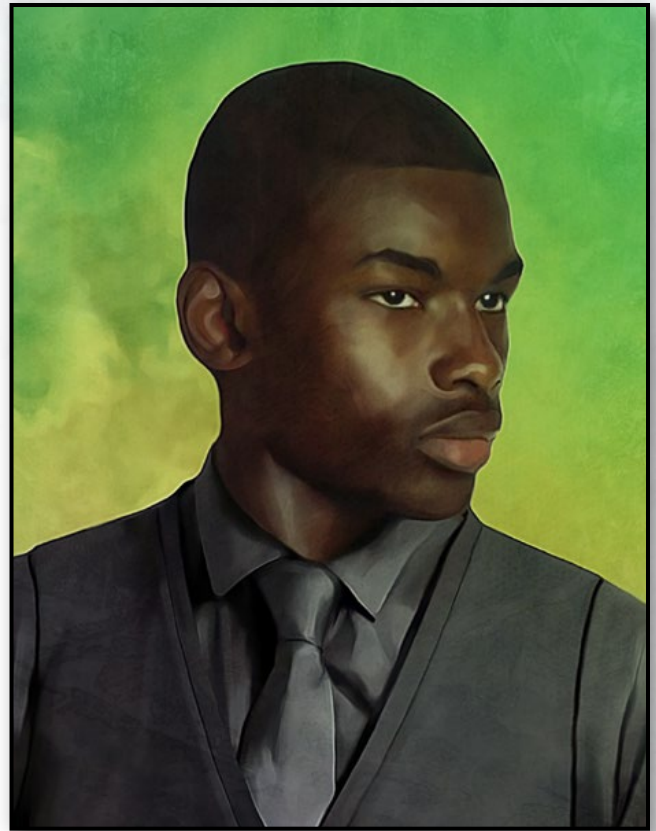
**Morality:** Path of Humanity 3

**Willpower:** 6

**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 12/1

**Background:** Derrick was born during the late 1940s in Chicago. He joined the Army at age 18 to serve his country and was sent to Vietnam, where he remained until hostilities there ended. Upon his return to the United States, Derrick had a hard time fitting into what most people call a normal life. He was desensitized to death and suffering and had a hard time empathizing with those around him. He soon fell in with those who recognized his skills as a killer, and he accepted money to kill. He was good at it, but eventually the work caught up with him in the form of a Sabbat pack looking for trouble. Derrick was good at a few things, one of which was keeping his head in dangerous situations. What could easily have ended up as just another statistic landed Derrick as a ghoul for the pack.

One of the pack members and a shakari, Lilly, saw in Derrick the cold and calculating personality needed to



be an assassin. She trained Derrick in secret and eventually brought him to Enoch to be tested and Embraced. Though Lilly was too junior and young to Embrace him herself, Derrick was given the chance for the Embrace and membership in the Tal'Mahe'Ra, but only if he served in Enoch for 100 years. Larux was given the honor of his Embrace, and he has been her loyal assistant ever since.

**Image:** Derrick is of average height, but very muscular. He has black hair, light brown eyes, and dark brown skin. He wears modern clothing, despite his residence in Enoch, and likes to keep up with American fashion.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You were broken, then remade. You are so far gone from the young patriotic man who joined the Army that you barely remember being that boy. Instead, you have walled himself off to emotion or caring. You speak little and keep your distance from those around you, taking orders and doing your job without comment.

**Haven:** Derrick stays with his sire, Larux, in the Idran stronghold.

## Rosette

**Clan:** Nosferatu

**Sire:** Unknown

**Nature:** Conniver

**Demeanor:** Creep Show

**Generation:** Ninth  
**Embrace:** 1500s C.E.  
**Apparent Age:** Unknown  
**Physical:** Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4  
**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 5, Intimidation 4, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 3  
**Skills:** Animal Ken 3, Etiquette 2, Melee 4, Stealth 5, Survival 4  
**Knowledges:** Academics 5, Computer 3, Investigation 2, Occult 1, Science 2, Technology 3  
**Disciplines:** Animalism 4, Auspex 2, Obfuscate 5, Potence 4  
**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 2, Contacts 5, Herd 2  
**Virtues:** Conviction 3, Instinct 4, Courage 3  
**Morality:** Path of Caine 7  
**Willpower:** 6  
**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 14/2

**Background:** Rosette is the Nosferatu Primogen of Augusta, Maine. She was approached to join the Black Hand through one of her Sabbat allies within the Clan. Being from such an unimportant location, her position as Primogen

was likely to never be challenged. This has proven true to date, though she spends many years outside of the city.

Currently, Rosette is serving in Enoch for a few years. She is a member of the Idran and takes great pride in ensuring the Tal'Mahe'Ra and Enoch remains safe. She uses her considerable capabilities for information gathering to keep everyone informed of everything happening in the city at a moment's notice.

**Image:** Rosette has mottled grey skin with open sores on her hands and face with pale, lifeless eyes. Her dark hair is thin and stringy, falling out in places. She often wears black robes and gloves to cover her striking appearance, but doesn't bother as much while in Enoch and only in the presence of other vampires.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You like to gather information, but you don't like to give anything away unless absolutely necessary. You are devoutly loyal to the Del'Roh, and hate the Bahari and all that they stand for. You are a scholar above all else, but fully capable of killing your enemies if they annoy you too much.

**Haven:** Rosette normally lives in the sewers of Maine, though she stays in the Idran stronghold while in Enoch.

**Influence:** Rosette is a Camarilla Primogen and has a decent amount of influence within her own city. She is a respected member of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, though her scope of influence within the Sect stretches to disseminating information and not much more.



## Irina

**Clan:** Old Clan Tzimisce  
**Sire:** Radovan  
**Nature:** Architect  
**Demeanor:** Monster  
**Generation:** Eighth  
**Embrace:** 1200s C.E.  
**Apparent Age:** Late teens  
**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4  
**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 1, Awareness 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 3  
**Skills:** Animal Ken 5, Etiquette 4, Larceny 1, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4  
**Knowledges:** Academics 5, Computer 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 2, Occult 5, Politics 2, Technology 3  
**Disciplines:** Animalism 4, Auspex 5, Dominate 4, Koldunic Sorcery (The Way of Earth) 4, Thaumaturgy (Lure of Flames) 3, Obfuscate 2

**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 3  
**Virtues:** Conviction 3, Instinct 4, Courage 4  
**Morality:** Path of Lilith 7  
**Willpower:** 8  
**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 15/3

**Background:** Irina was born and raised in a small village in Macedonia ruled by a Tzimisce, Radovan. Everyone in town knew he was a vampire, but it was of little concern, as the village prospered due to his influence. Irina was a beautiful child and grew to be a stunning young woman. She caught the lord's eye and he made her a ghoul at age 17. To be chosen by Radovan was among one of the greatest favors he could bestow on the lowly villagers, and her family was pleased to see her go. Irina was not as thrilled as her family by the prospect of being Radovan's eternal slave.

Irina did not suffer under Radovan for long. He kept her for only fifty years before Embracing her. He then tired of her company and sent her out into the world. Irina did not waste her newfound freedom. She traveled all across Europe following scholarly pursuits. When the Tal'Mahe'Ra contacted her, she had already started a large library on the nature of vampirism, Caine, and Lilith. It didn't take much to convince her to join their ranks, especially since Radovan had joined only 100 years earlier in hopes to help stamp out

what he referred to as the Vicissitude scourge. The Order of Moloch entreated her to join them, but her interests lay with the Bahari and the study of Lilith's role in the vampire nature.

**Image:** Irina enhances her petite and youthful appearance with her choice of gothic-punk clothing. She has black hair shot through with bright pink and blue strands, light skin, and blue eyes outlined in thick black eyeliner and heavy make-up.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Your youthful appearance makes people underestimate you, and you use that to your advantage. Centuries of study and experimentation have made you into a masterful manipulator, capable of getting your way with even the most stoic of individuals. As a solitary creature, you have little regard or care for others aside Antoinette and the rest of the Bahari.

**Haven:** Irina makes her home in northern Hungary, keeping to herself unless on missions with her kamut. She has recently taken up residence in Enoch at Antoinette's orders to prepare to take the Aralu's sarcophagus.

**Influence:** Irina is well respected amongst the Tal'Mahe'Ra, though she has very little personal power within the Sect. She is Antoinette's face to the rest of the Bahari conspirators, and leads them while she is in Enoch.

## Isobel

**Clan:** Toreador  
**Sire:** Marcus Duchene  
**Nature:** Sadist  
**Demeanor:** Chameleon  
**Generation:** Eleventh  
**Embrace:** 1950s C.E.  
**Apparent Age:** Mid-20s  
**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3  
**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2  
**Talents:** Alertness 1, Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Empathy 2, Expression 3, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 3  
**Skills:** Firearms 4, Larceny 3, Melee 4, Performance 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2  
**Knowledges:** Academics 3, Investigation 2, Law 2, Occult 3, Science 1  
**Disciplines:** Auspex 2, Celerity 3, Dominate 3, Potence 2, Presence 4, Protean 2  
**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 1  
**Virtues:** Conviction 3, Instinct 5, Courage 3  
**Morality:** Path of Lilith 6  
**Willpower:** 6  
**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 12/1







**Background:** Isobel is the youngest of Antoinette's lineage. She is favored by her great-great-grandmother, and was almost immediately brought into her sphere of influence after her Embrace. While given some amount of freedom, Isobel acts in accordance to Antoinette's wishes at all times as her willing pawn. Isobel joined the Order of Moloch at Antoinette's instructions, and enjoys hunting down demons and infernal creatures. Really, she just enjoys fighting and creating pain, and this is a good outlet for that.

Isobel is merely a contact within the Order of Moloch between the members with leanings towards the Bahari teachings and the Bahari cult. Her position within the group is minimal, but her association with Antoinette gives her some modicum of power.

**Image:** Isobel is not only the youngest of Antoinette's lineage, but was Embraced youngest. She looks every bit the young, pale, fair 1950s French woman. She keeps short brunette curls and sharp, well-manicured eyebrows. No matter the circumstance (or ritual), she looks meticulously put together. Often she can be found amidst her tortures, covered in blood and bone, but maintaining a look somewhere between a porcelain doll and a fashion model.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Isobel only enjoys two things in life: pain and inflicting pain on others. Her role of sorting out

immortal dangers suits her well, and she is happy to oblige in any kind of service that will eventually end in suffering. She has a habit fitting into whatever role those around her assign her, even in casual conversation, adapting to conversations based on social cues around her.

**Haven:** Isobel often stays with Antoinette in France, but is staying in Enoch for the time being to train with the Order of Moloch. She has a small room off the main quarters for the Order in their stronghold.

## Zeke

**Clan:** Nagaraja

**Sire:** Rajama

**Nature:** Conniver

**Demeanor:** Chameleon

**Generation:** Tenth

**Embrace:** 1800s C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Mid-20s

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

**Talents:** Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Intimidation 1, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

**Skills:** Drive 3, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Larceny 3, Melee 4, Stealth 3, Survival 2

**Knowledges:** Academics 4, Computer 3, Crafts 4, Investigation 3, Occult 5

**Disciplines:** Auspex 3, Dominate 3, Koldunic Sorcery (The Way of Wind) 3, Necromancy (The Ash Path) 5, Necromancy (Vitreous Path) 3

**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 2

**Virtues:** Conviction 4, Instinct 3, Courage 4

**Morality:** Path of Lilith 5

**Willpower:** 7

**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 13/1

**Background:** Zeke is Larux's older and less privileged brood mate. Where Larux has proven herself to be an invaluable member of the Idran and Nagaraja, Zeke has been unremarkable in all his endeavors. He doesn't make mistakes or cause problems, and he isn't viewed as a liability, but his performance is often less than stellar. This is because Zeke's interests lie elsewhere, beyond the narrow-minded view of the other members of the Idran. Zeke remains with the Idran in hopes they will uncover some kind of ancient artifact or discover some lost artifact, but otherwise doesn't care much about what the Idran are doing. He instead invests all his extra time and energy into discovering archaic lore and sharing it with his Bahari sisters.



**Image:** Zeke's most notable feature is that he has none to speak of. He has dark brown skin, dark eyes, and dark hair. He often wears a bland expression and dresses in drab monochromatic clothing.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are only really animated when discussing academia and ancient lore. Otherwise, you don't talk much, responding only in monosyllabic or one-word responses.

**Haven:** Zeke stays in the Idran stronghold, but keeps a small place in one of the Bahari hideouts to do his research in private.

## Sample Characters

The following characters are templates to be used for multiple characters within an encounter. The main actors in the chronicle often travel with companions, though they are not significant to the story. These character's goals and histories are less important to the development of the story, and instead their motivations are listed before the character's stats.

### Bahari Conspirators

The Bahari have worked for centuries to help Antoinette steal the Aralu and gain power within Enoch. With their

end so close at hand, they will stop at nothing to accomplish their goals. Most are part of the Lilin cult collectively known to the Tal'Mahe'Ra as the Bahari, though some conspirators are politically aligned with the Order of Moloch or the Idran. Those Baali or Nagaraja who are part of the conspiracy are loyal Bahari, despite the group they belong to.

When using the Bahari Conspirators, feel free to add or remove Attributes and Abilities as necessary. Pick five of the Disciplines listed below, and only the members of the Order of Moloch may have Daimoinon.

**Generation:** Ninth

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Talents:** Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 3

**Skills:** Firearms 4, Melee 4, Stealth 3, Survival 2

**Knowledges:** Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Occult 3

**Disciplines:** Auspex 4, Dementation 3, Dominate 3, Koldunic Sorcery (choose one Way) 3, Necromancy (Vitreous Path) 3, Obfuscate 4, Obtenebration 3, Potence 2, Presence 4, Protean 3, Daimoinon 3 (only if Order of Moloch)

**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 2

**Virtues:** Conviction 3, Instinct 5, Courage 3

**Morality:** Path of Lilith 7

**Willpower:** 8

**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 14/2

### Idran Agent

These agents of the Tal'Mahe'Ra work with the Idran to protect Enoch. Most of these vampires are Nagaraja, though a few are other Clans. The Idran Agents the leaders of small kamuts, but are only a little better than common thugs.

When using the Idran Agents, feel free to add or remove Attributes and Abilities as necessary.

**Generation:** Tenth

**Physical:** Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

**Talents:** Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 3

**Skills:** Animal Ken 3, Firearms 4, Melee 3, Stealth 4, Survival 4

**Knowledges:** Investigation 2, Occult 5

**Disciplines:** Animalism 4, Auspex 2, Celerity 3, Dominate 3, Necromancy (The Bone Path) 3, Obfuscate 3, Potence 4

**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 1

**Virtues:** Conviction 3, Instinct 3, Courage 3

**Morality:** Path of Caine 5

**Willpower:** 7

**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 13/1

## Idran Thugs

These vampires just joined the Idran, working to prove themselves to the secretive group. Most of these vampires are young and freshly Embraced Nagaraja, though a few are older members of different Clans who are seeking to join the Idran's ranks.

When using the Idran Thugs, feel free to add or remove Attributes and Abilities as necessary. This template assumes characters still working toward Paths of Enlightenment.

Slightly more experienced thugs may have made the transition already, and have Virtues to suit.

**Generation:** Eleventh

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1

**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Talents:** Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Intimidation 2, Subterfuge 3

**Skills:** Firearms 4, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2

**Knowledges:** Investigation 2, Occult 4

**Disciplines:** Auspex 3, Dominate 2, Necromancy (Vitreous Path) 3, Potence 2

**Backgrounds:** Black Hand Membership 1

**Virtues:** Conscience 1, Self-Control 2, Courage 3

**Morality:** Humanity 2

**Willpower:** 6

**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 12/1



## Hook – Antoinette’s Task

If the characters are new to the chronicle, hooking them in should be fairly simple. For most of the characters, Antoinette could be a benefactor or trusted mentor. If this chronicle is part of a larger campaign and the characters have pre-existing backgrounds, then Antoinette could be connected to someone the characters trust – such as a sire, mentor, or venerated elder. Whatever their connection, the characters should either be beholden to Antoinette, or know someone who is connected enough to trust her. The characters can be from any Sect, and do not necessarily need to know or like each other before meeting with Antoinette. Her task and goals bring the characters together for good or for ill, and they will find working with one another is easier than not.

Antoinette Sauveterre has called the characters to her estate in Montreuil, France to request a favor. She requires the characters to escort a rare and valuable artifact from France to her holdings in New York. She would normally ask her own childer to handle such a delicate task, but political pressure dictates that she try to distance herself and her family from the artifact’s transportation. If the characters accept her request, she has everything in hand, including an overnight transatlantic flight ready and waiting.

Antoinette’s request does not come without reward. She offers the characters a reward befitting each one’s desires and Sect. The Storyteller has ultimate say on what exactly Antoinette offers each of the characters, but she is capable of offering any of the following: an increase in standing or a position within the character’s Sect, a teacher for a rare Discipline, a boon from a prominent member of the character’s Sect, or the removal of standing from a rival within the character’s Sect. The characters have every right to seem incredulous that Antoinette has as much sway over their own Sects as a mere Independent. Antoinette is confident in her offers and sincere in her belief that she can accomplish the tasks. Openly questioning her abilities leads Antoinette to firmly but gently explain that even if she is unable to deliver, she holds boons on those who will have to respond.

Along with her offer of a reward, Antoinette gives the characters a list of instructions for the artifact while it is in their care.

- They must never let the artifact out of their sight. They must not let it be stolen or barter it for insignificant things.

- The artifact may have strange properties. The characters are allowed to explore the uses of the artifact as long as they do not lose or destroy it.
- They must not mention Antoinette in connection with the artifact. Secrecy is of the utmost importance, and she expects the characters to remain discreet while performing their task.

Antoinette doesn’t speak much about the artifact itself. She explains that it is very old and nothing else like it exists in the material world. It has some magical properties, but they are mostly unknown and undiscovered. She has little interest in the magical, but other vampires do, and the artifact must remain in neutral hands. She refuses to reveal the nature of the artifact or where it comes from, but instead assures the characters that they shouldn’t need that information just to transport it across the ocean.

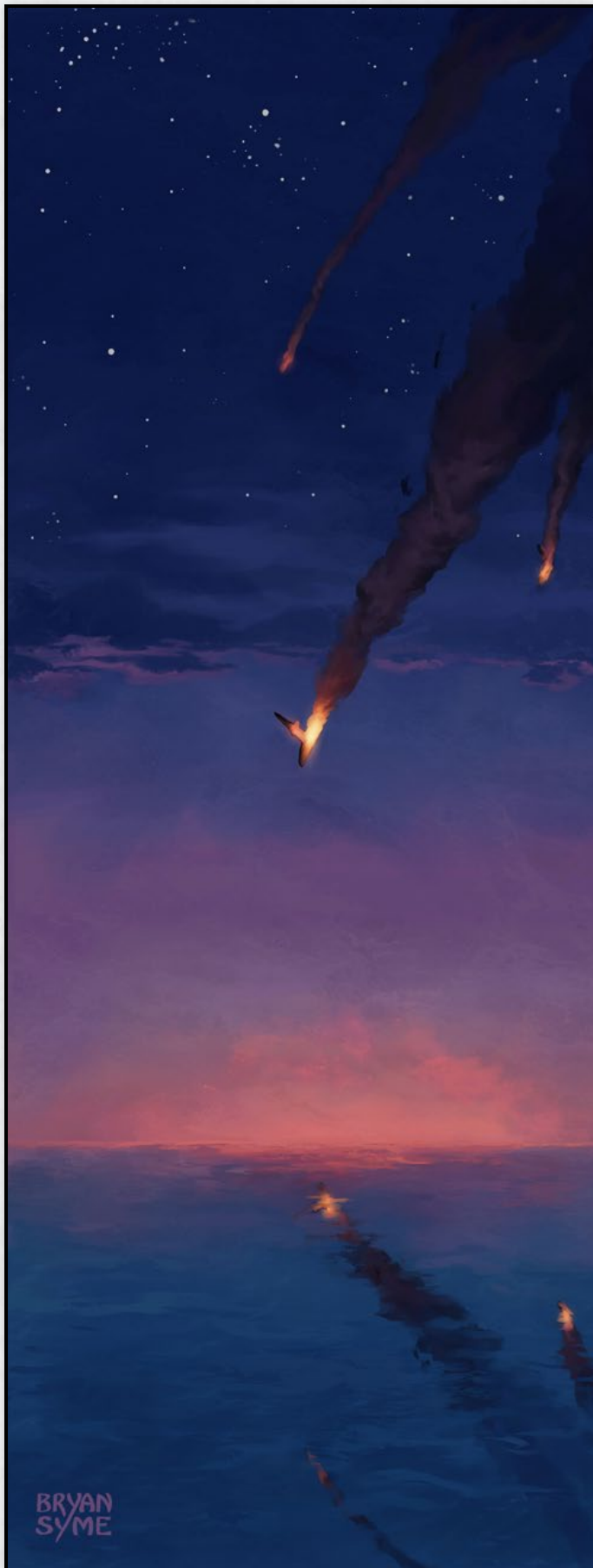
If the characters are enterprising enough to attempt truth-detecting powers, Antoinette does not lie to them. She may not be telling them the whole truth, but the things she does tell them are factual. If they attempt further prying using Telepathy or even Dominate, Antoinette will recognize it immediately and become furious with the characters, even if they fail to affect her.

## Scene 1: The Crash

Assuming the characters accept Antoinette’s offers, they are shuffled off to an international airport and sidled past security without any muss or fuss. Antoinette’s influence in France clearly extends far beyond her own domain. The characters have the whole business class section to themselves, while the rest of the plane is populated with mortals. The artifact is small enough to be a carry-on, but with the packaging and crate it rests in, it must be safely stowed in an overhead compartment. The first half of the flight is uneventful, and the flight attendants are conveniently absent for most of the time.

This gives the characters plenty of time to talk amongst themselves and make as much or as little speculation and investigation into the artifact as they want. Looking at the artifact reveals that it is a fist-sized stone, possibly marble or sandstone, likely broken off of a much larger piece. One side is covered in ancient script. If any of the characters happen to know Enochian or Sanskrit, they can read the characters, though they do not form complete words and therefore are mostly meaningless.

A little more than four hours into the flight, the plane experiences a sudden and inexplicable power failure.



Immediate investigation tells the characters that this is due to a Dominated plant who dug into the mechanical parts of the plane, caused immense damage, then committed suicide; this plane was brought down intentionally. The engines stop moving and the plane descends from its great height toward the Atlantic Ocean. The mortals aboard panic as the plane shudders and begins to break apart at the seams. Oxygen masks fall down around the cabin, and overhead bins pop open and spill their contents into the aisles. After a few moments, the power comes back on, and the captain explains over the speaker system that they need to make an emergency water landing. The flight attendants instruct the passengers to put on their life vests, buckle up, and remain seated. While the crew seems to have a better handle on the plane, it is still destined to crash into the water. As it does so, the back half of the plane, engines and all, tears apart from the front half, sinking quickly into the water. The front fuselage and cockpit tip up like a glass, trapping air in it. Everything tumbles away, including the crate holding the character's artifact.

If the characters had removed the artifact from its crate for investigation, then they can keep a handle on it. Otherwise, the players must succeed on Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 8) to grab it before it falls. If they fail to save the artifact, it falls into the water and disappears below the waves.

Just below the water, the characters can see what looks like a vast labyrinth of twisting halls and passageways covered in growths and coral. The stones that comprise the labyrinth resemble the artifact they are transporting (consider a Perception + Investigation roll, difficulty 8, if the players don't latch on to your descriptions). A group of four individuals emerge from a door near the sinking plane; they were staged near the landing site on a small boat if anyone happened to be looking out the window to the ocean. They reach out and grab mortals, tossing them through the door, knocking them unconscious, or in some cases feeding from them as they work. The sight of the newly-arrived vampires is likely to be shocking to the characters, but the presence of the characters is much more of a shock to these vampires.

At this point, the rest of this scene is on a timer. Regardless of how the Black Hand vampires respond to the characters, either to fight or to talk, the plane with the vampires still in it sinks quickly and falls into the catacombs visible just below the surface of the water. This happens in just one minute of time, or ten rounds of combat. The whole thing should

be jarring, stressful, and unclear. The stark immediacy should leave many questions.

It doesn't take long for the newly arrived vampires to notice the characters. They immediately stop what they are doing and draw weapons. If the characters have the artifact in hand, either because they had been holding it when the plane started crashing or because they were able to save it from falling, the vampires look dangerous and standoffish, but do not immediately attack. They demand to know who the characters are and where they got the artifact. The characters can talk to the vampires or attack them. Either way, they only have a minute on the plane before everything ends up in the catacombs.

Talking with the vampires reveals the following information:

- These vampires are members of the Black Hand, the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and they have emerged from Enoch beneath the waters.
- What the characters see below them is a set of catacombs, and not the city proper. The Black Hand vampires seem very confused by this revelation and act wary about the situation. Essentially, they ended up in the wrong place. They don't want to let the players' characters in on this fact, but it's upsetting to them that their methods didn't seem to work correctly. This is a good way to hit home that the planar travel committed by the Black Hand is often unexpected and frightening.
- Enoch is not in the material world, and the vampires are uncertain of how the plane came to fall towards the catacombs. By all accounts, something called the Tempest should be tearing them to shreds at this very moment.
- The catacombs are a labyrinthine crypt beneath Enoch. They refuse to divulge more information than that to the characters.

If the characters do not have the artifact, or do not have it visible, the newly arrived vampires will attack them without questions. Use the Idran Thug character sheet for each of them. Feel free to alter Attribute, Ability, and Discipline levels to suit the characters. The fight on the plane only lasts for 10 rounds before the whole fuselage crashes into the catacombs beneath Enoch. The fight can continue after that, but the crash itself disrupts everyone as the surfaces they are fighting on explode about them.

Regardless of what the characters are doing when the plane crashes, the characters land in the catacombs.

## Optional Environment Challenges

If the characters engage in combat on the sinking plane, consider using the fact that the plane is both sinking underwater and falling from the material world into the Underworld as environmental factors to make combat more interesting. Remember that any mechanics that affect the player's characters also affect the Storyteller characters.

For the first five rounds of combat, the floor of the plane is at a severe angle, water is rushing around the vampires' feet and legs, and plane seats are unbolted and floating through the area. All movement speeds are halved in the face of such difficulties, and if a character moves more than one or two steps, the player must roll Dexterity or Strength + Athletics (difficulty 6) to remain upright.

For the last five rounds of combat, the water is rushing out of the plane and into the catacombs, threatening to sweep the vampires with it. Each round a character wishes to take an action other than holding on for dear life, the player must roll Strength + Athletics (difficulty 7) to not fall out of the plane and onto the floor of the catacombs.

In the last round of combat, the plane crashes into the catacombs. All players must roll Dexterity + Athletics, Brawl, or Survival (difficulty 6), or the character falls prone as the impact rocks the entire plane and the catacombs.


## Scene 2: Entering Enoch

As the plane crashes into the catacombs, the entire place shakes with the impact. Pieces of fuselage scatter the ground, as do the broken bodies of the few mortals who were in the front half of the plane. Even though the characters witnessed copious amounts of seawater flow into the catacombs, the floors are mostly dry with a few puddles here and there. If the characters were in combat when they landed, they are more than welcome to continue fighting.



## Finding a Way Out

The characters are in the middle of a vast maze of corridors and hallways and must find their way out. How long it takes them is inconsequential, though the trip should feel long and confusing. If the players are uninterested in long narratives describing missed turns, long paths that lead back to where they started, and dead ends, then consider having them roll Wits + Survival (difficulty 7) to find their way to one of the tombs within about thirty minutes of exploration. Failure on the roll means the characters spend an extra hour lost within the labyrinth. Afterward, they can make additional Wits + Survival rolls to find the right direction.



If the characters were unable to secure Antoinette's artifact as the plane broke apart, it landed in the catacombs just before the plane did, and is now mixed with the debris. The characters can find it easily, as it stands out among the shards of metal and plastic.

If the Black Hand vampires are still alive and capable of talking, they are clearly out of their depth in the catacombs. They admit that not a single one has been in the catacombs before, though they know it is a labyrinth of immense proportions. The tombs are eerily silent after the crash, each footprint or spoken word echoing throughout the cavernous hallways.

In the first fifteen minutes of the characters' trip through the labyrinth, they hear loud scraping and shuffling noises. It sounds as though the walls are moving around them, and the floor rumbles and shakes under their feet. One of the Aralu tombs is being moved through the labyrinth. The loud noises carry on for ten full minutes, making it impossible for the characters to talk or hear each other during that time. If the Black Hand vampires are around, they seem edgy and hurry the characters along, hoping to get out of the labyrinth as soon as possible.

Just before finding the exit, the characters enter the main tomb, a room housing three sarcophaguses and an empty space where clearly a fourth sarcophagus stood not long ago. The floor is scored and marked where the tomb was moved, and the marks lead out the door the characters entered through and end at the hallway. The name Nergal

is etched above the space where the sarcophagus once stood. Again, the Black Hand vampires look distressed and attempt to usher the characters out immediately upon seeing that one of the Aralu tombs is missing.

The characters have a few minutes to quickly investigate the tomb, but either the Black Hand vampires will press the issue and interrupt the investigation, or the appearance of Izaha will halt the character's progress.

Investigation reveals the following information:

- The sarcophagus was moved recently, more than likely the source of the racket the characters heard earlier.
- The other three sarcophaguses look as though they are growing up out of the floor. No seam can be seen between the floor and the bottom of the sarcophagus.
- The empty slot for the missing sarcophagus looks like a fresh wound, the stone beneath it a deep red color with cracks and fissures running through the stone all around the impression in the floor.
- The floor of the tomb is completely clean. Either it is always free of dirt and dust or someone cleaned it recently.
- A successful Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 8) reveals a single handprint in the dust on the nearest sarcophagus to the missing slot. This print looks feminine, though nothing more can be discerned from it.

As the characters are looking around the tomb, a single man enters the room. He is clearly a ghoul who looks weathered with age, but not ancient. He seems confused and uncertain of where he is or how he got there. He looks around the tomb in wonder and stares at the characters open-mouthed. The characters can get him to speak after a few prompts, and he introduces himself as Izaha, the caretaker for the Aralu. He tells them that he felt the crash and a lot of pain, and then blacked out. The last thing he remembers is waking up near the entrance to the tomb chamber.

The characters get little more from the ghoul before a large group of vampires enter the room. The leader announces himself as Pietro, Seraph of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and demands that the characters surrender and follow him. Pietro has a large contingent of imposing Black Hand vampires with him, and resisting his commands should seem like a very bad idea to the characters.

Pietro leads them to a set of heavy, ornately-carved double doors. Once outside the catacombs, Pietro turns on the characters and demands to know what they were doing in the catacombs and how they got there. If the original six Black Hand vampires are around, they offer no help, fading into the crowd behind Pietro and refusing to speak on the characters' behalf. Pietro is not inclined towards violence, as he believes Enoch should remain a neutral and safe place for the Tal'Mahe'Ra. He does warn the characters that they are in unfamiliar territory and should step lightly, however.

Pietro informs the characters that they are summoned by Anadja, the Del'Roh, and he is to escort them there immediately. He makes it very clear that she doesn't like to be kept waiting, and that they continue to exist at her mercy.

### **Scene 3: Meeting the Del'Roh**

The Del'Roh's estate is the Dread Palace Ghemal. Pietro leads the characters through a barren courtyard with crumbling stone walls and ancient fortifications. He takes them up two flights of narrow, dangerous stairs to a large audience chamber. Anadja is seated in the only chair in the room, with a tall thin man standing just behind her and to one side. She nods to Pietro as they enter, then waves him out of the room, leaving the characters there with her and what appears to be a living cadaver.

Anadja is suspicious of the characters, but not for the reasons she tells them. She assumes they are unwitting pawns in someone else's larger game and wants to know who and what purpose they serve. Unfortunately, since the characters themselves don't seem to know, it will take more than a set of pointed questions to get to the bottom of that mystery. Despite this, she sees them as intruders into her domain and wants to set them right. How she presents herself and reacts to the characters depends on how they treat her. If they are respectful and attempt to answer her questions as honestly as possible, then she remains cordial. If they are disrespectful or evade her questions, she loses her temper.

The Del'Roh's first concern is who the characters are and where they came from. She interrogates them as to their purpose in Enoch, and is not satisfied with simple answers. Even the explanation of the plane crash does not satisfy her, and her questions seem leading and accusatory. "What were you doing in the catacombs?" "How did you open the doors to the catacombs?" "Where did you get that artifact?" "Who sent you?" "Why are you in Enoch?" Honest answers to these questions might satisfy the Del'Roh, but the

characters should feel put on the spot. She demands they give her the artifact. If the characters refuse, it is the first time Anadja gets angry and threatens violence against them. She will take it by force if necessary, but hopes the characters will see reason. To her, the stone is an artifact of Enoch, and rightfully belongs in the hands of the Tal'Mahe'Ra.

After the first round of interrogations, the Del'Roh calms suddenly and asks the characters in a cold and calculating voice, "What did you do with the Aralu?" This question is rhetorical and doesn't have a correct answer. The Del'Roh knows the characters have nothing to do with the tomb's disappearance, but she sees an opportunity to use the characters. She lets the characters flounder in denial before she gives them an ultimatum: either accept responsibility for the disappearance of the Aralu tomb, or prove they had nothing to do with it by recovering the sarcophagus. They have a week to make their decision, meaning they have a week to find the sarcophagus or be executed. From there, they are turned out into Enoch to do as they wish. Depending on the characters' actions, see "Antoinette's Contact," "Encountering the Idran," or "Bahari Ambush."

### **Scene 4: Antoinette's Contact**

As the characters explore Enoch, they find it is almost as confusing and labyrinthine as the catacombs below the city. Being in the Underworld, the city does not follow normal physical rules. Walls or edges do not bind the city; instead, buildings just seem to extend into a distant grey landscape. The characters could walk for hours in one direction, only to find themselves back in the same spot they started in.

During these explorations, the characters see other vampires within the city going about nightly business that seems both natural and strange. The most striking thing the characters notice is the lack of a mortal presence in the city. Other than that, it is sometimes easy to forget that Enoch is in the Underworld.

After Henri Leclair approaches the characters after they wander the city for at least an hour. Henri is Antoinette's man, and he has a message from Antoinette for the characters. He leads them to a rundown sector of Enoch with decaying modern architecture and crumbling walls. Here he crafts a door seemingly out of nothing and leads them into a small room at the bottom of a half-crumbled sky-rise. Henri explains to the characters that this area of town has been abandoned for the moment, and they should have relative privacy and safety while there.



Henri has the following information, which he either volunteers freely or provides as answers to the characters' questions.

- Antoinette is concerned about the character's safety. She has no idea how the characters ended up in Enoch, and knows that the Tal'Mahe'Ra is prone to killing those who find out their secrets.
- Antoinette is a member of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Henri will not divulge much more than that to the characters, but he assures them that she has enough influence to give them assistance as needed while in Enoch.
- Henri is tasked with helping the characters with whatever they need. He is at their disposal, and has basic information on the different factions of the Tal'Mahe'Ra within Enoch.
- The Del'Roh is familiar with Antoinette, but if the characters haven't already divulged that they are working for her, they should try to keep it a secret. If they have revealed their connection to Antoinette to the Del'Roh, it isn't the end of the world, but it may not help Anadja's disposition towards them.
- Henri asks the characters where Antoinette's artifact is. When he learns that Anadja has it, he is nonplussed, but tells the characters that the most important thing for them to do now is to clear their names. They can worry about retrieving the artifact later.
- As long as the characters remain in the Slums of Enoch, they won't need to sleep. Blood is scarce in the city, but as long as they are careful, feeding shouldn't be an issue. If they do need to feed, Henri should be able to find something, though it may cause an imposition on someone.
- Henri thinks the characters will find information in and around the catacombs, and should go there first to gather information and try to find out who might have taken the tomb.

After Henri reveals what he knows, he tells the characters that they should head out immediately to start taking care of business. He suggests they start at the catacombs. See either "Encountering the Idran" or "Bahari Ambush."

As mentioned, Henri has basic information on all the different factions within Enoch. He will give the characters a simple rundown on each, or give a more detailed account if asked. It may be necessary to refer to this section multiple times throughout the chronicle, if the characters come back to Henri to ask questions. The following is a

breakdown of what Henri knows about each faction. The first paragraph is the quick explanation he may give for each, with a more detailed narrative following.

### **The Idran**

The Idran consider themselves the guardians of Enoch. Within their ranks are three liches who advise Anadja and many Nagaraja. They consider themselves as a type of policing agent within the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and are more than likely very interested in finding out who moved the Aralu tomb.

The liches are powerful undead sorcerers and are not to be trifled with. The characters are unlikely to have any dealings with the liches, which is for the best. The Nagaraja are more likely to interact with the characters, as they have a vested interest in maintaining their reputation as defenders of Enoch. If the Nagaraja come to bother the characters, it is better to work with them rather than against them. Most of the Nagaraja in Enoch take their duty to destroy enemies of the Sect very seriously, and if they see the characters as a threat, the Nagaraja will more than likely kill them rather than let them continue in their work. The best way to deal with the Nagaraja is to get on their good side, or to get one of the leaders of the Tal'Mahe'Ra to order them off from the characters.

### **The Order of Moloch**

The Order of Moloch is mostly interested in rooting out infernalism and destroying it where they find it. They have little interest in the state of the Aralu as long as it does not smack of infernalism.

The likelihood that the Order of Moloch will seek out the characters is very small. If the characters encounter the Order of Moloch, they should establish their non-infernalist intentions as quickly as possible. The Order should be willing to work with the characters to restore the Aralu, if only to satiate their concerns of infernal workings and prevent their own implication in the theft.

### **The Bahari**

The Bahari are followers of Lilith and those on the Path of Lilith. They revere the Dark Mother, and are deeply disturbed by the invasion into the Aralu tombs. They believe that the Aralu are the children of Lilith, and feel very strongly about their sanctity.

The Bahari may seek out the characters if they believe the rumors that the characters are responsible for the missing Aralu tomb. If they can convince the Bahari that they are not involved, the Bahari should be interested in helping the characters. While not unreasonable, Henri thinks that it will be difficult to avoid a fight with the

Bahari before the characters can talk and convince them they are on the same side.

**Extra information:** Henri knows that Antoinette is a member of the Bahari, but he does not know about her plot to steal the Aralu's tomb. He has no idea how the Bahari will truly react to the characters.

## Scene 5: Encountering the Idran

The Idran are also on the trail of who took the Aralu's tomb. They are less sure of the character's innocence than Anadja and make it clear that they do not – and will not – trust the characters while in Enoch. This scene can happen any time after the characters leave their interview with the Del'Roh, and they do not need to meet Henri Leclair first.

The Idran seek the characters out shortly after their meeting with the Del'Roh. The Idran pass information quickly amongst themselves, and they have learned that Anadja has tasked the characters with discovering who took the Aralu's tomb. While they do not question her wisdom in the matter, they do not trust the characters at all. If anything, the investigation should be the responsibility of

the Idran, and on top of that, the characters are interlopers who are learning important Sect secrets.

The first meeting with the Idran is extremely antagonistic. They corner the characters in the Slums, either as they leave Safe Haven or the Dread Palace Ghemal. As the characters move through the streets, it seems as though the buildings are moving around them, closing in on them and cutting off escape routes. The Nagaraja in the Idran are reshaping the soulstuff of the nearby buildings, boxing the characters in. When they have completed the process, they show themselves to the characters. The Idran do not immediately attack the characters, but do posture as though they might. The characters can attempt to talk to the Idran, but if they cannot convince the Idran that they are not the ones responsible for taking the Aralu's tomb, the Idran will attack them to make a point.

### Diplomatic Negotiations

If the characters did not attack and kill the Black Hand vampires who entered their plane in the scene "The Crash," they recognize one of the vampires among the Idran they encounter. He isn't necessarily sympathetic to the characters, but he can attempt to speak with him and convince him that they aren't involved in the Aralu's disappearance. Players may roll Charisma + Expression



(difficulty 7) to talk the Idran down without a fight. If they killed all the Black Hand members on the plane, the characters can still attempt to talk diplomatically with the Idran, but the difficulty of the roll is increased to 8.

If successful, the characters meet Larux, a Nagaraja and the leader of the Idran in Enoch. Larux openly admits her suspicion of the characters, but allows that they may just be the ignorant pawns of some greater force. She is receptive to the fact that the characters must find the Aralu's tomb if they want to survive the week, and even if they did take it, revealing the tomb is within their best interest.

Talking with the Idran leads them to offer the characters assistance in their efforts. Though they are wary of the characters, they would rather be involved in the investigations at every level. Larux explains to the characters how to find their stronghold, and tells them they can come to her any time for assistance. See either "Antoinette's Contact" or "Bahari Ambush."

## **Fighting the Idran**

If discussions break down, the Idran attack, though they are smart enough to not try to kill the characters. They recognize they may never find the stolen Aralu tomb without the characters. Larux has two other Idran with her: Derrick, another Nagaraja, and Rosette, a Nosferatu. While the three of them are not particularly powerful vampires, they are skilled at fighting together, and none of them are willing to die in this fight. If the characters seem to be overwhelming the three, they will attempt to escape the fight intact, if they can. The Idran will attempt to beat the characters into near torpor and leave them in the middle of the street. Either way, when the Idran leave, they tell the characters that they will be watching.

If the characters have not yet met Henri, then he comes to them as the Idran are leaving the scene. Regardless of the outcome of the fight, see "Antoinette's Contact." If they have already met Henri and been shown Safe Haven, they may want to go back and request food and rest, depending on how the characters handled the Idran. Henri will supply them with a mortal or two gathered from the crashed plane, but blood is scarce and he will encourage them to drink sparingly. Afterward, Henri encourages them to begin their search of the catacombs as soon as possible. See "Bahari Ambush."

## **Scene 6: Bahari Ambush**

The Bahari are in a tight place. The catacombs were not supposed to open when they did, and they acted in haste

to steal the Aralu tomb while they had the opportunity. Now that they have the sarcophagus, they need to move it out of Enoch and into the Shadowlands so that it can be transported to the mortal world and studied. The original plan included transportation and distractions for the Tal'Mahe'Ra while the sarcophagus was being moved. With the timing issue, arrangements have not been made, and the Del'Roh and the Idran are very aware of the missing sarcophagus.

Irina, the de facto leader of the Bahari conspiracy in Enoch while Antoinette is away, has heard about the characters, their interview with the Del'Roh, and the fact that they showed up with the artifact that opened the catacombs. Irina assumes the characters are transporting the stone for Antoinette, and rightly so. Her hope is that the characters have instructions from Antoinette on what to do from here, and is seeking the characters for assistance. Irina's plan is to abduct the characters in secret and bring them to one of their many hideouts in the Slums so they can talk in private. The Bahari have worked in secrecy for years, and have learned to be suspicious of everyone. They assume the Idran are following the characters, and will not talk with them openly in the streets of Enoch.

The Bahari find the characters as they make their way to the catacombs to investigate the missing sarcophagus. Ten vampires, each dressed in black from head to toe with faces covered and weapons sheathed, drop out of building around the characters. They immediately grab at the characters and subdue them, attempting to put black cloth bags over their heads. More than likely, the characters will try to fight off their attackers instead of being kidnapped in the streets, especially after the incident with the Idran earlier. If the characters strike out at the Bahari, they whisper urgently, "Come with us quickly. We work for Antoinette and need to talk to you."

The characters may take this how they like, but the Bahari expect the characters to comply with the abduction. They assume the characters know more than they do, and feel no need to explain the need for the bags and the secrecy. If the characters continue to resist, they may give short comments, such as "The Idran may have you tagged," and "Not here. We can't talk here." The characters may very well decide the Bahari are trying to trick them and attempt to kill them all. This should be discouraged as it leaves the rest of the chronicle rather lacking and it impossible for the characters to find the Aralu tomb without the Bahari's aid. However, if you need an alternative path, you could offer a note with one of the bodies, detailing a method for escape. It should be in a difficult cypher to interpret.

## The Bahari's Proposal

Once the Bahari and the characters have made it to the hideout, Irina introduces herself and asks the characters if they have a plan or if Antoinette has sent instructions. These questions should be somewhat confusing to the characters, as their only contact with Antoinette since they arrived in Enoch has been through Henri, and he hasn't given them any instructions other than to find the Aralu. They may even explain this to Irina.

The news that Antoinette did not intend for the characters to be in Enoch, or for the catacombs to open, distresses Irina. She is filled with both panic and fear that all the hard work the Bahari have put into their plans has been wasted in a moment of poor timing. She presses the characters, asking for Antoinette's specific instructions to them about the artifact. She also asks to see the artifact, and is extremely disturbed to find out that Anadja has it in her possession.

At this point, Irina lays out her dilemma to the characters. She tells them that she has the sarcophagus, but she has no way of getting it out of Enoch safely. She doesn't tell them where it is, only that it cannot currently be found, but also can't stay where it is. With no way to get in touch with Antoinette, they must act on their own to secure the evacuation of the sarcophagus. If the characters want to fulfill their obligations to Antoinette and survive the Del'Roh, they must help her to smuggle the Aralu tomb out of Enoch. She is insistent, and threatens to kill them or worse if they refuse to help.

## Making Decisions

The characters have a couple of options in front of them, and no matter what they tell Irina now, they can always betray her later. Irina won't let them leave the hideout without assurances that they will help in any way they can.

If the characters have not yet met Henri Leclair, see "Antoinette's Contact" as they leave the hideout. Otherwise, the characters may wish to return to Safe Haven to explore their options. They know without a shadow of a doubt that the Bahari have the Aralu tomb, and that Antoinette is involved with taking it. From here, they can either help Irina, and by proxy Antoinette, to smuggle the Aralu tomb out of Enoch, or they can turn the Bahari in to Anadja.

The characters' decision at this point shapes the rest of this chronicle. Some scenes are only available to the characters depending on which path they chose, and some have different outcomes depending on what the characters are doing. These scenes have a sub-header indicating options if the characters are working for the Bahari or the Del'Roh. The characters may decide at one point or another during the chronicle to change allegiances. Just keep in mind the

## Telling the Del'Roh

The characters may decide that their job has been done for them, and the Bahari have confessed their guilt to the characters. They may want to go directly to Anadja, turn in the Bahari, prove their innocence, and get a first class ticket back to the mortal world. They are free to go to the Del'Roh and give her their information, but she is unimpressed by the character's deductions.

Anadja already suspects the Bahari are behind the Aralu's disappearance, but that doesn't tell her where the tomb is hidden or where it is going. Irina was too smart to give that information to the characters. While she appreciates the new knowledge that Antoinette is involved in the conspiracy, she simply tells the characters that she cannot take their word on the confession alone. If they can't produce the Aralu tomb, then they must be guilty or at least complicit, and her original verdict still applies. In short, the characters must go along with the Bahari at least long enough to figure out where the sarcophagus is. If they insist on keeping the Del'Roh updated, she tells them to go through Pietro instead.

flow of what they have already done to help one side or the other when that switch is made. No matter what the characters decide to do, see "Bahari Instructions."

## Scene 7: Bahari Instructions


Shortly after the characters leave the Bahari hideout and discuss what they want to do next, Irina sends an envoy to Safe Haven to give them a list of instructions that the characters need to complete in order to prepare for removing the sarcophagus from Enoch.

Irina's plan is to smuggle the sarcophagus to a nearby Byway, a flowing river of stability leading from Enoch and to the River of Death that flows through the Shadowlands. Once the sarcophagus is secured on the boat and out of the city, the Bahari will handle the transportation of



## Byways

Byways are routes of safe passage through the Tempest of the Underworld. For most characters, Byways are the only way to make extended trips through the Underworld. Some wraiths possess the ability to travel and help others travel through the Tempest, but without a wraith companion, Byways are the only viable option.



the sarcophagus through the Shadowlands and to the mortal world. The characters must help Irina by getting all the pieces of the plan in order while she prepares the sarcophagus to move once again.

Irina requests the characters to do the following tasks in the next two days. She plans to move the sarcophagus on the third day. Once the tasks are complete, the characters must meet Irina and the sarcophagus at a specified time and place within the Slums of Enoch so they can protect the Aralu on its way out of the city.

- The characters must work with the few members of the Idran and the Order of Moloch loyal to the Bahari conspiracy to seed false information about the sarcophagus between the two groups. See “Contacting Allies.”
- The characters must escort and assist one of the Nagaraja to the Byway to craft a boat large and strong enough to carry the sarcophagus all the way to the Shadowlands. See “Contacting Allies – The Idran.”
- The characters must request aid from the Order of Moloch to prepare a diversion to distract both the Idran and the Del’Roh while the sarcophagus is being moved. See “Contacting Allies – Order of Moloch.”
- The characters must retrieve Antoinette’s artifact before the sarcophagus gets moved to transport with the sarcophagus out of Enoch. See “Palace Heist.”
- During the movement of the sarcophagus, the characters’ must ensure that all the vampires transporting the Aralu get to the Byway safely and assist with transporting the tomb in case something goes wrong. See “Race to the Byway.”

The characters can do these tasks in any order, except the “Race to the Byway,” which needs to be the last thing they do. If the characters have chosen to betray the Bahari, see “Working with Pietro” first. Refer back to this scene to help the characters determine where to go and what to do next as they play through the rest of the chronicle.

## Scene 8: Working with Pietro

The characters should only go through this scene if they have decided to betray the Bahari. When the characters make their way to Pietro, they find he is unsurprised to hear that they suspect the Bahari. He and the Del’Roh have known about their plots for quite some time, but they did not know who was in charge of the conspiracy and could do little to prevent the situation. His biggest concern is returning the Aralu safely to the catacombs. He is willing to help the characters in any way he can, but he worries that if he gets too involved with them, the Bahari will recognize the characters have betrayed them. Right now, the characters are in a unique position to infiltrate the Bahari’s ranks and feed Pietro information about their plans and even their members.

Pietro first wants the characters to seek out Larux at the Idran stronghold and convince her to help them. From there, he suggests the characters continue to follow the Bahari’s instructions as though nothing is amiss. While doing this, he wants the characters to gather as much information about the conspiracy as possible, including the names of the contacts in each group, the names of the Bahari who are not part of the conspiracy, and any incriminating information they can find out through casual conversation. He stresses that they should not raise the Bahari’s suspicions during their investigations, or the counterintelligence plan will fail.

Pietro tells the characters that when the time comes to move the sarcophagus, he and others loyal to the Del’Roh will stop the Bahari in the streets and apprehend them. He believes they will resist and the characters should be ready for a fight. He sends them on their way with instructions to come back and let him know of any new plans or changes happen.

The characters will more than likely contact Pietro several times throughout the chronicle. He does what he can to help them without being too overt. See “Contacting Allies – The Idran.”

## Scene 9: Contacting Allies

Irina's plan requires multiple aspects to function simultaneously, meaning she must enlist the help of the entire conspiracy to accomplish his goals. Irina has given the characters the names of two contacts, one within the Order of Moloch and one within the Idran. The characters are instructed to enlist their help in setting up the transportation. The following scene contains a few tasks and meetings, which the characters may engage in any order. If the characters are actually working against the Bahari to betray them, they have little to no need to contact the Order of Moloch, since keeping them out of the situation prevents the Bahari from having too many allies when the time comes to take the sarcophagus.

### The Idran

The characters are told to seek out Zeke, a Nagaraja loyal to the Bahari conspiracy. Zeke has two functions: secure a boat and have it ready and waiting to take the Aralu to the Shadowlands, and to help seed misinformation among the Idran about who might have taken the Aralu's tomb.

Zeke wants to lay the blame for the missing tomb at the feet of the Order of Moloch. Most of them vehemently believe that the Baali founders are sleeping within the catacombs, and since they are already the object of Black Hand suspicion, it shouldn't be too hard to convince anyone that they are making a power play. The only thing he needs is something linking the Order with the catacombs. Members of the Order in Enoch are often found wearing their order symbol, a crescent moon with a curved dagger filling in the open edge of the moon, sunburst radiating away from the dagger. Zeke wants the characters to steal one of these symbols, preferably a pendant or something attached to a chain, that he can break and plant in the tomb for the Idran to find later.

Zeke's other task is for the characters to escort him to the location just at the edge of the Byway so that he can craft a boat for the sarcophagus and hide it in preparation for the upcoming move. With power loaned to him from his Itarajana Blood Familiar, he plans to summon forth a weak ghost, and then shape it into the form of the boat. He tells the characters to come back to him whenever they are ready to help him. See "The Getaway Car."

#### If the characters are working for the Del'Roh:

The characters can find Larux in her office in the Idran stronghold. When the characters explain to Larux what they found out from the Bahari, she is incredulous at first. If

the characters talked with Larux during their first meeting with the Idran, she is much more likely to believe them. She wants to go to the catacombs to get a look at the tombs to see if she can find any hard evidence. Explaining that Pietro is working with them also goes a long way to win her trust.


Larux takes the characters to the catacombs and down into the chamber where they first saw the Aralu sarcophaguses and the wound in the floor where the fourth is missing. If the characters successfully investigated the area during the "Entering Enoch" scene, they can point out the handprint to Larux. If not, the players can roll Perception + Investigation (difficulty 6) to find it this time around. Now that they have more time, they can do all the investigation they want on the print, including using The Spirit's Touch to determine what happened. The handprint belongs to a petite woman with long black hair. The characters may remember seeing her with Irina when they spoke with him in the Bahari hideout, but Larux definitely recognizes her as a member of the Cult of Lilith. This is enough to convince Larux without a doubt that the Bahari are involved.

Larux repeats Pietro's sentiment that until they find out where the Bahari are hiding the sarcophagus, there is little she can do for them. She tells them she will make sure her people are ready and prepared to apprehend the Bahari and return the Aralu to its tomb. She instructs them to go meet with the Idran contact and follow his instructions. She is going to go to Pietro to collaborate their efforts. If the characters need anything, they can find her with Pietro.

### The Order of Moloch


The characters are told to seek out Isobel, a Toreador of Antoinette's lineage who has learned Daimoinon as a way to better understand and combat infernalism. Isobel wants the characters to seed ideas that a group of Nosferatu wishing to unleash their Antediluvian into the world took the Aralu. Her plan is to select key areas all over Enoch to suffer from destructive mishaps resembling the aftermath of an Antediluvian waking up. This diversion will allow the Bahari to move the sarcophagus through Enoch and on to safety. She has little need of help from the characters in preparing this. Instead, she asks the characters to take on some of her duties around Enoch while she prepares.

While at the Order of Moloch stronghold, the characters have a chance to steal one of their symbols. The players should roll Dexterity + Stealth (difficulty 7) to escape notice. Implicating the Order of Moloch is completely optional, so if the characters miss this chance, it will not change Zeke's reaction to the characters. Once the characters are done with helping Isobel, they are free to complete other tasks. If this is their last task, see "Race to the Byway."



## Isobel's Duties

Every member of the Black Hand who lives in Enoch must work to maintain proper function of the organization. Isobel's kamut must perform regular duties around the stronghold and the rest of the city. As a way to take a break from the main plot, consider having Isobel request the characters to take on one of her duties in the days leading up to the big move. If any of the characters have specific interests, this is a place to embroil them; have Isobel request those services so the characters can eagerly volunteer and you can engage in targeted play.



## Scene 10: The Getaway Car

When the characters are ready, they can go find Zeke in the Idran stronghold to help with the boat building at the Byway. Zeke says it's best if they do not leave the stronghold together, since he isn't supposed to be watching the characters at the moment. He cautions the characters to be certain they are not followed out of the stronghold, as any member of the Idran following them to the Byway is sure to raise questions. Zeke gives the characters directions through low-traffic areas of Enoch to the location of the Byway, and then leaves down a street not connected to any of the main passages.

Characters should attempt to remain hidden as they leave the stronghold, following Zeke's example by entering the less traveled roads of the city. Players should use some kind of way to hide themselves, preferably with Obfuscate or a simple Dexterity + Stealth roll. Complete failure to obscure their movements results in one of the Idran following the characters. If this happens, have the Idran confront the characters as soon as they arrive at the Byway. She assumes they are trying to skip town and tries to stop them. The characters can likely subdue this lone agent easily.

Once at the Byway, Zeke tells the characters that all he has to do is summon a ghost or two and then shape their souls into the boat. While this sounds easy, the sorcery he is performing is time-consuming and mentally taxing. Summoning

the ghosts takes almost no time at all, but then they need to wait for the ghosts to arrive. Two ghosts arrive within fifteen minutes of being summoned. Almost immediately, at least one of the players' characters recognizes the ghosts: They're from their past. Victims. Loved ones. People left behind. These are the trails left in the vampire's dark and twisted wake. After that, the ritual and ability to shape the ghosts takes Zeke over an hour each. Of course, the ghosts have zero intention to let themselves be forged into a solid object and attempt to flee. Zeke tells the characters that they need to hold the ghosts long enough for him to complete the ritual, which leads to the ghosts fighting for their lives.

Normally, vampires have little recourse in dealing with ghosts unless they have the Necromancy Discipline. In the Underworld, ghosts are as real as they will ever be, so physical actions and attacks can directly affect them. This also means that the ghosts can harm the vampires just as easily. The ghosts Zeke summons are not the strongest around, though they are not as weak as he assumed they would be. The characters must subdue the ghosts, but keep them alive long enough for Zeke to perform his ritual magic to craft the boat. Once this is complete, the characters are free to complete their other tasks. If this is their last task, see "Race to the Byway."



## Ghosts

For ease of understanding, ghosts use powers equivalent to vampire Disciplines as described on p. 384 of *V20*. Ghosts feed on emotions, and use a Passion Pool to fuel their powers much like Kindred blood. Use the following traits as a guideline for ghosts in this chronicle.

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

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Empathy 1, Intimidation 3, Melee 3, Occult 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

**Equivalent Disciplines:** Celerity 2, Chimerstry 4, Dementation 4, Obfuscate 2, Obtenebration 3, Presence 2, Protean 2, Quietus 2

**Humanity:** 2, **Willpower:** 7, **Passion Pool:** 9





## Scene 11: Palace Heist

The characters must sneak into the Dread Palace Ghemal and steal the stone Anadja took from them during their first meeting. Even though the Bahari already have the Aralu's sarcophagus and have no need to open the catacombs again, they believe that the stone is vital in studying the tomb and eventually opening it. Irina tells the characters that the stone must be retrieved before the sarcophagus is moved, because she needs the characters to help defend the sarcophagus and they can't be running around the palace during that time.

Irina tells the characters that Anadja keeps all Black Hand treasures in the dungeons of the Dread Palace Ghemal. The dungeons are part of the original city and were once used as prisons for mortals and vampires. Though the stones of the building are ancient and crumbling, the fastening on the doors and the locks in and around the dungeon are tempered to withstand vampiric might. It won't be as easy as busting down doors and breaking open locks to get to the stone. Not to mention that he thinks the liches might have placed some kind of magic on the place to keep intruders out.

Getting to the palace is easy. The first two floors of the fortress are open to anyone in Enoch to gather and meet. The characters' presence in the palace should not raise any suspicions, as the Del'Roh has given them a task. Of course, getting into the dungeons of the ancient building is more difficult, since guards are posted at all entrances leading to the underground passageways.

The characters have two options for slipping into the dungeons. They can come in through the front door, attack the guards, and try to make their way through whatever wards or locks stand in their way. The other way requires the characters to talk to Henri about their plans. He tells them that the dungeons of the palace are connected to the catacombs and they should be able to make their way through the catacombs, past the labyrinth, and into the dungeon. Of course, this path is also difficult, but Henri believes he can guide them through the labyrinth, as he has learned quite a bit about the catacombs from spending time with Izaha. His only stipulation is that they must make haste through the catacombs. Izaha is his friend, and on top of that, there is no lying to the ancient ghoul. He doesn't want the man finding out what their plan is.

Coming in through the front requires more effort on the front end of the scene but makes the escape plan much



easier, as the characters will exit the way they entered. Going in through the labyrinth is a little easier at the beginning of the scene, but the spells on the dungeon make going out the way they came in impossible. The characters will have to fight their way out of the dungeons through the palace. Of course, no matter which way they enter, dealing with the dungeon and its traps remains the same.

Before the characters can pass through the entrance to the catacombs, they will need to deal with the three Black Hand vampires on guard duty. Once inside, Henri leads the characters around and through the passages. This takes some time, and from what the characters remember of the first time they came through here, the catacombs have changed shape and the maze of tunnels and hallways looks very different. He seems to know his way pretty well though, and brings them to a single door carved of what looks like red sandstone set into one of the walls. He has to pull and tug on the door before it gives, scraping along the ground as it slowly opens. He tells the characters to go inside and says he will wait by the door for them.

Coming in through the Palace leads the characters down a long set of stairs to the dungeon entrance. Two guards are stationed at the end of the hallway. The characters must subdue the guards; they cannot be talked out of leaving their post and are guarded against persuasion. The door to the dungeon is locked, but one of the guards has the key on him. Unfortunately, the door also contains a magical trap that wreaths the door in flames if the proper code phrase is not spoken while being unlocked. (See the Fire Trap below for mechanical effects.) The magical fire dies away after three turns, though those who ran in fear may not believe it is safe enough to return. Those who remain can enter the dungeons.

The dungeon proper consists of a single long hallway with doors partitioning cells along its length. Each door is closed and locked, with only a small slit within the door showing what's inside. Most of the cells seem empty, or filled with arms and armor from ages past. One cell is filled with modern weapons of war, including assault rifles and bulletproof vests. Two different cells contain ancient and rare-looking artifacts, and it is within one of those cells that the stones are kept. Players can roll Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 6) to determine exactly which stone was the one Antoinette had previously, or they could just take one of them at random.

Each door to a cell with something inside is trapped in some way by magic. Characters with Auspex can see the magical auras outlining the door, but cannot tell what the trap will do. If the characters have any Path of Thaumaturgy, they can spend a blood point to determine

the basic nature of the trap. The cell doors are locked, but can be opened with a key from one of the guards. If the characters don't have the key, the player can roll Dexterity + Larceny (difficulty 6) to open the doors. Once any of the cell doors have been opened, the door leading from the dungeon into the catacombs seals shut and disappears. This is a failsafe preventing anyone stealing from the dungeons from escaping back into the crypt, which may very well trap the characters inside the dungeon.

### Door Traps

- **Fire Trap:** The door is wreathed in blue flame. The player must roll Dexterity + Awareness (difficulty 7) or take two health levels of aggravated damage when her character opens the door. All vampires in the room must check for frenzy.
- **Staking Trap:** Several shards of wood erupt from the door. The Storyteller rolls to stake the character opening the door using Strength 5 + Firearms 3 (difficulty 9).
- **Pit Trap:** The floor just in front of the door turns incorporeal. The player must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7) to not fall through the floor and land in a ten-foot-deep pit.
- **Illusory Door:** Though the door is open, an illusion is created to make it look as though it is still closed. Characters with Auspex have a chance of dispelling the illusion. Players must roll Perception + Awareness (difficulty 7) and net three successes. (Note: If none of your player's characters have Auspex, this trap should only be used on non-essential item doors.)

Once the characters have the stone, they must escape through the dungeon entrance into the palace. If that is the way they came in, then it is clear for them to escape through that entrance. Otherwise, the characters must overcome the fire trap and deal with the two door guards before they can escape. Once they escape the palace, the characters are free to complete their other tasks. If this is their last task, see "Race to the Byway."

### If the characters are working for the Del'Roh:

The characters can go to Pietro and explain that the Bahari are trying to retrieve the stone Anadja took from them earlier. Pietro is certain Anadja is unwilling to give the stone to the characters, and that they are more than likely out of luck in this situation. He does mention that Izaha, the ghoul the characters met when they came through the catacombs, might be able to help them.

The characters have two options. They can steal the artifact as originally planned by the Bahari, with the hope that they can retrieve it and return it to Anadja after the fighting goes down. If the characters choose this option, run them through the rest of “Palace Heist” as described below.

The other option is to go to Izaha and see if he is capable of helping them in some way. If the characters go to Izaha, he is agitated and distant. The loss of the Aralu tomb is taking a toll on his psyche, and he isn’t nearly as genial as he was during their first meeting. At first, Izaha has no idea what artifact the characters are talking about; the stones were discovered so long ago that he has forgotten them completely. If they mention it came from the catacombs or the labyrinth, it will jar his memory. He remembers how the labyrinth was hurt when the stones were taken, but it was nothing like how it cries now that the sarcophagus is gone. This is much worse.

Izaha explains that the very nature of the stones — being a living part of the labyrinth — is what makes them magical, not anything the liches did. The liches merely preserved the stones so that they didn’t die and decay after being removed from the catacombs. He says that he’s seen pieces break off and sift their way, dead and lifeless, into the front of the catacombs, no more magical than any other rock. Each of these stones is nearly indistinguishable from one another unless the observer is well versed in the catacombs. Irina shouldn’t be able to tell the difference. If the characters broke away a living piece of the labyrinth, it would have all the same properties as the stones locked up in the Dread Palace Ghemal, but not for long without the liches’ enchantments. Of course, they don’t need to trick the Bahari for long.


Izaha leads the characters through the catacombs and to an area very close to the labyrinth. Though his instructions are simple — break off a piece of stone and carry it out — the undertaking of such is not nearly so simple. The catacomb is most alive in this area, and it does not take kindly to attacks. The catacomb defends itself by summoning ghosts from the nearby labyrinth and by attacking the characters directly. As with before, the ghosts are the tortured souls of those the players’ characters know. Usually, this means victims of the vampires’ years past. The characters must deal with the ghosts while they break away the stone piece, and the ghosts harry the characters as they try to leave. Izaha does not help the characters in this fight, as he seems to be feeling the pain of the catacombs as the characters attack it. Once they have the stone, the characters can leave the catacombs and are free to complete other tasks. If this is the last thing they needed to do, see “Race to the Byway.”



## The Catacombs

The catacombs are a living thing. In most cases, it just lives and grows, but it is capable of rudimentary defenses. Characters can attack the catacombs with whatever means they wish (claws, swords, guns) but it takes all damage the same. It has a soak pool of 4 and the characters must deal 10 health levels of damage to it to break a piece of stone away.

Also, as the characters are attacking the stonework, the catacomb can retaliate. Stones jut out of the wall to strike nearby characters, pieces of flooring move suddenly causing characters to lose footing, and moss reaches out and wraps around character’s arms to prevent them from attacking. The catacombs have an attack dice pool of 6 and a damage dice pool of 4, and only deal bashing damage. The catacombs primarily employ Disarm or Hold combat maneuvers against the characters, hoping the ghosts will drive them away.



## Scene 12: Race to the Byway

Irina gave the characters a time and a place to meet her in the Slums of Enoch. The Bahari have been working in a state of mistrust and careful paranoia for centuries, and that kind of thing doesn’t change overnight. She has no intention of meeting the characters with the sarcophagus. The characters are under careful scrutiny from the Idran, and all their activities to prepare for the move has likely attracted even more attention. Instead, she sends a few of the Bahari to meet them there and escort the characters to the Byway.

The characters are left waiting for several minutes before they start hearing the sounds of explosions all across the city. The Order of Moloch are razing buildings all through the Slums as a diversion, hoping to draw the Idran and others away from the location of the sarcophagus. Shortly after hearing the explosions, three of the Bahari show up to escort them to the Byway. If the characters are working to betray the Bahari, see the subtitle “The Betrayal” on the next page; otherwise continue.



The Bahari usher the characters forward, explaining that they need to move quickly or they might get caught up in the explosions. As they pass through the Slums, the explosions get closer and more frequent. The paths the characters are taking through the Slums are clearly in the line of the diversion. They are meant to be the bait as the real sarcophagus moves in secret elsewhere. Periodically, an explosion occurs very near to the group, dropping debris and shrapnel all over them. The falling debris is pretty ubiquitous, and causes one health level of bashing damage when it hits. Players can roll to soak the damage or roll Dexterity + Athletics to avoid falling rocks. Shortly after the explosion, the characters are attacked by Idran responding to the explosion. The Bahari with the characters assist in the fights, but they urge the characters to move quickly, lest the Byway get discovered by the Del'Roh's agents.

This happens two or three times, depending on the pacing and how the characters are doing with the fights. Each time the Idran attack, they have 3-5 vampires with them. Use the character sheets for one Idran Agent and 2-4 Idran Thugs when constructing these combats.

Once the characters make it to the Byway, Irina is there with the sarcophagus and asks for the characters to hand over the stone. The Bahari are loading the sarcophagus onto the boat Zeke made earlier, but the Del'Roh's agents have zeroed in on their location and are attacking, led by Larux. The characters must fend off the attack while the Bahari load the sarcophagus and move down the Byway and to safety. Larux has six vampires with her—Derrick, Rosette, one Idran Agent, and three Idran Thugs. If the characters are successful in holding off the seven vampires while the Bahari escape, most of the Bahari jump onto the boat and speed off down the Byway. The fight continues afterward, and once Larux and her crew are defeated, the remaining Bahari lead them down the Byway and out of Enoch. If somehow the characters are defeated by the Del'Roh's agents, they are apprehended and brought to the Del'Roh for judgment. No matter what the outcome of the fight, see "Aftermath."

### **The Betrayal**

If the characters told Pietro where they were supposed to meet Irina with the sarcophagus, he shows up with Larux and several others before

the three Bahari do. When they hear the explosions, Pietro sends most of his group away to investigate and quell the issues. Pietro and Larux are waiting when the Bahari arrive, and as soon as they see the Seraph waiting, they turn tail to run. At this point, it should be obvious that Irina isn't coming with the sarcophagus. Pietro follows the Bahari to cut them down. Larux tells the characters that the sarcophagus must be on the move elsewhere and the only way to get to it now is to meet them at the Byway.

As the characters move through the city, they are subject to the same issues of falling debris and building explosions as mentioned above, except they are more likely to run into Bahari conspirators rushing towards the Byway. As above, characters periodically run near exploding buildings. But, instead of being bait for the Idran, the characters have the ability to attack and stop the Order of Moloch members before they set off any explosions. Larux will continuously urge the characters to move forward; otherwise they might miss the sarcophagus leaving the city. Each team is comprised of three or four members, and as long as the characters engage them instead of running past or avoiding them, they stop the explosion. Otherwise, the characters are subject to the falling debris as described above. Again, the characters encounter the diversions two or three times, depending on pacing. Pietro rejoins them eventually, but he mostly stays out of their way in combat, not helping unless they look like they absolutely need it. He doesn't want to get involved unless he has to.

The characters have a bit of a time crunch. If they don't get to the Byway in time, they may miss the sarcophagus. It might not matter too much, but if they spend more than 5 minutes in combat (50 turns), the sarcophagus is already gone when they arrive at the Byway.

If the characters make it to the Byway on time, Irina and the other Bahari are there with the sarcophagus, loading it onto the boat. Irina is only a little surprised to see the characters with Larux and the Seraph. She spends a moment to curse them for their betrayal, but immediately sends the Bahari to attack. The characters have to deal with Zeke, Isobel, Irina, and three Bahari Conspirators. Three more Bahari Conspirators are loading the Aralu on the boat, and unless they are also stopped, the sarcophagus gets away despite the character's best intentions.

Regardless of what happens with the sarcophagus, when the characters have successfully defeated the Bahari, Pietro asks the characters to come with him to report to the Del'Roh; see "Aftermath."

## Aftermath

Despite who the characters were working for, they are likely to be badly beaten and hurt immediately after the fight at the Byway. Unfortunately, they have very little time to heal and feed before dealing with the fallout of their actions. If the characters helped the Bahari to steal the sarcophagus and escaped through the Byway, see "The Bahari." If they betrayed the Bahari and turned them in to the Del'Roh, then see "The Del'Roh."

### The Bahari

The characters follow the path of the Byway all the way to the Shadowlands. Irina is there waiting for them. She congratulates them on their help and offers to take them out of the Shadowlands with her. The trek doesn't take too long, as the area they are looking for is near the exit of the Byway they used. As they cross from the Underworld to the mortal world, the characters instantly recognize where they are: only a few minutes' drive from Antoinette's estate in France.

Irina insists that the characters go to see Antoinette and report to her the status of the Aralu and artifact. When the characters arrive back in Antoinette's audience chamber, she is surprised by their presence. Contact between Enoch and the material world is slow, and the last she had heard was that Henri was working with the characters to keep them out of Anadja's hands. She is clearly not happy with Irina and commands her to leave her presence; she will deal with her mistakes later. While the Aralu has been successfully removed from Enoch, the manner in which it happened has left the Bahari in a weakened state among the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Antoinette risks exposure, and she must work in haste to discover the secrets of the sarcophagus she has now.

She is more genial to the characters, welcoming them back and congratulating them on their quick thinking and prompt action. She asks for the artifact, as it has no need to go to New York now that the Aralu is in France. She is nonplussed to find out Irina has it, but says she can handle that later. She doesn't waste any time on asking after the characters and their participation in the movement of the Aralu; instead, she gets to talking about the rewards. She is willing to make good on her original promises to the characters, if that is all they want, but she also has a new offer. She would like to induct each of them into the Tal'Mahe'Ra to work under her. If they accept, she will have them immediately begin induction ceremonies and send them with handlers and a set of instructions. She explains that the normal trip to Enoch during induction

can be waived in light of the characters' recent activity there, as she's sure the Del'Roh is not happy with them.

If they refuse her, she feigns regret in informing them that they will need to have their memories of Enoch erased, and all Black Hand secrets scrubbed from their minds. The process takes a while, but otherwise, she would have to kill them. Of course, when they return to their normal lives, they find she has made good on her promises to them, assuming they remember those promises. Any who have built trust in her maintain at least scraps of memory.

## The Del'Roh

If the characters were able to stop the Bahari from leaving with the Aralu's tomb, Larux and the rest of her group offer to return it to the catacombs. Pietro escorts the characters to the Dread Palace Ghemal. In the Del'Roh's quarters, Anadja waits with the creepy old man who was with her the first time they met. Pietro stays this time and explains to Anadja that he witnessed the Bahari attempting to take the Aralu out of the city. He tells her that the characters were instrumental in leading his agents to the Bahari, and without them, the Aralu would have left the city without being discovered. He also tells her that with the characters' help, he has compiled a list of names of those in Enoch complicit in the conspiracy. He also confirms that Antoinette is the leader of the Bahari conspiracy, and where the Aralu's tomb was being (or is being if the Bahari got away with it) transported.

Anadja gives her attention to the characters, telling them that she knew all along they did not take the Aralu's tomb, but that their help was necessary in rooting out who was really involved. She saw no other way to get them to help without alerting the Bahari to her plan. All that aside, she is impressed with how the characters stepped up to the challenge, when they could have easily helped the Bahari and escaped with the Aralu.

She tells them that she will have Larux escort the characters out of the Underworld and back to their normal lives, but before they go, she offers them a place within the Tal'Mahe'Ra. She says she needs more vampires like the characters, and they already know many of the Black Hand's secrets. If they refuse the offer, she will need to remove the memories of their stay in Enoch, or possibly kill them for the information they have. She states this intent blandly, and it is clearly not a threat, but a promise. Anadja expects them to accept her offer and only acts surprised if they refuse her.

She tells them that Larux will be their handler for the time being, though she expects them to fall under Pietro as their elder, since he seems to have taken a liking to them. Once initiation is finalized, she tasks them with gathering information on Antoinette and her estate in France.

## Characters

These characters can supplement your Black Hand chronicles. They show some of the feel of the Hand. Some of these characters also appear in the sample chronicle.

### Izaha, Caretaker to the Aralu

**Creature:** Unknown, but rumored to be a ghoul to a domitor of anywhere from the Second through Fifth Generations

**Nature:** Chameleon

**Demeanor:** Pedagogue (shifts to Conformist in the presence of the Del'Roh and Wazir)

**Apparent Age:** Indeterminate. His weathered, age-streaked features are those of a man in his 50s.

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 7

**Social:** Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

**Mental:** Perception 8, Intelligence 9, Wits 5

**Talents:** Alertness 6, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Empathy 5, Expression (prayer) 4, Leadership 4, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

**Skills:** Animal Ken 2, Etiquette 2, Herbalism 4, Melee 2, Performance 5, Ride 1, Stealth 3, Survival 4

**Knowledges:** Academics 4, Hearth Wisdom 6, History 9, Investigation 5, Law 1, Linguistics (millennia of living and dead tongues) 8, Occult 4, Science (agriculture) 5

**Disciplines:** Animalism 2, Auspex 8, Celerity 2, Domination 9, Dominate 7, Fortitude 9, Necromancy 1 (Sepulchre Path 1), Obfuscate 7, Potence 3, Presence 1, Protean 3

**Backgrounds:** Domain (the catacombs) 6, Fame (Tal'Mahe'Ra) 1

**Derangements:** Multiple Personalities. Triggered when presented with a Cainite alone. In such a situation, his Nature shifts to Monster as he attempts to consume their blood, shifting back should another being enter the area. If the feeding is successful, for the remainder of the evening his Demeanor changes to Masochist.

**Virtues:** Conscience 2, Self-Control 1, Courage 2

**Morality:** Path of Humanity 1

**Willpower:** 10

**Background:** Izaha is somewhat of an infamous figure in Enoch. No one is sure how he entered the city, or how long he has been there. He seems to serve as caretaker to the Aralu, though how or when this relationship began

is as mysterious as Izaha's background. Stories abound in Enoch, implying that the creature served as a ghoul to Caine's childer and is now charged with keeping them safe.

To a Sect as closed and secretive as the Tal'Mahe'Ra, the unknown surrounding Izaha causes a great deal of concern. Still, his presence in Enoch is tolerated, as the Aralu seem to have accepted him as caretaker. Cainites receiving visions of the Aralu claim the ancients approve of Izaha, but given that those Cainites themselves might be delusional, that offers little comfort. Izaha also seems to be capable of navigating the catacombs, having found a way to enter and exit in relatively short order (though some Kindred believe he merely waits by the door for an hour or so and then comes out again). More importantly, Izaha's knowledge of ancient Kindred history is superb and rivals that of Noddist scholars, which lends some credence to the "ghoul to ancient vampires" story.

Izaha refuses to align himself with any individual faction in the Tal'Mahe'Ra, though he takes orders from the Del'Roh and Seraphim. He also won't answer questions about the nature of the Aralu or Caine, either out of disinterest or to protect the privacy of the ancients involved (or, skeptics say, because he does not know). However, clever conversationalists can draw him into a discussion of Cainite history. While much of Izaha's knowledge seems to corroborate with the *Erciyes Fragments*, there are instances where his story deviates or adds to known myth significantly. Believers of Izaha claim that this is only natural with someone who witnessed the events firsthand, saying that either the chronicle or Izaha's memory must have gaps in it after so much time. Skeptics, on the other hand, claim that Izaha is obviously just inventing fable, though he has an excellent base of knowledge to draw from.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra has reached a stalemate where all the idiosyncrasies and oddities surrounding Izaha serve as proof of authenticity to those who already believe in him, while also serving as evidence of fraud to those who don't. It's a self-perpetuating cycle that does not seem to go anywhere and, thus, the elders of the Sect don't bother with it. Izaha's nature and presence in Enoch confounds them, but he poses no threat to the Tal'Mahe'Ra, seems to do his self-appointed task of taking care of the Aralu well (which the elders admit is necessary, but not a job they themselves are very eager to do), and he obeys the Del'Roh if push comes to shove. To most elders, who have learned to value pragmatism, that's enough. If Izaha also serves as entertainment value in having new arrivals fuss over him, well then that's fine too.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You're not really sure who you are or what you're doing in Enoch. People say you're the caretaker

to the Aralu or possibly the ghoul of ancient Kindred, and you guess they know what they're talking about. Some of the Cainites come to you with questions, which you try to answer to the best of your abilities; it's the polite thing to do, after all. Since you are supposedly the oldest creature still active on earth, you picked up many obscure techniques during your journey, though you seem unfazed by such. What does worry you, however, is the blackouts that plague you in increasing frequency. You have reached the point where you are losing entire days. During your lucid moments, you wonder if you are going mad or if you are under some sort of psychic attack. This uncertainty makes you alternatively withdrawn and paranoid.

## Riulu, Reluctant Recruit

**Bloodline:** Maeghar

**Sire:** Mist

**Nature:** Autocrat

**Demeanor:** Loner

**Generation:** Seventh

**Embrace:** 1442 C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Riulu's stone-like skin makes it impossible to determine his age.

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

**Social:** Charisma 1, Manipulation 5, Appearance 1

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness (fine details) 4, Awareness 3, Empathy 4, Expression 1, Streetwise (blending in) 4, Subterfuge (impeccable lies) 5

**Skills:** Animal Ken 2, Crafts (taxidermy) 4, Etiquette (archaic) 3, Larceny 3, Melee (scalpel) 4, Stealth 3, Survival 3

**Knowledges:** Academics (poetry) 4, Finance 3, Investigation 2, Medicine (Ophthalmology) 5, Law 2, Occult (ghosts) 4

**Disciplines:** Animalism 2, Auspex 3, Fortitude 2, Necromancy 6 (Path of Haunting 5, Sepulchre Path 4, Corpse in the Monster 2), Obfuscate 2

**Backgrounds:** Generation 7, Retainers (ghost) 2

**Virtues:** Conviction 2, Self-Control 5, Courage 3

**Morality:** Path of the Bones 6

**Willpower:** 4

**Background:** When the Kiasyd came for the other Maeghar, Riulu's sire told him not to get involved. Nothing was forever, she said, and attachments were merely an illusion. He learned his lesson well that night, as the Kiasyd rounded up and killed his friends. So when the Kiasyd captured Riulu's sire and left her staked to meet the sun, he

did not free her — that would be getting involved — though he did creep in to say his final goodbyes. He likes to think she was proud of him in that moment when he let go.

Riulu left his home behind that night and he has never been back. He has visited Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas since then, but most places are a blur in his memory. Favorite feeding haunts, carefully built havens, and painstakingly wooed allies all fade from memory the moment they cease to be relevant. Even emotions are left behind, and Riulu takes no kindnesses or grudges with him. All meaning disappears when he moves on. Except the eyes. As little meaning as Riulu's own life has, he likes to experience it through others. A babe seeing its mother for the first time. An old man looking in the grim face of death. A young man, the face of his assailant still burned on his retinas. His sire as she stared up at him with unmoving, torpid eyes. All these he collects and cherishes.

Riulu came into contact with the Tal'Mahe'Ra through circumstances rather than choice. He was looking for the eyes of a budding serial killer (who unfortunately was shot dead by the police after he broke into the apartment of his third victim) while the Sect was looking for the dead man's soul. A deal was struck, and Riulu got his eyes in exchange for tracking down the killer. He has performed several tasks for his mysterious patrons and received substantial services in return, but the relationship goes no deeper than that. At least, it doesn't to Riulu. It looks like he underestimates his own value. Riulu's sire was versed in Necromancy and he learned a few rare Paths from her — unknowingly to Riulu, the Tal'Mahe'Ra finds that sort of thing intriguing.

His patrons keep him at arm's length, and the mystery of their identity used to drive him mad. At times he tried to flee, even crossing continents in his haste, only to find a note or contact waiting for him upon arrival. He's grown comfortable in the arrangement at this point and doesn't ask too many questions any longer. After all, they pay, and they always have more work. Recently, his benefactors extended an invitation to meet an official representative of theirs for an interview. Riulu is keenly aware that if they wished to terminate the relationship, an interview is unlikely. More likely, he suspects, they may be seeking to test or recruit him into whatever organization it is they belong to. He wonders if the option to turn them down is even a possibility.

Since the day the Kiasyd came for his sire, nothing has scared him as much as the idea of being tied down, and he is torn on what to do. On the one hand, he wants to avoid any permanent alliances, havens, and especially friends at all cost. On the other hand, his curiosity is

nearly overwhelming. Nevertheless, despite his rational mind telling him this might be a good deal, he keeps going back to his sire's wisdom: "Do not get attached. They cannot take what you do not have."

**Roleplaying Hints:** You think attachments and emotions are weak, so you keep moving and make sure not to develop any. You cannot handle feeling anything. The prospect of having to repay an ally terrifies you. You crave control and carefully banish anything that might threaten it. Do not offer help, or even your insight on a particular discussion, unless you absolutely have to. When you feel control slipping, you take strength from your eyes. Through them, you have already experienced everything the world has to offer, so how could anything hurt you?

Speaking of your hobby, you try not to be cruel. If given time and opportunity, you prefer to remove the eyes with surgical precision, leaving your donors blind, but alive. This is not out of any sense of decency, but because cruelty is an emotion just as much as kindness is. You are above such pettiness.

## Jennifer Miller, clever little ghost

**Creature:** Ghost

**Nature:** Capitalist

**Demeanor:** Soldier

**Generation:** Tenth (equivalent for Pathos pool and Pathos per turn)

**Death:** 1839 C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Mid-teens

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness (eavesdropping) 4, Athletics 2, Awareness (mystical objects) 5, Brawl (dirty fighting) 4, Empathy 4, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge (double-dealing) 5

**Skills:** Crafts (sewing) 4, Larceny (misdirection) 5, Stealth (silent movement) 4, Survival (Tempest navigation) 4

**Knowledges:** Investigation (shadowing) 5, Occult (Kindred Lore) 4

**Disciplines:** Auspex 5, Dominate 1, Necromancy 3 (Cenotaph Path 3, Path of Haunting 3), Potence 1, Thaumaturgy 4 (Movement of the Mind 4)

**Backgrounds:** Ally (Harbinger) 4, Contacts (various ghosts) 3, Resources (ghostly favors) 2

**Virtues:** Conscience 3, Self-Control 2, Courage 4

**Morality:** Path of Humanity 5

**Willpower:** 6

**Notes:** Jennifer has learned a special power that allows her to bring her mother's amulet into the Underworld. She either keeps it on her or hides it, depending on the circumstances. This amulet is Jennifer's only known fetter.

**Background:** Jennifer, called little Jenny by her friends due to her small stature, was a seamstress in Victorian London. She was doing well for herself, having found a sewing shop willing to employ her nimble fingers, sharp eyes, and clever mind. Then the smallpox broke out. This was nothing new in London – smallpox regularly broke out – but Jenny had always assumed herself immune with the sense of invincibility that comes natural to all teenagers. She wasn't. Jennifer's mother attempted to take care of her at first, but when it became clear the cause was lost, her mother turned her attention the remaining children instead. Jennifer, who had always thrived in the company of friends and family, died alone. Except part of her didn't die, and she lingered on the threshold between life and death.

Jennifer explored the ghost world of London, such as it was, until she was summoned by a Cainite using the locket given to Jennifer by her mother. The theft enraged her, but there was little Jennifer could do as the Cainite bound her to his service. She was clever though – always had been. She fulfilled the Cainite's quests faithfully, even as she carefully learned about him too. His name was Reperto and he was a vampire of Clan Giovanni. This meant little to Jennifer, but she also learned that Clan Giovanni had ancient and powerful enemies anxious for leverage against any of Reperto's kind. She was bound not to act against him directly, but nothing stopped her from leaving a trail of breadcrumbs for these enemies to follow. When they killed him, Jennifer was finally free.

She might have escaped Cainites altogether that night, but the realization that these creatures could and would bind her again if they had the chance stopped her. She scoured London's underworld for some faint hope of securing her freedom permanently. By luck or fate, she met an ancient and terrifying creature of tremendous power surpassing Reperto's and proposed a partnership. They – for Jennifer could not discern if it was male or female – accepted. The creature's decision was not made on emotions, for the freedom or enslavement of one ghost mattered nothing to the Harbinger, but more on a mix of practical considerations and curiosity. Bound ghosts can be gained by the dozens, but a willing and self-employed ally is far more resourceful. Besides, there was something in Jennifer's clever rebellion that the creature could appreciate.

Since then, Jennifer has travelled far and wide for her Harbinger ally. She has learned to navigate the eddies of the Underworld, bypass wards intended to keep her kind out, and

spy on the world of the living. She has even been to Enoch, though she is blissfully unaware of its state of contention in the Underworld. She has brought back scores of information for the Harbinger, who in exchange protects her from more powerful ghosts and has taught her to bring her amulet into the Underworld so Jennifer may guard it herself.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You were always clever and quick, and you have grown bold under the protection of your Harbinger ally. You believe yourself to be almost untouchable – which you most certainly are not – and your ally to be loyal enough to come for you if something goes wrong – which might also be hopelessly optimistic. However, your sincere belief in your own fortitude does impress other ghosts, as you project an air of being quite powerful. You have even managed to bluff a few young Cainites (though technically speaking you aren't bluffing so much as being absolutely convinced of your own might).

You rather enjoy working for the Harbinger, whose name and gender you still have not been able to identify, though you have caught on to the fact that not all Harbingers are as nice and reasonable as yours. You have no such sense of nuance when it comes to the Giovanni though, whom you all hate equally and with a passion created by the necromancer that once bound you. Your powerful Harbinger ally seems to have lost interest in pursuing the Giovanni as of late, which frustrates you to no end, so you must now maintain your feud alone. You have little knowledge of the inner workings of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, despite having been to Enoch, and even less of the ghost hierarchy, as you spend more time around Cainites than your own kind.

## Sylvester Marlowe, the Ticktack Man

**Bloodline:** True Brujah

**Sire:** Al-Muntathir

**Nature:** Eye of the Storm

**Demeanor:** Chameleon

**Generation:** Eighth

**Embrace:** 1893 C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Differs depending on disguise, ranging from early 30s to impossibly old

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Empathy 4 (Emotions), Expression 3, Intimidation 3, Leadership 4 (Compelling), Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

**Skills:** Crafts 4 (Watchmaking), Etiquette 3, Larceny 5 (Misdirection), Melee 3, Performance 4, Stealth 3



**Knowledges:** Academics 5 (Mathematics), Computer 2, Finance 4, Investigation 3, Occult 3, Technology 2

**Disciplines:** Auspex 2, Obfuscate 3, Obtenebration 1, Potence 2, Presence 3, Temporis 3

**Backgrounds:** Allies 4, Contacts 4, Domain 3, Fame 2, Generation 5, Mentor 1, Resources 4, Retainers 2, Status (Black Hand) 2

**Virtues:** Conviction 2, Instinct 4, Courage 2

**Morality:** The Path of Night 6

**Willpower:** 6

**Derangement:** Megalomania

**Background:** In life as well as death, Sylvester Marlowe has epitomized the criminal mastermind. During his living days, Marlowe operated a crime ring spanning the Atlantic; his associates ranging between Manchester, Le Havre, and Bridgeport. Marlowe's agency was instrumental in the operation of illegal gambling fronts, or more specifically, the altering of odds swayed in the favor of his clients and their interests.

Murder was not beyond Marlowe's purview. If a profit was to be made, he would set up the dominoes to fall in a way causing the greatest payoff, casualties be damned. The rich and powerful were willing to put a wager on anything from the mundane to the sublime. His admirers maintain his instrumentality in King Ludwig II of Bavaria's untimely death. At the exact point the eccentric monarch left Berg Castle on 13 June 1886, it is said that Marlowe, half a world away in New Haven, snapped shut his gold pocket watch and announced it was time for those who placed bets on Ludwig's survival to pay up. A few gentlemen, Marlowe included, became very wealthy on that day.

His skill in predicting, planning, and orchestrating sometime catastrophic events drew the attention of his eventual sire, the True Brujah known as Al-Muntathir. Such ability was already closely aligned with the goals of many Sages within the Tal'Mahe'Ra, so with permission from his Sect the elder vampire stalked the mortal for years to gauge whether becoming a ghoul or a vampire would be the preferred course.

Al-Muntathir was surprised to find he was being observed in turn. Marlowe's network was more capable than even the True Black Hand suspected. Almost as soon as Al-Muntathir had begun his watch, Marlowe's own agents had started picking apart the covers of this impossibly old observer. Not one story added up, but Marlowe's historical dealings with an Egyptian claiming to worship the dread god Sutekh allowed him to piece

the puzzle together. Al-Muntathir returned to his haven in Manchester one night to find Marlowe already there. Marlowe was Embraced soon after.

In the last century, Marlowe has calculated with mathematical precision some of the most devastating changes in Kindred society. The Third Sabbat Civil War, the fall of Prince Mithras of London, and the rise of the Anarch Free States were all predicted by Marlowe, with this information being fed back to his peers in Enoch. The commands returned by the Hand were to initiate whatever was required to ensure these predictions came true. They did so, perhaps due to Marlowe's gift of foresight, or more likely as a result of his pulling the levers and activating the pulleys set up so that whatever events he envisages become reality.

Marlowe creates his own portents. If he wants to see something happen, he will make it so. He then takes credit for predicting said event. Marlowe has a high success rate in his manipulations, working through agents both unknowing and informed, or on occasion with his own hands. Marlowe believes in the tenets of the Tal'Mahe'Ra as a means to his ends. He thrives on the chaos of others and feels strongly that the world exists to service his whims. His megalomania is matched only by his ability in reinforcing such a god complex with the results he desires. Through his actions, he has occasionally garnered allies among Followers of Set and Sabbat Lasombra alike, but where they see him as a supporter, he views them as dupes.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Arrogantly inscrutable, Marlowe enjoys ostentatious disguises and godlike proclamations and poses. If he can work through his personal agents he will do so, but if there's a chance to meet and diminish a potential obstacle in his endeavors, he'll take pains to appear in a way that asserts his authority.

Marlowe's only semblance of humanity is in his fiddling with the winding mechanism on the gold pocket watch always on his person. His emotions have been stunted by the curse of his bloodline, but still he obsesses over keeping perfect time. If a predicted event doesn't take place at the exact point he expects, he is liable to fly into frenzy and take out his ire on an underling. It would be unbecoming to attack a guest, associate, or enemy, as he considers his minions at fault in such cases.

Marlowe is most likely encountered orchestrating the next shake-up of Kindred society. When a Sect or Clan grows too strong or unified, an Alastor closes in on an Anathema, or a coterie gets too close to discovering the truth of the Hand, Marlowe will set the wheels in motion to disrupt their successes. He always aims to be one step ahead of his opponents in what he considers to be a grand and eternal game.

## Sahar-Hanibaal, Dominion of the Order of Moloch

**Clan:** Baali

**Nature:** Caretaker

**Demeanor:** Survivor

**Generation:** Seventh

**Embrace:** 195 B.C.E.

**Apparent Age:** Early 20s

**Physical:** Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 8

**Social:** Charisma 7, Manipulation 6, Appearance 6

**Mental:** Intelligence 8, Perception 8, Wits 7

**Talents:** Alertness 5, Awareness 6 (external psychic influences), Brawl 6 (fighting dirty), Empathy 6, Expression 6, Intimidation 4, Leadership 5, Subterfuge 5

**Skills:** Craft 5 (musical instruments), Etiquette 6 (diplomacy), Melee 6, Performance 6 (music)

**Knowledges:** Academics 6, Computer 2, Investigation 5, Medicine 6, Occult 6 (infernalism and infernalists), Politics 5, Science 6 (astronomy; mathematics)

**Disciplines:** Auspex 6, Daimoinon 7, Celerity 3, Fortitude 5, Obfuscate 6, Presence 3, Thaumaturgy 7 (Music of the Spheres 5, Spirit Manipulation 5, Whispers of the Heavens 4)

**Backgrounds:** Allies 8 (the Order of Moloch in its entirety), Generation 5, Herd 3, Resources 3, Retainers 6 (bound spirits), Black Hand Membership 3, Title 3 (Dominion of the Order of Moloch)

**Virtues:** Conviction 5, Courage 5, Instinct 2

**Morality:** Path of the Hive 9

**Willpower:** 9

**Background:** Sahar-Hanibaal was born in the years of Carthage's slow and painful decline, the youngest son of a humble family with far too many mouths to feed as it stood. Fortunately, in those days, there were solutions to such difficulties: the wealthy and powerful were always at pains to keep a healthy offering to the gods at hand, and were becoming more and more loath to offer up their own children when another's offspring would suffice just as well. With his sleek black hair, huge dark eyes, dimpled cheeks, and quick, clever hands, he fetched a handsome price on the auction block.

In this new house, he was never hungry or cold. He was kept well-fed and well-dressed, in preparation for the day when his throat would be cut over the sacrificial bowl. That day never came. He grew from well-fattened childhood into gawky adolescence and slender young adulthood, going the

temple for more than instruction in the proper methods of worship, the songs of praise, and the means of sacrifice. Even so, it was there, in Tanit's house among the temples, that he met his fate. What the goddess' philosopher-child saw him as he knelt singing the words of her glory, he still does not entirely understand and likely never will. Still, when Tanitbaal-Sahar laid eyes upon him, it was then that he became not a sacrifice in waiting, but a sacrifice in truth. His adopted parents were first astonished, and then greatly pleased, when such a high-born lord of the city requested the use of him for a companion and, within days, he was ensconced in the modest household of his new patron, serving as his scribe and assistant.

Far-traveled, intellectually questing, and troublesomely unorthodox, Tanitbaal-Sahar was deep in the throes of creation, writing not only a series of travelogues but also laying out the fundamental tenets of what would become the *Via Desideratio*. Sahar-Hanibaal became the first whetstone against which he honed the knife of his doctrine. His elders, with his grandsire Moloch among them, vehemently disagreed with Tanitbaal-Sahar and his philosophies, and when Tanitbaal-Sahar persisted, punishment fell on the head of Sahar-Hanibaal. When Sahar-Hanibaal awoke in the house of Tanit, the taste of his sire's blood still clung to his tongue.

The night of his painful death and unplanned Embrace was the last he ever saw his sire. Tanitbaal-Sahar fled Carthage, taking nothing with him but the bare necessities of survival and his most current writings. He ran to Rome and took shelter there under the protection of its Prince, out of Moloch's reach. Sahar-Hanibaal spent the first surreal and disorienting nights of his unlife under the care of his grandsire, Tanit, who chose to stand between him and the wrath of Moloch. Beneath the aegis of Tanit's protection, he learned the first lessons of what he had become at her knee, the truth that had hidden beneath shadows and praise-songs, and came at last to understand the purpose his life – rootless, waiting – had lacked. When Tanit left Carthage for Tyre, Sahar-Hanibaal followed to repay the debt he owed his grandsire for sparing his existence. He served as her left hand for centuries, mastering the arts of warfare to enforce her primacy as eldest when Carthage fell.

War followed with the Followers of Set, the Assamites, and his own kin. When Azaneal assumed the title of *Shaitan*, Tanit received Azaneal's ambassadors at her hidden court, listened to what they had to say, and quietly prepared to abandon Tyre as she had abandoned Carthage before it. Tanit fell into torpor due to an ambush, leaving the reins of leadership in the hands of her grandchilde.

Sahar-Hanibaal took them up and has not relinquished them since. He rallied the survivors of Azaneal's first attack cast aside the ages-old prohibition in the Via Hyron against the practice of blood sorcery. After a century of treachery and bloodshed, Chorazin fell and Azaneal fell with it. Sahar-Hanibaal sang Tyre's Well of Sacrifice to sleep, *and* sought sanctuary in the court of a fellow scholar in the far north with what remained of his own people. In the far north, among their reclusive cousins of the Old Clan Tzimisce, the Molochim found peace and safety for the first time in centuries.

It could not, of course, last. Sahar-Hanibaal had chosen a duty for himself; Azaneal might be gone, but the idiot spawn of Nergal would keep trying their luck until one of them broke the world. There were more than enough untenanted, untended Wells lying in forgotten corners of the world, and the Children of the Outer Dark, forever restless, were growing even more so. The Order of Moloch came forth from the mountain fastness of their allies to hunt their infernalist kinsmen again and found that, while the world changed, some things never did. The Well of Carthage may be nothing more than rubble, but *something* stirs there and casts the smoke of burning innocents into the night sky again after thousands of years. The ancient city of the First Tribe, lost for even longer, has been found by forces inimical to the Molochim mission, the Maw of the Sleepers alive and gestating darkness greater than even Nergal in its depths. The choice to ally with the Tal'Mahe'Ra, made in cold deliberation and in full knowledge of the price of failure, has thankfully thus far proven a fruitful one, even if the cost of attaining it was painfully, personally high. The world may yet have a future, and Sahar-Hanibaal some hope of seeing it come to pass.

**Roleplaying Hints:** For the entirety of your existence, you have served, both as a sacrifice-in-waiting, and as your grandsire's left hand, the blade she pointed at the hearts of her enemies and used to discipline your erring blood-kin. However, you did not carve a swath of bloody destruction everywhere you went, extending yourself to save those who were salvageable and bringing them back into the fold, even at the risk of Tanit's displeasure. On occasion, you even adopted your absent sire's practice of masquerading as a member of another Clan to understand the greater Cainite culture from which the Baali were so frequently divorced. You studied and honed your skills to deploy them in service to your grandsire, and you were as content as you could be.

But when the chance came to be more than merely content, you seized it with both hands. Unifying your allies in the scattered Molochim hives to forge them into

a force to be reckoned with has been the work of your unlife and more – the Order of Moloch is as much your family as it is your weapon. You agonized over the choice to offer them to the Tal'Mahe'Ra, but what you have seen of late has rattled you to the core and inspired the first terror you have felt in centuries. You are forced by circumstance to believe that among the Tal'Mahe'Ra, all have the best chance of survival.

## **Sophia-Amunet, Second Assistant Librarian**

The young woman who knows herself as Sophia-Amunet in truth knows very little else about herself. Her memories of her own existence are little more than a fractured jumble of mirror-bright flinders broken off from multiple, disjointed, asynchronous lives.

Agents of the Tal'Mahe'Ra found Sophia-Amunet taking shelter in the basement of one of the Sect's transitional safehouses in London, curled in a shaking, sweating ball and babbling to herself in an ancient dialect of Egyptian. She was apparently nearing a state of panic-laden and exhausted near-torpor herself, though she could give no explanation for how she had found the place or how she had successfully bypassed its numerous defenses. She gave her name as Sophia-Amunet, and at some level seemed to believe that she was both a British library sciences student *and* an Egyptian priestess and sorceress. Startled and disturbed, the kamut elected to bring the young woman with them back to Enoch in order to ascertain what sort of threat, if any, that she might be.

The sorcerers of the Tal'Mahe'Ra determined that Sophia-Amunet appeared to be a spiritual fusion of two beings – one young and one almost impossibly ancient – and that union was, at best, an incomplete and fractured one. They managed to assist her in calming the chaos inside her own mind, in the hope that she would one day be able to recover completely, though many had their doubts. *Sophia* was a sweet-natured young woman, studious and conscientious, but lonely and vaguely disconnected from others in the way that so many children of the modern age were. *Amunet*, by contrast, was imperiously self-assured and almost unmanageably willful, demanding in her wants and capable of immense cruelty when faced with even minor imperfections or refusals. The spiritual ties that held them together were constantly raw from the tension between the two mismatched halves of her being, which caused her great mental distress. Protective amulets helped to subdue Amunet somewhat, keeping the worst of her excesses quiescent, and Sophia asked to be allowed to remain in Enoch as a member of the



## The Undying

Mummies are agents of balance made immortal eons ago through the Spell of Life. All possess the shard of a powerful and ancient spirit that seeks out a restless soul to unite with. The spirit offers the opportunity to atone and resurrect; if it agrees, the portion of the soul that is most flawed is torn out and the spirit inserts itself in its place. If the body dies afterwards, the mummy must seek another host and begin anew with a blend of the memories and personality traits of all its previous lives.

Three categories of mummy exist: the Teomallki from the Chinchorro and Inca people of Chile; the Wu T'Ian, ancient Chinese sorcerers driven to seek immortality; and the Amenti of Egypt, souls blessed by Osiris to battle the forces of Apophis. One final group, the Apepnu, are ifrit spirits of darkness and flame freed by Apophis and enchanted by Set to seize a cadaver in mockery of the spell of life.

### Powers and Weaknesses

- Mummies share the frailties and strengths of mortals, but are immune to vampiric blood and may not become Embraced.
- Mummies have a Balance rating equivalent to Humanity, or the Path of Typhon for Apepnu. Unlike other mummies, Apepnu have a Beast and may frenzy due to the ifrit bound to their souls, but they are unaffected by Röttschreck.
- Rather than through Generation, a mummy's threshold for attribute maximums is equal to its Balance. Balance acts as a base rating for Sekhem, which may be drawn from like a vampire's blood pool to fuel Hekau, mummies' specific brand of magic.
- A mummy regains one point of Sekhem each day at dawn. If the sun is visible in the place he resides, he may spend one hour in meditation to regain more Sekhem by rolling his Balance rating (difficulty 8). Apepnu may only regain Sekhem by either subjecting themselves to fire (which deals lethal damage to them and restores a point of Sekhem for each wound soaked), or by consuming the flesh of the dead (or undead). When reduced to zero Sekhem, a mummy grows withered; its Appearance drops to zero, and its dice pools and speed are halved.
- Instead of Disciplines, mummies study Hekau. They may learn any Thaumaturgical or Necromantic Path (including rituals) without a tutor, as in-Clan Disciplines.
- Mummies who reach Incapacitated fall into impermanent death, travel to the Underworld, and temporarily transform into wraiths, but retain all their base statistics. While in the Underworld, they must find a soul with a roughly intact body to join with. Following that, the mummy spends a point of Sekhem, then rolls Willpower + Balance (difficulty equal to the body's rate of decay; 6 for a whole, fresh, young corpse; 9 for a body reduced to ash and dust). A failed roll requires one full day before a second attempt to resurrect is made. Short of atomization from a nuclear blast, a mummy will never meet Final Death.
- Like vampires, mummies may soak lethal damage, and all bashing damage is halved. Mummies heal at twice the normal rate of a standard mortal. They may spend a point of Sekhem to soak one level of aggravated damage, as well as heal all non-aggravated wounds they sustain.

Tal'Mahe'Ra. Where else, she reasoned, would she have access to the resources necessary to repair herself? The Wazir agreed, and Sophia-Amunet was assigned to the staff of Rawi Tayumet as a Second Assistant Librarian, which thrilled both halves of her bifurcated soul to their individual cores. She has spent the years since studying as directed by the harried and long-suffering Tayumet, exploring the city in a manner likely far more reckless than she realizes, and slowly attempting to piece together the fragments of her identities.

**Roleplaying Hints:** On the surface, you are one of the youngest and least threatening of all the possible things that another could encounter in Enoch: a conscientious, scholarly, and genuinely helpful young librarian who *just happens* to be the wildly unstable fusion of a modern British graduate student and an ancient Egyptian sorceress well-steeped in cruelty and wickedness. Mostly, you succeed in not being wicked – or, at least you try to be wicked in a *helpful* way and hold back the worst of the cruel and wrathful thrashings of Amunet, who you rather suspect was a deeply unpleasant person that deserved all the horrible things you half-remember being done to her/you. You keep yourself immersed in work and studies to avoid being afraid all the time, and for the most part try to avoid contact with others – after all, most of them are thousands of years old, so what do you have to talk about anyway? Trying to ask someone out for coffee would be a *disaster*. This has only changed recently, when you met Sahar-Hanibaal, who, despite being thousands of years old, sometimes seems almost as lost and out of place as you feel.

**Nature:** Scientist

**Demeanor:** Loner

**Mummy:** Amenti

**Physical:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

**Mental:** Perception 4 (insightful), Intelligence 4 (book smarts), Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 1, Awareness 3, Empathy 3, Expression 2

**Skills:** Crafts 2, Drive 1, Etiquette 2

**Knowledges:** Academics 4 (library and information sciences), Computer 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Technology 1, Occult 2, Science 5 (anthropology and archaeology)

**Backgrounds:** Allies 4, Retainer 2, Vessel 1

**Hekau:** Necromancy 2 (Ash 2, Sepulchre 2), Thaumaturgy 5 (Elemental Mastery 3, Thaumaturgical Countermagic 5)

**Rituals:** Bind the Accusing Tongue; Ritual of the Smoking Mirror; Puppet; Ward versus Ghouls, Lupines, Kindred, and Spirits

**Merits/Flaws:** Probationary Sect Member (Tal'Mahe'Ra), Flashbacks, Language (Coptic, Greek, Latin), Eidetic Memory 2, Natural Linguist 2

**Balance:** 5

**Sekhem:** 6

**Willpower:** 6

**Notes:** Sophia's Allies are Sahar-Hanibaal and members of the Rawi. Her Retainer is an intelligent falcon spirit named Sekani that uses the statistics for the Recently Deceased (V20, p. 385). She has a unique magical talisman in the form of a broach (Vessel) that allows her to store one extra point of Sekhem.



My hand still burned from the ritual, the symbol of the Black Hand carved and burned into my flesh. No one would be able to see it save others of my order. The magic and ritual used to make the mark guaranteed it.

The circle was drawn and we stood within it. Ophelia stood there, her face blank as she waited, the spoken words picking up in their intensity. The air seemed to grow thicker as the atmospheres of two worlds stood in one place. The light shifted, and I could feel the floor beneath my feet change from a solid surface to stone and sand. The scent of candles and blood and ozone crackled through the air, and strange wind rushed up from the floor. I closed my eyes, chanting along quietly, knowing the words but not sure what impact my saying them had on the spell.

A gentle hand squeezed my shoulder. I felt weak. I opened my eyes and saw Ophelia smiling at me.

"We have made it," she said in her quiet voice. "I hoped for this day for so long."

I looked around. Barren land. Black clouds that looked like they held rain but which held nothing. The smell of age and stone and sand. No trees.

And before us, what was now a mausoleum that stretched towards the sky, wide in expanse. We all turned and walked towards it. The entrance stood open like a maw, waiting to take us into itself. As we drew closer, I could see that the walls were carved with images, depictions of history, of savageries, negotiations, loves, and losses. The rise and fall of houses, of eras. I walked in through the entrance.

Inside was a great chaos of stone and what looked like bone rising from the floor. It twisted and curved to form walkways, rooms, chambers, staircases, and other ways to travel throughout the hulking edifice. This was Enoch, what it had become. And somewhere in here, they slept. I saw the names, many of them written, all of them contested. I remembered the nights in Egypt so long ago, when Pallas had read many of these names off of the wall. The night we parted ways. Now the names were here, carved into stone so old that none of us who walked the halls had seen them carved.

"I have wanted you to see this for so long, Blake," Ophelia said. "To share the burden with you."

I walked alongside her, up a staircase that looked as if it led nowhere, but which instead turned sharply

and led to another level altogether. "Much is written here, and I know you will find answers here, for all of us to share," she said, her hands clasped together. "I knew when I first saw you, reading in that old library. I watched you study, the questions you asked. I watched you struggle. And I knew though you were young, you knew better than to ride out your youth to middle-aged obligation. You wanted to leave something on the world. So I brought you into mine, so you could do that."

I thought about the nights I had pretended to be her partner, in order to drum up rivalry within her profession or simply add to her mystique. I thought of the nights she had warned me about going to see Pallas, and wondered if she had truly meant it as a warning or told me knowing it would drive me towards her. I thought of the sips of blood she gave me from her flask and the first time I met her, so long ago. Those small moments had led to this expanse of time. It was so old it felt like going back in time, before hunger was a vicious cycle that sought to be reset with blood and terror. And yet it was the beginning, where all this had started.

"I hope to further the goals of the Black Hand," I said, walking besides her still. She hooked her arm in mine and we walked past a vast library of books, Cainites sitting on the long, low tables as they pored over the tomes before them. I had heard them speak about these books, history and clues, the words of our forebears, written in ink and blood. Magic. Tales of lupines and changelings. Servants guarded the libraries and stalked the halls. I thought I saw one who looked like the little girl I have saved with Dian so long ago. I watched her walk passed us and continue down the hall. If she recognized me, she didn't say anything.

"It is the only true goal," Ophelia said. "On earth, we bide our time. We pass it best we can and hope we do not offend."

"I've watched you over the years, Ophelia," I replied. "You have kept the secret all these years. You are here in Enoch. There is your proof you have not offended."

"Know that my continuance with the Black Hand relies on not only on my own conduct but your own," she said. "I have chosen wisely, I believe, and you have been vetted by others, but do not rest easy on your acceptance," she said. "This is not a life of rest."

We walked together through Enoch. The wind was hot and the eyes of every statue and relief we passed seemed to be watching me. When I turned around, it seemed the way we came had changed while we were not looking. I had been warned about the nature of Enoch before I entered, but being here was different. It was disorienting, and I worried I wouldn't be able to leave the building if I wandered too far.

We came across a vast room with high ceilings. In the center was a single stone sarcophagus. I stopped short, my senses telling me to leave this place, but Ophelia squeezed my arm and pulled me forward. Our steps echoed so loudly in the room, I feared whoever was in the sarcophagus would wake. But we came within twenty feet of it and stopped.

"One of them?" I asked. I could barely speak. Ophelia simply nodded. We stood there, waiting, as if for a sign, but none came. After several minutes,

we turned and left to further explore the twists and curves of Enoch.

When we turned, I felt a dark shadow rise from the coffin and creep up along the wall and onto the ceiling, hovering above us as we exited the large chamber. My mind told me not to turn back, not to dare slow down. I quickened my pace, which made Ophelia smile besides me.

I was part of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, this ancient order. I was not ancient myself, but one day, I might be, if those who slept saw fit. And before they came, I would hold the night through cunning and blood, so there might be something left for them to watch over, to serve them in their greatness, to unite the children of those two brothers or two wives once more, under a true peace.

The night could be peaceful.

Eventually.



# THE BLACKHAND

## A GUIDE TO THE TAL'MAHE'RA

### **We Deal in the Truth.**

Every interaction, every fight, every clandestine meeting, it's all about the truth. The truth hurts. The truth kills. But in the end, the truth protects. The truth shapes the world. Shape the world with us.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra, the Black Hand, plays the long game. They're fighting a war of millennia, and the stakes could never be higher than they are tonight. They know truths about the Ancients, terrifying truths, dangerous truths, and they know the fight will be long and tireless.

### **The Black Hand – A Guide to the Tal'Mahe'Ra includes:**

- An updated look at the Tal'Mahe'Ra, which brings the ancient conspiracy into the twenty-first century.
- Tricks of the Black Hand's trade, including new Disciplines, Backgrounds, Merits, and eldritch sorceries.
- Insight into some of the Hand's sects, including those who hunt the infernal, and the worshipers of Lilith.

