

# FORBIDDEN RELIGIONS

A SOURCEBOOK FOR

**VAMPIRE**  
THE MASQUERADE



# FORBIDDEN RELIGIONS

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# SINNERS AND SAVIORS

By Steffie de Vaan

## JADEN

Jaden bowed crisply at the waist as his sire Esmé sank down in a curtsey that left her cerulean gown pooling on the floor. Esmé's brooch, a broken spear wrought in filigree, revealed their membership in the Shattered Spear, but none in Barcelona had indicated their recognition of the sig-net. Barcelona was an opulent court, both owing to Prince Maria Del Torro trying to outdo her Ventrue seneschal *and* to it being Barcelona. The famous city had always chosen art and beauty over function. Jaden felt the eyes of the gathered Kindred upon him as they whispered about his choice of attire: impeccable coattails. He ignored them — embraced before hormone replacement therapy was discovered, he was used to stares.

Prince Del Torro waved them up. "Be welcome," she said. "What news of Lisbon?"

The news of Lisbon, of course, was shit. The city, left defenseless by the departure of its elders, was still fighting off inquisition attacks — much like Barcelona itself, and best not to even mention Madrid. Still, things were better than just a decade ago, which was the only reason Jaden and Esmé were able to travel from Lisbon to Barcelona. That, not coincidentally, was the real question

behind Del Torro's inquiry — how safe were the roads, and *why* had they embarked on the hazardous journey?

Jaden zoned out as Esmé waxed eloquently of a new Iberian alliance. They'd practiced the tale exhaustively, and he knew it by heart. He scanned the crowd instead. Del Torro seemed skeptical — she knew better than most how fractured the peninsula was — and her seneschal Jacques Fontaine eyed the pair hungrily. Any alliance between Barcelona and Lisbon would catch Madrid in a pincer and might finally claim it for the Camarilla. Fontaine's wasn't the only greedy expression though, and Jaden observed all of them from beneath thick lashes. Madrid was the largest prize still unclaimed in Europe, a fat pearl in a dark and bloody ocean. It took a certain kind of ambition and bloodthirstiness to snatch it. Those possessed of such characteristics could be the monsters he and Esmé were searching for. One captured his attention in particular: an imperial, dark-skinned woman surrounded by fawning sycophants. She was unlikely to pay Jaden any heed, but he also spied a withdrawn woman at her side: a portly, conservatively-dressed woman with dark eyes Jaden could lose himself in for nights. He glanced briefly at Esmé, and her eyes flickered to the ground to indicate her

approval. His sire would work the imperial elder, and he would pursue his own target.

## IVORY

Ivory laughed as Jaden tripped over his words. "Your Mandarin is excellent," she praised him, "but your Wu needs work."

He laughed too, spinning her around the velvet-clad room once before pulling her close. They'd been at it for weeks, pretending to be two love-struck kine. The laughter was false of course, lips never pulled back far enough to reveal sharp teeth, but the facade suited them both. It was easier to negotiate an alliance if all predators involved pretended to be nice people, for a while at least.

Ivory noticed the way Jaden's eyes lingered on her neck. She pulled back. "Your sire is meeting with Primogen Velez again," she said noncommittally.

"Hm," he replied, feigning equal disinterest.

This too, was part of their game. Jaden and his sire Esmé weren't in Barcelona to pursue an Iberian alliance, no matter the pretty tales they spun. Ivory hadn't figured out why they were really in Barcelona though, which made Jaden a shiny new toy. It helped that he hailed from

Lisbon, the purported resting place of Artemis Orthia. If the Children of Salvation could sink their fangs into that methuselah... The thought made Ivory salivate. First though, she had to unwrap the mystery of Jaden and his sire.

"Del Torro's hold on Barcelona is absolute, you know," she continued, feeling a pang of possessiveness towards her clan.

He laughed at her. "You think we'd approach a Lasombra Primogen to overthrow a Lasombra Prince?" Then, after just a beat to let his mockery sting: "Although it would be like your clan. But no, we're not here to unseat the Prince."

Ivory moved, using her superior strength to push Jaden against the wall harder than befitted their playful facade. "Then why are you here?" she demanded, running her tongue hungrily over the thin, sensitive flesh concealing his carotid artery.

He tilted his head back, offering himself — daring her to take him. Ivory let out a rough grunt and released him. She withdrew to a safe distance, lest he tempt her again. Jaden chuckled, exulted in his victory. Instinctually, Ivory leaned forward, fingers curling with malicious intent. Only the teachings of Salvation allowed her to maintain a grip, though she resolved to find her lover once the Hunt began. He would experience the depths of her hunger then.

"Come, sweet Ivory," Jaden coaxed, recognizing that he'd gone too far. "Let there be peace between us. Peace and perhaps more?" He bowed in that beautifully fluent movement that had first drawn her attention. She growled again, though not in frustration now. This time, when he offered himself, she accepted. She would press him about Lisbon later.

## JADEN

"You're certain?" Esmé asked. "She admitted her sins?" In the privacy of

their own quarters, Esmé had traded the gowns of Barcelona's court for the leather attire favored by the Shattered Spear. She looked like an Amazon of ancient myth, ready to slay her enemies — which was precisely what she was in Barcelona to do. The spear she hefted in her fist was coated with blood, and her flush cheeks temporarily lent her the radiance of the living. Esmé liked to hunt kine, literally, when feeding.

"Hmm," Jaden hedged. Ivory was bold, even irreverent. She pushed and pressed about almost everything that struck her fancy — but not Lisbon, and the Church of Orthia had come up only once in their conversations. She was a lioness looking every which way but at her prey. "I'm sure she is one of them, honored sire," he said, "but I don't know whether she's committed any sins yet."

Esmé fixed him with a frown from beneath her hard, dark brows. "Nonsense. Addicts do not choose how and when they sin."

That was precisely it, though — when Ivory drank from him, she drew it out, savoring every drop. Surely a foul diablerist would lack such self-control? Still, he was in no position to question Esmé. "What's our next step, sire?" he asked.

"We must uncover their leader, and the hellish pit where they perform their dark blasphemy," Esmé insisted. "Primogen Velez has given me nothing. Keep working the ancilla."

## IVORY

"Can you recruit him?" Sofia Velez drawled.

Ivory considered. She felt passionately fond of Jaden, although their escapades with one another were rapidly pushing her from false affection to obsession. And better still, the feeling was mutual. Jaden was elusive and secretive, but she could read his body and emotions clear as night. Even so, he was holding back.

"I think so, yes."

Velez snatched Ivory by the throat, gripping her with her sharp fingernails and lifting her into the air. "You *think* so?" she hissed.

"I know so!" Ivory choked out. "He is mine." Velez's grip tightened, nails seeking the precious vitae below. Ivory felt a terrible pop, and could barely wheeze, "Ours! He is ours!" through her damaged windpipe. Velez dropped her childe to the plush carpet. Ivory knew better than to rise, instead prostrating herself before her sire.

"Let's set a deadline," Velez purred. "It will help you focus. A week?" It wasn't really a question.

Mute, Ivory acquiesced, still making herself as small as possible.

## JADEN

Lying on his back next to Ivory, Jaden kicked one leg from beneath the blankets, trying in vain to relieve his discomfort. The bed had too many pillows. The feather blanket was too thick. Everything in Barcelona was soft and opulent, as if to disguise bloody daggers underneath. He resisted the urge to throw them all on the floor, and instead rolled onto his side to trace lines on Ivory's skin.

"This Church of Salvation," he whispered. "Explain it to me again?"

"It's not that complicated," Ivory sulked, exasperated. "We lift each other up."

"To salvation?" he asked, not for the first time.

"Yes."

"From," he gestured broadly, "this?"

"Yes."

The conviction in her voice was absolute. Although she wasn't lying, Jaden knew Ivory was skipping a few steps. "I help you secure a haven and herd, and **boom**, no more curse?"

Her silence spoke volumes — she was leaving out the key details. They'd

been going ‘round like this for nights.

“What if,” he tried, “this isn’t a curse?”

She propped herself up on one elbow to slap his hand away. “How is this *not* a curse? Never seeing the sun, existing as a parasite, always looking over your shoulder for the next person to betray you.”

“Being stronger, faster, more enduring,” he finished for her. “What if we’re *chosen*, not cursed?” He placed his hand on her hip again, his thumb wearing a gentle circle around the crest of her bone.

She let out a bitter groan. “Then nobody asked me if I *wanted* to be chosen.”

“God doesn’t ask,” Jaden intoned. “Such is Her prerogative. She calls, and we answer.” He ignored Esmé’s warning shrieking in his mind, telling him to be silent, warning him his feelings for Ivory were leading him astray. He was chosen for this mission because he fell in love easily, because he gave himself wholly and completely — there was no subterfuge in his emotions. “God calls us to slay demons in Her name and gives us the tools to do so.”

Ivory sat up sharply and snatched his other hand with both of hers. “Yes, we must slay the demon!” She pressed her hands and Jaden’s to her breast, over her dead heart, then reached forward to caress his chest

with just her right index and middle fingers. “But what if it is *here*. Inside us.” She gazed at him with a huge, hopeful expression, then cupped his chin with her right hand, keeping him close with her left. “Join the Children of Salvation,” she invited, “and we can slay this demon together.” She scooted in to kiss him, and he reciprocated. He’d come to Barcelona to uncover and slay a cabal of diablers, and instead he’d found — he wasn’t sure yet.

“Please. Tell me more,” he whispered against her lips.

## IVORY

Ivory knelt upon entering Velez’s chamber — she’d not forgotten her elder’s ire. A mortal hung upside down behind the Primogen, bleeding from a thousand small cuts into a chalice below. The Children of Salvation often fasted, and Velez liked to test her resolve when she did. It would take days for the mortal to die, and only then would Velez drink the rich bounty.

“Jaden is ours, sire,” Ivory whispered. “He wants to destroy the demon as much as we do, but he was misled — they lied to him about where it hides.”

“Good,” Velez gestured for Ivory to rise. “You have done well. With him at your side, you can win the

great Hunt — and salvation will finally be ours.” She walked to Ivory and cupped her hands in her own. “I always saw your greatness. When the Hunt is called, I shall submit to your fangs willingly. You are the one.” She bent forward to kiss Ivory’s forehead.

The pair remained in spiritual rapture until practical Velez straightened. “First things first. I’ve had less luck with Esmé. Such makes sense — she’s older and more set in her ways. Have Jaden lead her to the Sagrada Família. We shall destroy her and initiate him in one act.”

Ivory nodded. Behind the pair, the mortal twitched and slowly spun in silent agony.

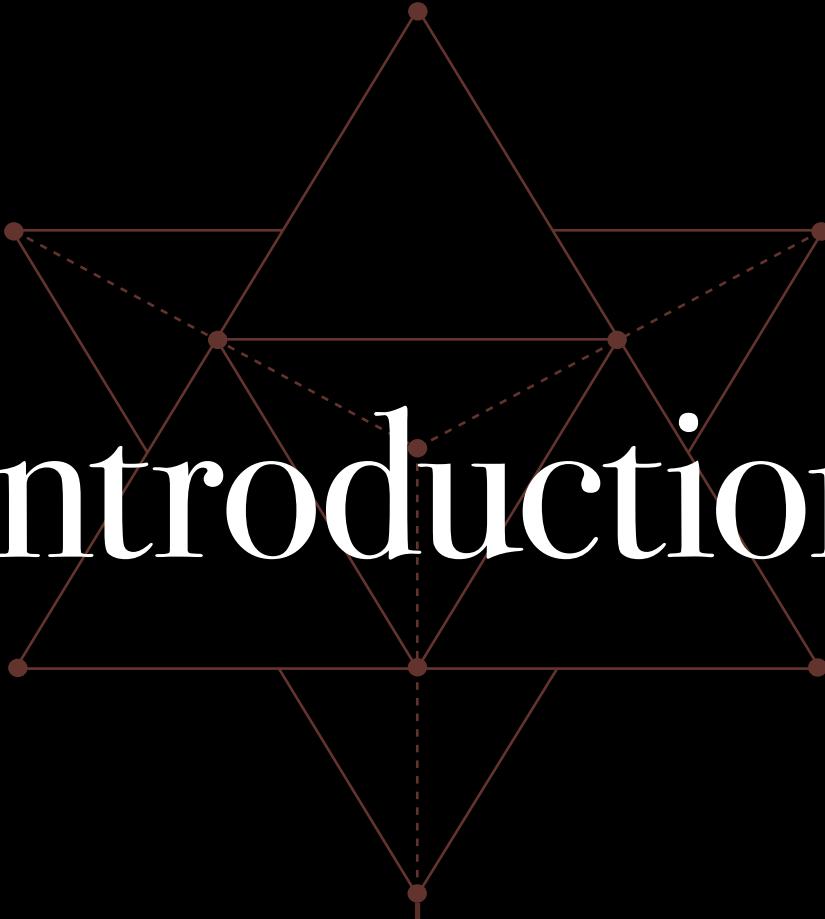
## JADEN

“I uncovered the location of their church,” Jaden reported. “They hold Mass in the Sagrada Família. Their leader sleeps often. It should be easy to hit them.”

Esmé cracked a rictus of long-forgotten humanity. “Good. And the ancilla — she trusts you?”

Her childe nodded.

Esmé’s smile widened to show sharp teeth. She grabbed her spear, still flecked with rust-colored stains. Jaden grimly gripped his own weapon as he watched her lead the way. “We’ll slay demons tonight,” he said.



# Introduction

*“Have a taste. Come on, are you chicken? If you want to join our club, you’ll have a taste.”*

— Iain MacQuoid, Penny Dining Club

Religions aren't all created equal, or at least, history doesn't treat them with equal deference.

It might appear on the surface that a religion's rise and fall comes down to its adherents' practices and reputations. A belief system based around human sacrifice, veneration of the Adversary, and gratuitous acts of public violence is less likely to be treated with as much courtesy as one with discreet rites, apparently benevolent aims, and an ostensible “truth” to what they worship.

It's more accurate to say that religions flourish or fail due to the influence of their patrons, the culture in which they grow, and the prevailing attitudes of the time. In some historic cases, those grand acts of sacrifice might be deemed acceptable, or even desirable. The Adversary may be a worthy figure of worship, if a community believes God has forsaken them. Gratuitous acts of violence may simply be a form of exaltation, a celebration of power.

This kind of justification enables some of the religions within this book to persist. While some are pernicious and widespread, and could even become influential throughout Kindred society, others have been hunted close to extinction or deliberately kept their numbers small and their focus narrow. They all tell themselves they deserve to exist, their beliefs are righteous, and it's their

hunters who are misguided, but that doesn't stop each of these cults from facing censure in Kindred society.

Any Kindred religion is likely to be mired in blood, responsible for misdeeds, and guilty of manipulations its worshipers and enemies alike. What makes the cults in this book forbidden, therefore, varies between each order, and few consider themselves worthy of such an epithet. Some may be persecuted, while others might simply be hidden and exclusive, cults open only to the cream of vampire society.

## Kneel and Present Your Neck

Within **Forbidden Religions** you will find a collection of fringe faiths with deplorable practices. Few rise to power. Some may even witness their own destruction within a mortal lifetime. All, however, have an allure to the outcast and the downtrodden, the monstrous and the wretched. The vampires who join these cults *need* purpose, and the idea of being forced to the border of acceptability

is oddly comforting, as other vampires are there with them, worshipping the same perverse gods and practicing the same rites.

The content in the following chapters can be used straight from the book for player characters and SPCs to join, or adapted for any other story of *Vampire: The Masquerade*. This material is malleable, so please adjust cults, characters, domains, and powers to fit your chronicles. Powers presented amid the cults in this book are available to Kindred outside these groups, though players should discuss using them with their Storyteller to ensure their use matches the story in play.

- **Sinners and Saviors** — In this short fiction, we introduce readers to members of the Shattered Spear and the Children of Salvation, as they conspire together to work toward their own cults' aims.
- **Introduction** — A brief treatise on what it is to be a forbidden faith in *Vampire: The Masquerade*.
- **Pathways to Power** — Methuselah worship comes in many terrible forms. This chapter details the militant worship of Artemis Orthia of Clan Ventrule, cannibalistic sacrifices to the Nictuku of Clan Nosferatu, the fanatical devotion of the Shepherds of Ur-Shulgi, and the dedicated Praesidium of Clan Tremere.
- **Dreams of Golconda** — Vampires tell each other rich tales of hope and salvation under the banner of Golconda. This chapter exposes the cults dedicated to that fabled state. The Children of Salvation, the Butterflies, the Eremites, and the Hunters of the Golden Cicada all appear in this chapter offering their own promises of redemption and liberty, but each with hidden thorns attached to their words.
- **Eschatological Thought** — When one is undead, the study of death, the end times, and what eternal life has in store might naturally become a subject of interest. The members of these cults, each worshiping

## GENERAL DIFFICULTIES

Characters in this book have what are referred to in their traits as General Difficulties. These come in the form of two numbers divided by a stroke, such as 6/4 or 4/2. The first number is the Difficulty the players must beat (or the pool the SPC rolls) if ever opposing this character in an area the SPC excels. The second number is the Difficulty whenever players oppose this SPC in an area in which that character is mediocre or poor. Though each of these characters comes with traits for those who want to use Attributes and Skills to determine Difficulties, if you prefer a simpler method, the General Difficulties are there for you to use.

a different form of oblivion, make their studies their work and purpose. This chapter describes the Whispers of the Dead, the Orphans of Enoch, and the Third Day cults.

- **Ruinous Beliefs** — From decadent bacchanals to the scholarly pursuit of the Adversary, to exploitative charlatany, to the ritual practice of diablerie: this chapter details the exaltation of the diabolical within Kindred society. The Bloodless Pilgrims believe in a perverse form of purity, while the Children of the Devourer pursue human (and Kindred) sacrifice as a form of personal elevation. The Penny Dining Club believe in sampling every experience, while the Soldiers of the Adversary stand ready to serve the Devil in their every action.
- **Optional Advantages** — This chapter contains optional new Merits, Flaws, and Loresheets for players to take advantage of in *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Some are tied to groups and beliefs in this book, while others are general traits fit for adapting into any story.



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# Pathways to Power

*"We are immortal, unchanging, stagnant, exempt from natural evolution.  
Does that mean we should not push ourselves to improve? To excel?"*

— Opal St. Claire of the Praesidium

Kindred religions are founded upon a promise. What that promise is varies, from salvation to annihilation and anything else besides. Perhaps the most common reason for Kindred to be drawn into a cult is the promise of unbridled power that will allow them to crush their enemies, wash away their nightly fears, or impress their social circle.

Power is the reason many Kindred rise at night, and preserving it is the focus of most of their resources. It's therefore easy to see why these cults are among the most popular, particularly among older Kindred. Not only do they offer increased strength and security, or mastery of blood magics and powers unknown to the uninitiated, they offer a sense of belonging to something more organized than a coterie or clan.

They offer nothing less than uncontested mastery of the night, and often, the world.

## The Shattered Spear

*"We are Her spear, raw iron forged in the Blood of Artemis Orthia. We do not fear the Final Death, nor do we balk when*

*carrying out Her will. Be a beacon against the dark, my childe, and you will know your purpose."*

— Polemarch Elena Andreas,  
Voice of Artemis Orthia, Lisbon

The Shattered Spear has existed far longer than the Camarilla, or so their adherents claim. They bear the Blood of Artemis Orthia, first and most beloved of Ventre's childe and Goddess of ancient Sparta, who led the vanguard against the Brujah of Carthage and fell battling the darkness that seized that city in its vile grip. The Spear operates in secret, each warrior standing firm against the tide of Gehenna and the diabolical forces that lurk outside of civilized Kindred society — for who better than to fight the savage demon-worshippers and blood-drunk diablerists than the Clan of Kings?

## Blood of Sparta

From the moment of their Embrace, most Ventre are taught the importance of lineage and are expected to learn every step of their line by rote. After all, their Blood proves their right to rule and places them above the other



Kindred clans. The children of Orthia can trace their line directly to the Goddess, laying claim to a legacy of fierce warrior kings and mighty generals. Orthia herself was said to be unrelenting in combat, as disciplined and powerful as the Spartans who worshiped her. This worship carried over to her childer, whom she chose from among the most skilled warriors of her people, and their veneration never ceased even after her fall in battle against the forces of Carthage. Some even refuse to acknowledge her Final Death, dedicating themselves to finding and recovering their progenitor's body and safeguarding it until

such time as she awakens once more. Those who took up this charge named themselves the Shattered Spear, with Orthia's broken weapon as their namesake and symbol.

With the rise of the Camarilla and its denial of any veneration of their forebears, the Spear began to operate in secret. The march of time saw their numbers dwindle and their influence weaken until all but a few cells were stamped out. Yet they clung to their purpose. It wasn't until the Beckoning began to draw elders away and the rising Second Inquisition struck against any Kindred that it could find that the Spear

could grasp for relevance again. The changing times have seen a boom in its membership as the remaining few have drawn in others of their lineage, speaking to the fire in their Blood that calls to battle and to their shared desire for direction and purpose. With their numbers bolstered with new converts, the cult redoubled its efforts to seek out their progenitor, while also dedicating itself to fighting against the threats posed by the Second Inquisition and more dangerous, heretical cults among their own kind as Artemis Orthia did when she led the charge against the diabolists of Carthage.



## The Spark of War

A single Kindred, a Greek ancilla of Orthia's line who emerged shortly after the first salvos of the new Inquisition sparked the Shattered Spear's renewed vigor. She claimed the name of Elena Andreas, though many elder Ventre consider her exact provenance suspect. The sire she named was long gone, and none could corroborate her story. She was easily dismissed, but those who took the time to listen to her words found that she bore witness to a persuasive idea: that Artemis Orthia had

survived her fall at Carthage and has lain in slumber ever since. As proof, Elena produced the fragments of the fallen progenitor's spear, leaving little doubt that at least she might know something about what she was saying.

Word of her appearance reached the Shattered Spear quickly. The remaining leadership of the cult approached her in secret to test her and the relic she carried for themselves. Elena satisfied the cult's ruling council, called Orthia's Hand, such that they followed her to what she claimed was Orthia's current resting place — the city of Lisbon, Portugal. They descended beneath the city and emerged changed by what they found there, going so far as to name bold Andreas the "Voice of Orthia" and to relocate the center of the cult to Lisbon.

In the short time since, Elena has cemented her control over the cult, delivering the orders of their progenitor to Orthia's Hand, who then deliver her words to the ranks below. Their purpose is clear: war has come to the Kindred, and they mean to be the soldiers on the front lines. While the cult had never been complacent, the presence of the Voice and the knowledge that they now safeguard the slumbering form of their god-like creator have sparked a fire its members that they use to fuel their battle against the enemies of the Kindred — specifically, the Camarilla's enemies — while paying at least nominal lip service to the idea of secrecy for their cult.

## Liturgy of the Spear

The cult's leaders carefully regiment and administer the rites and rituals of the Shattered Spear, reflecting the organization of the cult itself. Its members hold worship of Artemis Orthia as a

god as well as the progenitor of their lineage above all else. Many of the cult's rituals include solemn retellings of her greatest victories against the darkness. Since their relocation, which allowed them to secure Orthia's resting place, members have begun to tell tales of her Voice in the same manner; how Elena Andreas was called to Orthia's tomb and gifted with her purpose before the weary methuselah sank back into torpor, and her quest to recover the lost fragments of Orthia's spear in particular.

Their temples are few, and those that exist favor modest, unpretentious adornment over vulgar displays of wealth and luxury. Simple stonework marked with the symbol of a splintered spear or the Spartan lambda symbol and plain altars are sufficient, and members of the Spear consider anything more excessive and distasteful. Statuary is the rare exception, depicting Artemis Orthia bearing shield and spear.

Outside of their hidden temples, members of the Spear bear little in the way of identifying marks and few risk creating a personal shrine. Instead, it has become popular among the cult to bear a symbol of a spear broken in two in the shape of a chevron, typically on a piece of jewelry. Some who were groomed as mortal servants to their sires prior to their Embrace even get the symbol tattooed somewhere on their body. Personal prayers are common among Orthia's faithful. They memorize short incantations and recite them in hushed tones before battle to bolster the warrior's conviction and bring the methuselah's favor.

## The Soldier's Code

The Cult of the Shattered Spear holds itself to an ideal of courage and valor modeled after the code of

### THE CONVICTIONS OF THE SPEAR

The convictions held by the members of the cult draw from the laconic ideals of spartan warriors, espousing valor in combat and adherence to the faith in Artemis Orthia.

- **Never falter in the face of battle**

The cult's warriors enter battle willingly. Displays of cowardice are anathema to believers. They lead from the front, refusing to allow others to enter danger on their behalf.

- **Always seek to live, not to die**

While seemingly contradictory to their boldness in entering combat, the Spear see this tenet as a simple matter. Even in combat, fight to live, for then you will fight with a greater ferocity than those that do not care if they fall. All warriors may fall, but only those who sought life after the blood and pain of battle may know they fought with valor.

- **Never deny the word of the Voice**

The Voice speaks the words of Artemis Orthia. When she speaks, those words are to be followed. To deny her words is to dishonor yourself in the eyes of the cult and its god.

- **Do not drink of the heart's blood**

The Voice has decreed that diablerie is the greatest of sins among civilized Kindred. Those who drink of the heart's blood and consume the soul of another are enemies of the Spear to be destroyed.

- **Never suffer the denizens of hell, nor those who consort with them**

As Orthia fell in combat against the followers of Hell, so should the Spear fight them with her ferocity. Diabolists and demon-worshipers are the greatest of the Spear's enemies, and to consort with them or their masters is to betray the purpose of one's Blood.

the ancient Spartans, who first held up Artemis Orthia as a god in the Classical age. Though some tangentially aware of the cult might write the warriors off as reckless fools at best, and a danger to the rest of Kindred society at worst, the soldiers of Orthia are not prone to acts of reckless abandon, nor do they falter in the face of danger.

## Temple of the Spear: Lisbon

The Spear holds the city of Lisbon tightly in its grip. The Second Inquisition weakened the domain enough that the cult had little trouble in placing one of their own as Prince. They moved into the old aqueducts below the city, secured much of the subterranean network beneath the city, and reinforced the claimed resting-place of Orthia. Despite this, their efforts to excise the city's Nosferatu from the tunnels have been met with repeated frustration.

The increasingly insular nature of the Camarilla has worked in their favor, and while the cult exists as something of an open secret among the Kindred of Lisbon, few outside the domain know how deeply they've sunk their claws into the city. Only Ventre of Orthia's line are allowed within the heart of the cult's power, an ancient cistern converted into a temple of their God, and even those do not know where She truly rests — only Orthia's Hand and Voice hold that knowledge. Those few Ventre outside of the direct lineage who have drifted into the cult's circle of influence may dedicate themselves to its cause, but they will never be more than foot soldiers and pawns used to further the purposes of the Spear.

The city of Lisbon, however, is not completely secure. As the Beckoning draws elders away and thin-bloods grow in number, outsiders continually test the purpose of the Spear within the city and without, as coteries of various sects and cults attempt to seize the domain for their own. The ongoing struggle has made the cult's efforts to spread outside of Lisbon difficult, as they are forced to focus on the seat of their power and the protection of their sacred charge.

It is from Lisbon that the Voice, Elena Andreas, issues the orders communicated to her by the slumbering Orthia. She remains within the temple, seen only rarely by those not among the five members of Orthia's Hand. Beneath them, a cadre of warrior-priests and priestesses administer to the cult's rank and file. They send these members, often young Ventre and fresh recruits themselves, to new cities where the Blood of Orthia runs strong to seek the members of her sacred bloodline; and if necessary, to recruit foot soldiers from among neonates of the Clan. Their insistence on limiting full membership to the cult to Orthia's lineage has limited the cult's growth, but their adherence to the purity of their line remains steadfast.

The temple itself has changed little from its origins as a cistern. Banners bearing the cult's sigil hang from the stone walls and a statue of Orthia herself stands at the center of the great chamber. Winding tunnels snake away from the temple's heart. Cultists clean hideaways formerly held by the city's Nosferatu and turn them into

simple, spartan facilities. Very few of the cult's members reside within the temple, however, save for its selected guardians — warriors chosen from among the local adherents of all ranks, rotating regularly to prevent their public facade from falling to disarray. The cult has sealed and reinforced areas where the tunnels give way to the warrens of the filth that reside outside of the cult's control, and guardians from among those chosen are stationed at each point to prevent incursions.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *Rabble rousers playing with fire. Their permissive nature and lack of discipline will mean the end of them. I pray that it comes at the end of our spears.*

**Camarilla:** *They hold many of the same beliefs that we do, but they are too complacent. One day, they will fall as Athens of old, but the Spear will endure. Perhaps then, we will rebuild something stronger from their ashes.*

**Bahari:** *Even in the most charitable interpretations, Lilith's demonic nature cannot be denied. They may not bear the powers of true Diabolists, but they are not to be trusted. Nor should they be suffered to exist within our domains.*

**Church of Set:** *Unrepentant hedonists that worship a false god. They are a cancer on any civilized society they touch and must be torn out by the root.*

**Diablerie Cults:** *They're all the same: usurpers who sully their souls by consuming the essence of another. We care little for why they do it, for it changes nothing about our response. Death is the only acceptable outcome for them.*

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Shattered Spear in a chronicle.

## Death Squad

The appeal of fighting back against the Second Inquisition has gripped many coteries, but neither the Camarilla nor the Anarchs will endorse such an operation due to the scrutiny and risk that would follow. The Shattered Spear doesn't have such qualms, as evidenced when two coteries, one sourced from within the domain and another from outside it, raid an FBI office and murder everyone within, from agents to secretaries. They attempt to set fire to the building as they exit, but the sprinkler system is too effective, leaving a building filled with monstrously mutilated corpses.

The Storyteller might handle this issue through the Prince placing the domain on lockdown except for blood procurement or could follow up with reprisals from the Second Inquisition on known Kindred targets. Alternatively, the Shattered Spear may have mistakenly targeted a branch office with zero knowledge of the undead or supernatural of any stripe, leaving the FBI and everyone else clueless as to the perpetrators.

For Kindred within the domain, the heat ratchets up, all while the mystery remains as to the culprits and their motives. Was there something this office contained regarding the cult? Were there agents present who knew of Artemis Orthia's resting place? Perhaps the Shattered Spear struck so the domain's Kindred would learn their name and fear what the cult intends to do next.

## Discovering the Tomb

It's possible for a mortal to live a happy, trouble-free life. Doing so requires having no contact with vampires, as their presence ultimately brings a heavy cost. In this story, one or more of the player characters' mortal associates discover what they believe is an old tomb beneath their

homes, workplaces, or — if they're academics — perhaps on an archeological dig, and they pass this information on to the player characters.

Typically, such a find would mean extraordinarily little. Unfortunately, cultists of the Shattered Spear believe this tomb contains the torpid form of their ancestor and figure of worship, Artemis Orthia. The cultists start by harassing the mortals involved for information before attempting to bribe or threaten their way into the tomb. The mortals, increasingly anxious, report this activity to their vampire patrons and companions.

Whether or not the tomb contains Artemis Orthia matters less than what the cult does to anyone in their way. A possible worse case scenario is that the cult accesses the tomb and wakes an *unrelated* vampire of considerable age and Hunger.

If the player characters are a part of this cult, they may be the ones tasked with discovering the truth of this tomb before opening it and keeping the kine involved quiet. Ultimately, the Shattered Spear believes everyone is expendable if they're foolish enough to stand between the cult and their goddess.

## The Withered Ones

*"Do you think our kind hides in the dark for fear of the mortals? They are weak as kittens. No, they hide from the only beasts vicious and cunning enough to hunt them. The Nictuku will devour them all, and we shall help them cleanse the children of Caine."*

— Isaac Marsh,  
adherent of the Withered

Every society tells stories about bogeymen and mythological monsters that stalk the dark, preying on

those that wander too far from the safety of the light. Kindred societies, despite being made up of those very monsters in the minds of humanity, are no exception. The myth of the Nictuku has haunted Clan Nosferatu since before recorded history. The thought that the most secretive and hidden of the clans of Caine is hunted by something even more secretive amuses many Sewer Rats within the Clan. Most who have even heard the stories view the Nictuku as just a myth, nothing more. It's all too easy — and sometimes fun — to write off stories of sudden disappearances of their kin as the doings of some shadowy monster, but little evidence exists to prove that these creatures exist. Sensible Kindred, doubters claim, shouldn't fear such tales. After all, those who believe spend their existences huddled in fear in their warrens... save for those known as the Withered Ones.

## Servants of the Monster

Fear is a curious thing. Those who allow it to control them can act irrationally as the primal terror of death leads them to desperate acts of self-preservation. If something exists that desires to devour and destroy the Blood of Clan Nosferatu, then perhaps working to further the goals of these creatures might earn some the right to survive, or at least to be killed off last. It is this line of thinking that birthed the Withered Ones, a disorganized cult of maddened Hidden that has dedicated itself to destroying their clan from the inside. Lacking anything resembling structure, the Withered lurk throughout the world, plucking their own kin from the shadows and consuming them — or worse, staking them out as offerings for the Nictuku. In either case, those Nosferatu taken by them are never seen again.

The Withered Ones draw their membership from the most fearful and desperate members of Clan Nosferatu. By and large, these wretched creatures emulate the Nictuku of myth by filling their role, culling the weakest of their own clan to aid the creatures they dread and worship. If the myth is true, they reason, then the Nictuku operate on the will of the very Antediluvian that began their terrible line. They have come to see the Nosferatu as worthy of nothing save destruction, and by furthering the goal of their hidden masters, they might secure their own unlivess, at least until the very end. Whether anyone ever struck such a deal between the cult and the Nictuku, or whether these are merely the assumptions of the fear-maddened masses is unknown, even within the cult. They simply do not care. If they are right, then they will stand alone until the rest of their Clan finally crumbles to dust. And if they are wrong, they will simply die with the rest. To not make the attempt to die last or to survive would be akin to giving up now. Better, in their twisted minds, to walk into the sun and forget the fear than not to take steps to prolong their existences.

To emulate the objects of their veneration, and to distance themselves from their victims, the Withered wear grotesque masks modeled after rare descriptions of the ruined faces of the Nictuku. Even though their own faces are often more twisted than those of the masks they wear, these ritualistic objects are crafted with a sinister mien and lend their members a measure of anonymity and uniformity. While it is rare for one of the Withered to remain among polite Kindred society, some few manage to maintain a tenuous balance, and become hidden killers, wolves hidden amongst the sheep.

## Ancient Tales, Modern Blood

The tales that describe the creatures known as the Nictuku vary in detail. Some paint Nictuku as a single beast that stalks the darkness, culling those Nosferatu that become complacent or taking vengeance upon them for some unknown, ancient insult. Others weave a tale of an entire bloodline of vampires descended from the progenitor of the Nosferatu and bound to his will. Their goal: the outright destruction of his failed clan. As long as these stories have existed, so have the Withered in one form or another. The cult does not have an unbroken tradition stretching back into antiquity. Rather, the Withered Ones are a modern incarnation of an ancient fear and hatred. Again and again throughout history, the Withered Ones rise up, the cult's members grow too brazen with their killings, and other Nosferatu band together to stamp out the branches of the cult. Still, like cockroaches they return, perhaps with only a superficial resemblance to their past trappings but sharing the same desperate goal.

The modern cult has existed in small numbers for centuries. Not even their own members really know how long, as the Withered are not ones for record-keeping. They replenish their numbers as they must and share tales of their unseen masters that have warped and changed through generations of telling. Each coven is led by a single member known as the Bitter One, who carries the stories and knowledge of the cult passed down from those that came before them. The masks, they teach, are to make them one, to bind them together as a coven, and are said to represent the monstrous nature of their souls. The Bitter One likewise imparts upon the coven's members the Waymarks, scratched symbols that impart meaning among the Withered and allow scattered covens to communicate with each other and mark pathways,

traps, and other dangers that exist within the twisting passages of their holdings. Those who choose to associate with a coven at all, instead of acting as independent agents, congregate in deep warrens, their fear of the monsters they serve driving them together to protect themselves and prolong the time they have to strike against their clammates. When one of the Withered disappears without a trace, the cult considers them taken by the Nictuku. Paradoxically, they view such a fate as a blessing. Some even believe that those taken become Nictuku themselves, chosen to stalk the darkness forever.

The most common fate for the Withered is the maddened state known as Wassail when the last shreds of their humanity give way to the hunger of the Beast. Likewise, destruction at the hands of those they hunt is common. A single member might grow sloppy, attack a particularly well-defended target, or even try to take a Nosferatu from one of the more hospitable communal warrens. Even in these instances, the Withered do not seek vengeance for their fallen comrade. After all, the destruction of their fellow hunter due to their own folly safeguards those who remain against the fallen's future rash behavior. Fate is not kind to those who enter battles they cannot win. Instead, the cult moves on, slinking back into the shadows to seek targets elsewhere, at least until the other Nosferatu whom they prey upon forget their presence become complacent once again.

With the rise of the Second Inquisition, the departure or destruction of so many elder Kindred, and the loss of much of the Nosferatu information network, the Withered Ones have recruited an influx of new members. When stability breaks down, fear and desperation can become overwhelming. Some Nosferatu — driven into deeper fear and paranoia — seek out the Withered Ones, driven by their sense of

purpose and, perhaps, by the allure of a measure of safety from what lurks in the darkness just beyond their doorstep. As a result of their growing numbers, attacks by the Withered have also increased in cities that host cells of the small, scattered cult.

## Masks

The masks worn by the Withered Ones hold no special magic, but they are sacred objects to the cult just the same. Generally crafted of leather — the exact provenance of which is left to grotesque speculation — these malformed, uncanny facades resemble prevalent Nosferatu deformities taken to the extreme. The sinister features are designed in such a way as to allow deep shadows to mask the wearer's eyes and give the face a more menacing countenance should victims see the mask in any sort of light. Deep wrinkles and folds line the features to accomplish this. Usually, the mask merely frames the mouth instead of covering it, the better to allow the wearer to feed upon their intended victim.

Should one of their number fall during a hunt, the cult will take great pains to recover the fallen one's mask. Only rarely will the cult craft a new mask. Instead, the Bitter One grants new inductees into the cult the mask of one of the fallen to bring them into the fold, and to give them a connection to those who came before them. Nevertheless, one or more members of a cell often learn some measure of leatherworking so that they can provide a new mask in those rare occasions that one is needed, and they take great pains to match the grotesquery of the mask they were unable to recover.

Within their rituals, the mask takes an important place, symbolically binding them together as one within their coven. Those who have utterly forsaken their old lives go so far as to

staple or sew their mask to their faces, only leaving their mouths exposed to feed. A Withered One without their mask is one who has lost their place within the coven, and their former cohorts quickly turn on them. Even a Withered *with* their mask who acts too strangely may be devoured and their mask ripped from their body, set aside to be given to a new recruit who can honor it.

## Faith of the Withered

The faith of the Withered Ones is a simple matter. Most have given up on the unlivess they once knew to dedicate themselves to the destruction of their own Clan. Though the exact reasoning might differ from cell to cell as to why the Nosferatu deserve destruction, the primary goal remains. Each cell has its own stories, its own rituals, and unique masks that share the grotesque and twisted visage of the Nictuku.

## Sacred Acts

The Withered Ones are not without ceremony. Their rituals, held in small gatherings of the cell in a hidden chamber of their warren, help them to indoctrinate new adherents and bolster their resolve to act despite their abject fear. The local members tell stories of their kills and recite whatever local variation of the myths of the Nictuku they hold as truth. While demeanors among a cell may vary, many established adherents share a sadistic glee in these retellings. This dark amusement is proof their humanity has already begun to slip further than those more recently inducted into the cell.

The most sacred rite of all is bestowing a new mask. This is a personal rite of passage for the fresh inductee to the cult. The re-

## WITHERED CONVICTIONS

The convictions held by the Withered Ones help keep them from descending into Wassail, though they remain only a temporary measure at best.

- **Do not hesitate to slake your hunger on the unwitting**

Those Nosferatu who grow too lax in their security or too resistant to the urgings of their paranoia deserve their destruction. The Withered see them as easy targets and devour them to emulate and serve the Nictuku.

- **Never leave sign of your passage**

A Nosferatu who disappears without evidence as to their fate strikes fear into the hearts of the clan. The Withered use this to their advantage. Practicality, of course, also plays a role — with no evidence to lead back to them, they can continue to strike at the clan in secret.

- **Never strike against another Withered**

The Withered Ones are few, and thus as a measure of practicality view attacking other members of the cult as anathema. A strike against another Withered who remains true to the cause is wasted, they feel, as long as they all share the same purpose. Destroying each other deprives them of the numbers that aid them in their ability to do their sacred work.

cruit is often blindfolded, taken deep into the tunnels around the cult's lair and, seemingly, left there lost in the dark with nothing. Their objective is to find their way back to the cult, while along the way, cultists dog them — or sometimes, depending on the bloodthirstiness of the cell, hunt them — while wearing their horrific masks. The ceremony is designed to make the inductee fearful near to the point of madness, until they stumble back into the relative safety of their brethren and are given a mask of their own, which symbolically transforms them into one of the monsters that had pursued them. While many inductees to the cult are willing participants in this awful rite, having sought out the Withered Ones based on rumors and driven by their own fear, this is not always the case. Some Withered take special delight in snatching an unsuspecting Nosferatu and twisting them into one of their own through fright and torture.

When one of their own vanishes, the Withered gather, don their masks, and implore their masters to make the chosen one of them. They make offerings of their own vitae

or even capture a Nosferatu to leave staked out in a place of the coven's choosing in the hopes that they will be taken and devoured in their stead. This place is always the same; always near to the cult's lair and exposed to the sun in some way to ensure the dawn destroys the offering even if the Nictuku never claim them. Should the offering disappear, the Withered celebrate, seeing this as an acceptance of their plea. In the case that such an offering is not accepted, the leader of the cell will often devour the offering themselves and write off their missing comrade as dead. There is no rite of mourning, as the cult largely sees death as inevitable — most are only working to die *last*. Instead, they move on, and never speak of the missing again.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *They treat our hunted kin marginally better than the supposedly civilized Camarilla, but it doesn't matter in the end. We'll devour them, too... and perhaps, once our own clan is dealt with, our masters will have us move on to the others.*

**Camarilla:** *Ah, the beacon of Kindred society. It's laughable, really. Those that know of our masters believe them to be little more than ghost stories told by the wretches of a clan they merely tolerate. We shall see how they hold together when all their spymasters and information brokers vanish without a trace.*

**Clan Nosferatu:** *They cower in their holes, in their hovels, trying to outlast what they do not understand or even entirely believe in. We will make them fear the dark. Perhaps, then, more will come to see the truth for what it is?*

**The Shattered Spear:** *These zealots managed to destroy a few of us in Lisbon without understanding what or who we were. Vengeance may not be our way, but I know more than a few that wouldn't hesitate to snatch one of them up if given a fighting chance.*

## Obfuscate

### Level 2

#### Ghost's Passing

**Amalgam:** Animalism 1

The vampire can bestow a measure of subtlety to the animals under their influence, masking their steps from mundane methods of tracking.

**Cost:** One Rouse Check

**System:** Animals under the user's influence that the user targets with this power leave no track or trace

that can be seen by mundane means. Sense the Unseen (Auspex 1) can still discern signs of an effected creature's passing however, as per the general Obfuscate rules.

**Duration:** One session

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Withered Ones in a chronicle.

### Marked for Sacrifice

This story works best if the player characters' coterie includes a Nosferatu, or if the protagonists are on good terms with one of the Sewer Rats in their domain. Otherwise, a Nosferatu who finds they have nowhere else to turn may approach them, reporting that their clanmates have drastically reduced in number in recent nights.

The Nosferatu target wakes one night to find a graffiti tag depicting an open mouth on a wall near to where they sleep. At first, they think nothing of it, until a few nights later they receive a letter through the mail from an anonymous sender, instructing them to get their affairs in order. The author expresses sympathy but offers no answers as to what's going to happen. Soon after this, the Nosferatu finds themselves afflicted by tortured daysleep and unusual rumblings from beneath their haven.

Perhaps the Withered Ones are marking this vampire for sacrifice to a waking Nictuku. Alternatively, the entire ordeal may be an elaborate prank by some neonates who send the Nosferatu into a frenzy of paranoia. How the player characters respond is up to them.

### Willing Victim

Perhaps among the most bizarre Withered Ones are those who sacrifice themselves to the Nictuku or other Nosferatu cultists. They see giving their vitae up to the cult as a holy ritual which allows them to ensure the completion of a greater purpose. To the horror of the Kindred in the player characters' domain, a reasonable, respected Nosferatu elects to take this course, announcing that they intend to give themselves to the fangs of others.

Is this the plan of a willing vampire, or has the Nosferatu in question been brainwashed? Is the Sewer Rat taking this course to protect the domain from another threat, or do they genuinely believe in what they say? The SPC who announces this fate should be one close to the player characters in some way, perhaps a sire or Mawla, and this behavior should be out of the ordinary for them.

The Storyteller should choose the truth of the matter

and give the player characters the opportunity to sway the Nosferatu from this course of action, albeit with consequences from the Withered Ones.

## The Shepherds of Ur-Shulgi

*"Ur-Shulgi teaches us to feel no fear. If we surrender ourselves to him, he will cleanse us and bring us at last to his mountain."*

— Amal Nassif, Herald to Ur-Shulgi

Ur-Shulgi is a fourth-generation methuselah of immense power, who, according to some, is the greatest sorcerer who ever existed. At the time of the destruction of the Second City, he followed Haqim, his sire, to Alamut. At some point at least 1800 years ago, he entered torpor. He slumbered through the rise of the Tremere and the Hecata. He slumbered while the Prophet Mohammed was born and the Archangel Gabriel dictated the Quran. He slumbered before Christianity became a major force in the world. The Jews, of course, existed, but to Ur-Shulgi, their faith was as nothing beside the Laws of Haqim.

Ur-Shulgi awoke toward the end of the 20th century. He spent time updating himself on events in the mortal and Kindred worlds, and what he learned displeased him. Not only had several new clans not blessed by the ages arisen and come to power, but vampires, even those of the Banu Haqim, had fallen to the religions of the kine. The methuselah determined that he would purge vampires of this weakness and reinstate the Laws of Haqim. As the eldest of the Blood, Ur-Shulgi regards himself as the one who holds the power of unlife or Final Death over all vampires, those of the Blood as well as the children of Khayyin. Only a mind ravaged by the ages, torpor, and the Beast could understand his reasoning, or his acts.

By adopting a religion favored by the kine, those of the Blood render themselves apostate in the eyes of Ur-Shulgi, who proceeded to eliminate the apostates in Alamut. His leadership demonstrated to his followers that taking the heart's blood of an apostate, even one of the Blood, was commendable. Most Banu Haqim, valuing their own faiths or maybe just their own unlivess, fled Alamut and dispersed into the world, even managing to join the Camarilla. The faithful followers of Ur-Shulgi were few and, in the beginning, mostly confined to the Mountain. Observing this, Ur-Shulgi appointed twelve of the faithful as his heralds to go out into the world and spread the faith of Haqim.

# Hierarchy

Ur-Shulgi himself disappeared in the last decade, claiming to be on a pilgrimage from which he intends to return with powers beyond that which he possessed before. Before his departure, he personally appointed his heralds and decreed no one had the right to remove them from their roles. The rest of his cult hierarchy resulted from the dispersal of the faith across the globe. While members of the cult use the same titles everywhere, the functions of the positions vary considerably in accordance with conditions on the ground.

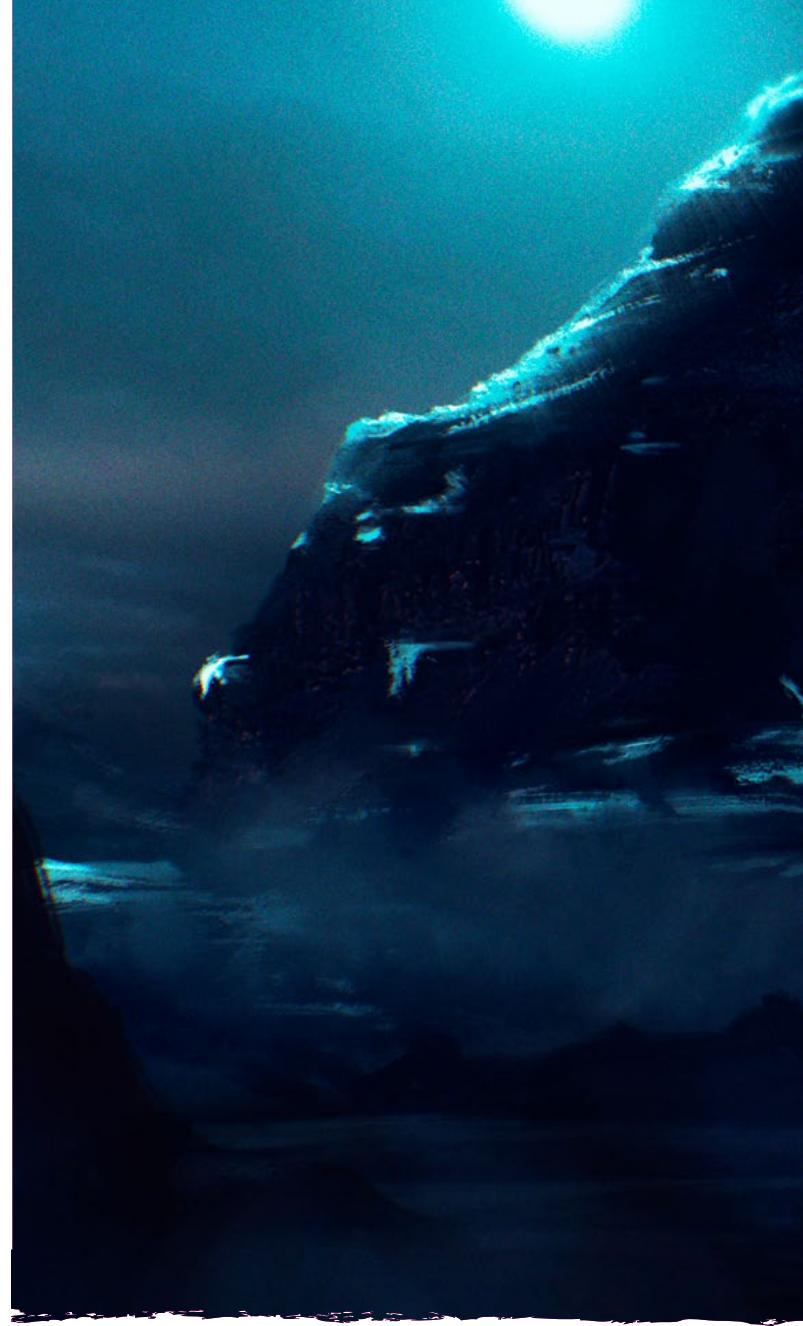
## Heralds

The twelve heralds have a broad remit: to bring primarily the Banu Haqim and secondarily other vampires back to the laws of Haqim. Those Ur-Shulgi chose were ancilla of considerable age. In the beginning, they tried traditional methods of conversion by the sword, which they swiftly found to be risky and ineffective. The twelve did not remain in close communication with one another and, as a matter of course, developed different methods of conversion and different takes on the laws. While sticking to their principles, they have adapted to local conditions.

Garnering little success in converting devotees of other religions, most heralds have taken to seeking out doubters and apostates, particularly those who crave a source of certainty. They find an enthusiastic audience among the thin-bloods. More than once, a herald has aided a thin-blood in diablerizing one of the Ashirra and attaining the 13th generation.

Twelve heralds were insufficient to manage the cult on their own, especially as most of them were peripatetic, moving from city to city. Furthermore, persecution and blood hunts in both Camarilla and Anarch domains thinned their numbers. Since the acceptance of the Ashirra into the Camarilla, the unlife of Ur-Shulgi's followers has become even more precarious in domains where the sect has influence. Most heralds settled upon the idea of leaving one of the faithful behind to lead in their stead. These local leaders are known as pashas.

The heralds never needed to be informed of the dangers of using electronic communication or the internet. They had no familiarity with either and see no need to learn. This means communication remains patchy between them and their followers, and no one is entirely certain how many heralds remain. At least five are known to be accessible to the faithful in domains across Europe and North America, including Siduri the Name-Thief and



Lugalme of the White Tongue. Others, such as Naram-Sin and Elulu, have returned to the Mountain for eternity. Their names are honored by the faithful.

## Pashas

After the herald has moved on, their pasha takes over recruitment and care of the converts, often imposing their own interpretation of the laws upon their flock. The pasha is inevitably Banu Haqim and always makes overtures to include thin-blooded believers, who are empowered within the cult.

Some pashas maintain communication with one another, but this is difficult and risky in nights in which the Inquisition monitors so much of what takes place on the internet and mobile phone apps. Most act independently



to increase the number of adherents to their faith. While heralds only assist in thin-blood diablerie of Ashirra and apostate Banu Haqim, many pashas condone the diablerie of any unbeliever. These nights, of course, most vampires in both Camarilla and Anarch domains are unbelievers.

Selective amaranth, whether committed by a thin-blood, a shepherd, or the pasha themself, if carefully done, is a viable way to bolster one's personal power. It is also a way to achieve one's own Final Death. Many pashas have fallen afoul of those vampires who discover evidence of the truth of their practices.

## Shepherds

Shepherds — the bulk of the cultists — follow the teachings and instructions of their pasha and are often re-

luctant to act on their own initiative. Rarely, they decide their local pasha has wandered too far from the path and attempt to contact a herald to complain. Even more rarely, this action succeeds, and the herald commands them to punish the errant pasha. A shepherd who successfully diablerizes a pasha usually takes their place.

## Fanatics

Mainly self-recruited from the newly Embraced thin-bloods, these fledglings assassinate and diablerize apostates, preferring those of the Ashirra. These, in the eyes of fanatics, although given the gift of a true Embrace into the Banu Haqim, have lost the privilege of their Blood. The hashishin — as they're otherwise known — are devout drinkers of souls who believe that by thus empow-

### SHEPHERD CONVICTIONS

- **Always keep faith with those sworn to the service of Ur-Shulgi**

There is remarkably little squabbling, let alone serious rivalry, among the followers of Ur-Shulgi. If a pasha or a sibling falls away from the teachings, their peers dispose of them quietly and, if of higher generation, diablerize. A shepherd always goes to the aid of a sibling who calls for assistance.

- **Show no mercy to followers of false religions**

Followers of the religions of the kine are unworthy of the Blood. This applies to all clans, not just the Ashirra. The religions of the kine are for the kine. Nevertheless, it is permissible to use them to protect the kine from the grim reality that they live and die within.

- **Never kill without profit**

When you kill a vampire, make every effort to drink their soul. If their soul is beneath you, find a sibling who can benefit and gift them the power. This way, the Shepherds of Ur-Shulgi prosper and grow strong.

ering themselves, they grow closer to Ur-Shulgi.

They also believe Ur-Shulgi himself is responsible for the Beckoning and that the closer they draw to him in generation, the greater their chances of hearing his call and receiving his summons to the Mountain. They chant *sada emedu* (Sumerian for “reach the Mountain”) as one of their number drinks the soul of an unbeliever.

No herald has ever endorsed these beliefs, although some pashas adhere to them. Even among the shepherds, most regard the self-styled hashishin as heretics.

## Organization

A cult with a penchant for amaranth is a threat to all members of the Camarilla and all Anarchs, so it is unsurprising that the Shepherds of Ur-Shulgi are often hunted down by Kindred fearful for their own souls. Few domains hold more than a small cell of shepherds. These cells always have a line of communication to the local pasha, who occupies themselves with ensuring the secrecy and safety of their members as well as their doctrinal purity.

While Ur-Shulgi chose his heralds from a group of older and more powerful Banu Haqim, pashas are often neonates

or even fledglings, no match for a powerful Prince or Baron. The shepherds survive best in unstable domains and those which face some greater external threat. They may also form nomadic or fugitive coteries which enter a domain, strike, and leave before they can be brought to task for their crimes.

## Beliefs

Ur-Shulgi commands his followers to uphold the Laws of Haqim:

**The Law of Leadership:** Honor Ur-Shulgi as He is the eldest among you. The Heralds of Ur-Shulgi carry His word and command your respect.

**The Law of Protection:** Deal honorably with mortals and protect them where possible.

**The Law of Destruction:** Do not destroy those of the Blood.

This law is one subject to interpretation, but common agreement among pashas is that “of the Blood” means “of the Shepherds of Ur-Shulgi.”

**The Law of the Word:** Deal truthfully with each other, for the word of Haqim is founded upon truth.

**The Law of Judgement:** Judge those not of the Blood and punish those who follow the faiths of the kine.

In practice, interpretation varies widely between individual cells, though all agree those Banu Haqim who follow a mortal religion are apostate and apostates forfeit the rights and privileges of the Blood. There is a great deal of dissent about whether false vampire religions render a vampire apostate. Much depends on the specific religion under discussion and local conditions.

## Modus Operandi

The practices of the shepherds revolve around bringing the apostates of the Blood and other unworthy vampires to Final Death. This a risky business, particularly in areas where the Camarilla or Anarchs hold power. Fanatics they may be, but members of the cult of Ur-Shulgi have as much investment as any vampire in avoiding the eyes of the Inquisition. Most shepherds are cautious, planning their attacks carefully and working to decrease the apostate’s power and influence before making their move. A favored tactic is to undermine, bribe, blackmail, or otherwise subvert a trusted retainer to allow a thin-blood access to her master’s haven during daylight hours.

Only the hashishin go for direct action. Whole coteries of them work together to isolate an intended victim. These fledglings also employ thin-blooded acquaintances to enter the victim’s haven during daylight hours and incapacitate them. The reward for this is sometimes diablerie,

though the hashishin are prone to losing themselves in the heat of the moment and chance alone decides who gets to drink the unfortunate apostate's essence. The hashishin are young and often careless, setting little value on their own unlivess and believing Final Death in the service of Ur-Shulgi wins them a place on the Mountain.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *Their rebellion against the outdated strictures of the Camarilla is laudable. They lack direction, though. We have had some localized success in mobilizing them against the Ashirra or the Camarilla. Similarly, in some areas, particularly in Southern Europe, we have had some success with recruitment.*

**Ashirra:** *Vile apostates. Traitors to the Blood and a danger to us all. We, devoted to the source, must reclaim their Blood.*

**Camarilla:** *A new-fangled attempt to regulate society. Well, new-fangled in some ways but deeply rooted in the times in which it formed. So, neither authentic nor up-to-date. We would tolerate them if it were not for the fact that they admitted the accursed Ashirra. Their organization and authoritarian power structure mean we must take care when operating in domains they dominate.*

**Thin-Bloods:** *We do not understand the thin-bloods, although we find their alchemy fascinating. Some amongst them wish to become true predators, and we have assisted them in reclaiming the Blood of the apostate Ashirra.*

## New Rituals

The shepherds believe Ur-Shulgi is the greatest sorcerer of all time. The heralds teach some specialized blood magic rituals, and many followers seek to develop their own.

### Level 2

#### The Shroud of Silence

This ritual creates an interior area from which no sound can escape, allowing for assassinations without screams, safecracking without the buzz of the drill, and detonations without the roar of an explosion.

- Ingredients:** A length of woven cloth, often silk. A golden ring through which the cloth can pass. Kindred vitae acquired from a vampire with the Obfuscate Discipline.

- Process:** The caster passes the cloth through the golden ring, daubs each end of the cloth in vitae, then affixes it to a door handle or threads it through a keyhole.
- System:** If the ritual succeeds, it creates a shroud of impenetrable silence centered entirely within the room to which the door serves as an entrance or exit. It lasts for a single scene. Anyone can disperse the effect instantly by removing the cloth from its place.

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks provide examples of how one might include the shepherds in a chronicle.

### Hired Gun

In the eyes of many vampires, the archetypal Banu Haqim is a hired gun; an assassin charged with exacting a blood price on another vampire, operating outside the reaches of sectarian Traditions and a Prince's laws. The Shepherds of Ur-Shulgi are willing to reinforce this stereotype if doing so allows them to pursue their aims without opposition.

In this story, one of the shepherds arrives in the player characters' domain and interrogates them for information on the whereabouts of one of their Kindred associates, their habits, and their defenses. If questioned in turn, the Banu Haqim makes no bones about being commissioned to perform a hit, with approval from "higher and greater powers than you'll ever know." It's possible the player won't recognize the authority of any vampire to destroy another without reprisal and may report these actions to the Sheriff or Prince. If they do so, each becomes incensed that one of the shepherds is operating in their domain, but fearful of approaching a dangerous killer who *may* have authority from an Archon, Justicar, or powerful elder beyond the Camarilla.

This plot highlights the strained diplomacy and politicking between domains and factions within the Camarilla, Anarchs, and cults beyond. If the assassin eliminates their target and the city does nothing in response, it effectively shows that independent killers may act with impunity and move on. If, on the other hand, the assassin is punished for their actions, the city may find itself declared an enemy of a dangerous, bloodthirsty cult.

## Heretical Purge

Few professed believers consider themselves condemnable for heresy, even if they recognize that they maintain religious opinions contrary to those prescribed by their faith leaders. They consider their point of view correct; therefore, anyone who disagrees is the one who has been misled and may very well be the true heretic.

This is the case for Banu Haqim, a clan of splinter cells and mixed beliefs, some clinging to the promise of the Camarilla, others devoted to their Islamic faith, while some hold to the beliefs of the Shepherds of Ur-Shulgi. Whether political or religious, divisions within this clan lead to bloodshed.

The mainstream of the Banu Haqim in the player characters' domain has decided that now is the time for a purge of any heresies within their ranks. If vampires won't change their beliefs, the only option for them is destruction and the hope of reconciliation in the afterlife.

This story is one with different potential scales. In a domain with few Banu Haqim, the player characters may notice that one or two of the Judges suddenly shift perspective or disappear overnight. In a domain with many Banu Haqim, a full-blown civil war might break out between territories and powerful vampires, all of whom are happy to enlist allies and mercenaries to tip the scales in their favor.

Throughout the purges, the player characters should become aware that someone in the background is orchestrating this event. They should discover clues leading to a Shepherd of Ur-Shulgi who seeks to shatter all Banu Haqim operations in the domain and arrange for the pieces to fall into the hands of the shepherds.

## The Praesidium

*"Through the mastery of the Blood, we, though dead, have conquered death."*

— from the correspondence of Meerlinda

To those outside the walls of Tremere chantries, the Warlocks seem like an ant colony, all members busying away collectively, away from the prying eyes of other Kindred. Indeed, members of the Praesidium would likely support the notion of the House and clan of Tremere as the image of organizational perfection at its height, but even their own role as the soldier ants within that structure.

They are the defenders of Tremere's legacy. They are a cult dedicated to the memory of Clan Tremere, viewing in their founder and their clan structure the perfect form of undeath.

## Ave Pyramidem

The creation of the Praesidium is a direct retort to the destruction of the Council of Seven and the attack on the Prime Chantry. Rallying around the notion of "never again," the Praesitors are an ultra-reactionary, militant front against those who war with the clan, including those Tremere they appraise as irredeemable. These magi procure boons and assets for themselves as mercenaries from needy Camarilla domains. The organization has even taken upon themselves the responsibility of "re-educating" those who take a liberal stance on Embracing those whom they deem unworthy.

The Praesidium view the Clan Tremere of the 20th century and prior as an ideal state, and aspire to emulate the clan prior to its joining the Camarilla, where they could experiment freely, make temporary pacts to organize defenses for themselves, and spend time building up their own forces of Blood Sorcery-forged bodyguards and shock troops. Those Tremere who are aware of them in these nights often refuse to speak on the group, and that's how the Praesidium likes it.

These opportunistic Kindred tithe to their local chantries to maintain their standing with local clan leaders and expect those resources to be used to promote the standing and station of the Tremere within a domain. They also work to protect the clan, as the pain of losing their leadership, either by destruction at the hands of the Inquisition or via the Beckoning, will burn forever in their minds. They boast that no Chantry defended by their cult has ever fallen, and many of their members ruminate on what might have been had they been privileged with the defense of the Prime Chantry.

In Camarilla courts, the Praesidium works to present themselves as a superior option to the Banu Haqim. They accept blood contracts, monetary resources, boons, or other exchanges for protective work, occult consultation, or general thaumaturgical violence. Praesidium market themselves as an expert security detail for other Camarilla members against the scourge of mortal Inquisitors and the Anarch rebellion. These Warlocks secretly work to undermine the Houses of Ipissimus and Carna, and anyone else who stands in the way of rebuilding the Pyramid to an image other than that laid out by Tremere when the House and clan was first founded. Or, at least, their interpretation of that image.

Highly versed in blood magic, the members of this group use the old grips, signals, and language that House and clan used before the fall of Prime Chantry. They also have made changes to their nomenclature as well. They greet each other saying, "Praesidium Victoria." They use grip hand signs with one another. While there are most definitely echoes of fraternal orders in their ritual practices, they are not exclusively male and accept all candidates whom they deem worthy from within the ranks of the clan.

## Cornerstones of the Apex

The Praesidium's dogma positions its membership as the stones sitting atop the lower echelons of the Pyramid, propping up the very top of the structure. Without them, the proud apex would be flat and uninspiring. Certainly, the foundations and base of the Pyramid do well to support them in their work, but it is they who enable the clan to achieve greatness.

In keeping with this rigid structure, the cult itself is highly organized in a military style rank system. They are led by Praesitor Bashar Wellig, one of the grandchilder of the legendary Tremere Meerlinda. It is Wellig who circulates the pronouncements and literature among the cells of the cult located in chantries across the globe from their headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky.

Below the Praesitor sit the Praetorians, headed up by Praetorian Primus Dilyana Sandelgado. Her role is to command important operations, such as the search for Meerlinda and other members of the Council of Seven, who the cult believes may be in hiding, in torpor, or in the hands of the Second Inquisition. If a Praetorian is present in any area, they are in direct command of the cult's forces; however, they tend to remain distant and oversee operations in a wide area rather than micromanage individual cells.

Prefects are those members of the cult placed in control of a local operation. Their leaders task them with the identification and recruitment of new members and with keeping those within the cult in line with its structure.

Beneath the Prefects are the rank and file, though even the rawest recruit to the Praesidium is considered by their peers to be of high standing compared to the uninitiated.

## Ave Ordinem

The Praesidium excels at selling their services to their clanmates, and even vampires outside the Tremere.

If they're to present themselves as the best and most efficient of Clan Tremere, they must act like it. The cult encourages recruitment from ex-military, police, bodyguards, and security teams. As well as those given the Embrace by their membership, the Praesidium monitors the Chantries they protect for potential recruits from within the Tremere. Of particular interest to them are Kindred who have held the office of Sheriff, Hound, Alastor, and Scourge, or assisted another Kindred working in those positions.

The cult is strongest within the American Southern states, Midwest, and Eastern seaboard. They find a resounding need for their work within former Sabbat territory, with members of both the Camarilla and Anarch Movement contracting out robust security details. While they prioritize Camarilla contracts, the cult is not above taking on bodyguard duty for Anarch rebels if the price is right. This is especially true when the Praesidium can use their position to undermine Carna or Ipsissimus.

## Cedant Classes Sanguini

The cult has sent agents to inspect and catalogue the ruins of the Prime Chantry and locate any survivors. They hope to find out the fates of the members of the Council of Seven. Their current theory is that only one council member needed to die to create such a thaumaturgical backlash within the Warlocks' blood. If they were able to reconvene the Council and replace the fallen member, preferably with one of their own, they believe their clanmates would quickly fall in line and return to the safety of the cup.

The cult is particularly interested in reports of Meerlinda's whereabouts, as she's their preferred choice to lead the clan despite their devotion to the historic clan structure. The Praesidium has gathered enough information to track the elder to one of three locations. Meerlinda is resting, or being held, somewhere in Rome, Moscow, or Krakow. With the elder's proficiency in Blood Sorcery, the cult suspects she is either toying with her captors to learn more about their abilities and their understanding of the vampiric condition, or she has entered torpor of her own volition. The Praesidium has launched preliminary missions to scout the areas they believe she may be.

The cult also conducts exploratory missions into former Sabbat territory to try to liberate any lost or stolen occult knowledge from House Goratrix before they flipped to the Camarilla. They have already made a handful of expeditions into Atlanta and discovered the abandoned Ponce de Leon Avenue Chantry. Though sacked,

### CONVICTIONS OF THE PRAESIDIUM

The leadership of the cult drills four key tenets into their followers.

- **Never work against the Pyramid hierarchy**

The key to the Praesidium is to bring a return to the order and perfection of Clan Tremere before the chaos of the modern nights. Any who stand in the way of that order have forfeited their right to call themselves magi and should be destroyed.

- **Always preserve the order of the domain**

The strong structure of the Pyramid is at its best when it reflects outward into the surrounding society. The Praesidium must remind the Camarilla of the harmony and security that can be brought about by allowing its members to monitor and secure Camarilla domains. If other sects or authorities wish to benefit from that order, they too may enjoy it, so long as they contribute to the rebuilding of the cult and clan.

- **Always retain the secrets of the clan**

In their scramble to ensure their own petty survival, the faithless members of Houses Carna, Ipsissimus, and Goratrix have bargained away sacred knowledge from within the vaults of the elders of our clan. Any such knowledge, artifacts, or secrets must be returned to the ownership of the Pyramid. Those responsible for their losses must be publicly destroyed, as an example to all.

- **Your body is a weapon to be honed**

The cult's power is the strength of its members. They are not only scholars; they are also soldiers who guard the walls within which the scholars study. The Praesidium encourages its members to cultivate exercise and combat regimens, despite their undead state.

the group did find thaumaturgical materials pertaining to control of weather patterns in the building. Concerningly, they also found Sabbat propaganda in and around the building. The agents documented continued references to "Seven Fires," depictions of three-eyed worms, and crucified shadow figures and brought them back to Louisville to decipher. The cult plans to establish a foothold within

the Ponce de Leon Avenue Chantry when the materials needed to do so become accessible.

### OPAL ST. CLAIRE

**Epitaph:** Reformed Bahari

**Quote:** *"The truth cannot serve only itself."*

**Clan:** Tremere

**Embraced:** 1850 (Born 1831)

### MORTAL DAYS: MADNESS OR PROVIDENCE?

Opal was a minor player in the spiritualism movement in her youth. She had grown up experiencing strange dreams which had the uncanny knack of coming to pass, although her audience members had to bend their minds around the images she described to find the reality behind her predictions. During the spiritualism movement's heyday, she was regularly wheeled out at high society parties, accompanied by burning incense and Ouija boards adorned with mystical symbols to impress her parents' patrons.

Her skills caught the attention of Kindred in Oxford, and she was spirited away from her family by Tremere agents under the guise of attending a reading at a meeting of an occult society. The Warlocks wished to study the source of her ability and exploit it for their own ends. For their part, her parents were happy to go along with the scheme. Having a daughter who woke screaming several times a night and often gibbered nonsensically to herself during the day was lucrative, at points, but also exhausting. They exchanged her for a tidy sum of money and to her knowledge, they never saw her again.

Conversely, Opal's predictions were deemed so useful to the Tremere who took her that they simply could not bear the thought of ever losing access to them, and so the Regent of Oxford's Chantry embraced her.

### KINDRED NIGHTS: RETURNING SIGHT

Opal's Embrace achieved the opposite effect of what the Tremere Regent intended. Following her initiation, her dreams ceased. During the day, she slept more soundly than she ever had in life. No visions of strange figures looming out of the darkness or portents of creeping doom came to her. There was only the eternal silence and solace of deathly darkness.

Opal enjoyed this clarity for a brief time, but her sire did not. After all, there had been only one reason for Cassandra Lee to bring this new childe into the fold. It would not do to admit that the Embrace had unforeseen consequences and call her judgement into question. There had to be something wrong with Opal.

Lee would spend as much time as needed to discover what that was and how to remedy it.

Each night, she dissected, studied, and questioned her childe. In her pursuit to exhaust every possibility, Lee drained St. Claire of blood, fed her to bursting, and placed her in ritual circles among chanting Warlocks. All manner of horrors were laid upon her in the name of helping her return to the half-mad, sleepless state Lee had lived in her whole life.

Shut in from the outside world, Opal was barely aware of the Chantry's fall or her own rescue at the hands of Kindred loyal to Lilith, known as the Bahari. However, they offered her fellowship, a purpose like she had never felt before, and a fresh start away from her clan's abuse.

Opal's transition back to the outside world invigorated her. She quickly rose in the ranks of the Bahari and travelled to spread the word of their unholy gospel. Her preaching took her all over Europe and finally to Poland, where something happened that she could not explain. On her first day sleeping in the new country, she was confronted by visions much like those she had experienced in her youth. These were clearer, however, and showed a blood-soaked woman reaching out to her, calling her to her side, repeating the phrase, "Return to your Blood and you will find me." The priestesses rejoiced that Opal had been touched by Lilith herself, but this explanation did not ring true to Opal. She felt a different calling, one that urged her to return to her clan. She slipped through the fingers of the Bahari delegation and set out in search of Kindred scholars who might identify the mysterious figure.

She found the waiting arms of the Praesidium. Operating under an assumed identity and falsified age (she claims to be a neonate

named Claire Slate, whose sire was destroyed in the Vienna attack), she has cleaved her way into their ranks. Her admittance into the cult came by way of her sharing the visions she had of the bloody woman, who others among the cult believe to be Meerlinda. Something of this rings true with Opal, who now suspects she's to be integral in the elder Tremere's awakening.

#### PLOTS AND SCHEMES:

- Find the Lady:** Opal seeks to locate the woman in her dreams. Her sleep is monitored by a team of mortal servants who note her every utterance and debrief her as soon as she wakes to describe any images that appeared to her by day. The Praesidium believe she is the key to locating Meerlinda.
- Bahari Target:** The Bahari will not allow Opal to slip away so easily and are actively seeking her out, believing she had a holy vision. The Praesidium do their best to shield and protect her from her pursuers.

#### TERRITORY AND FEEDING HABITS:

- Louisville Chantry (Haven 3, Resources 3, Status 2)** Opal is presently a resident of the Louisville, Kentucky Chantry where she enjoys the protection and patronage of the Praesidium, who view her as a sort of chosen one.
- Predator Type: Blood Leech (Tremere fledglings)** Opal has a strong preference for feeding from the young and the impressionable within her clan, justifying that it strengthens her hold over them while assured (through the Tremere clan bane) that she won't become Blood Bound to any of her vessels.

#### THRALLS AND TOOLS:

- Cult Attendants (Retainers 2)** As a member of the cult, Opal has full access to the kine who serve them and seek one night to be initiated into the ranks of the Warlocks.

#### KINDRED RELATIONSHIPS:

- Bashar Wellig (Hopeful)** The Regent of the Louisville Chantry and descendant of Meerlinda believes that "Claire Slate" is the next great hope for his clan and his ancestor. He's become so taken with her visions that despite his age and purported wisdom, he's never doubted her identity.
- "Sleeper" George Price (Witch Hunt)** This Bahari representative, generally consigned to monitoring the gardens his cult establishes around the world, has received intelligence that the errant Opal St. Claire isn't far from his present location. He intends to find the truth of the matter. If she is indeed within his reach, he will find a method of resecuring or eliminating her.

#### WHISPERS:

- Prophet:** While Kindred ranted and raved about Gehenna at the turn of the millennium, thin-bloods with visions were turning up all over the place. It was far rarer for vampires with verifiable clans to receive such visions. For this reason, talk of a Tremere with prophetic visions has caught the attention of several Kindred.
- From Whence She Came:** Unknown to Opal St. Claire, her sire Cassandra Lee survived the fall of the Oxford Chantry and is also a member of the Praesidium. If the two become aware of each other again, trouble is liable to ensue.

- **Poisoned Well:** Opal St. Claire has a dreadful suspicion that her sire was also a Bahari, and arranged her abduction as part of the experimentation process she was long exposed to.

### MASK AND MIEN:

- Opal operates two Masks, the first being that of British national on an American working visa, named Chandler Terry (**Mask 2**), while the other is her Kindred Mask of Claire Slate (**Mask 2**), for which she selected a vampire she'd heard was destroyed in Vienna as her sire. She knew just enough about this deceased Kindred — a reclusive Tremere named Spiros Busmalis — to forge a believable cover story.
- Despite her great age, Opal can seem naïve. She has not experienced much of the outside world and spent most of her formative years living in her own head, locked in the Chantry, or subject to the narrow view of the Bahari. She speaks quietly but is always earnest.
- Opal has what might be described as a chameleonic appearance, with unremarkable facial features, dark brown skin, and flat, dead-looking black hair that falls to the sides of her head in a bob. She bears the appearance of someone who never took care of her appearance, because she never really did. Even when she was alive, her parents preferred to keep her disheveled, as it added to her mystique.

**Sire:** Cassandra Lee

**Ambition:** I will find the bloody woman's identity

**Convictions:** Die before succumbing to captivity

**Touchstones:** Vlas Kosior, one of the mortals assigned with watching over Opal as she sleeps

**Humanity:** 5

**Generation:** 10th

**Blood Potency:** 3

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1; Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3; Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

**Secondary Attributes:** Health 4, Willpower 7

**Skills:** Brawl (Kindred) 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2; Animal Ken 1, Etiquette 2, Insight 3, Performance (Clairvoyant) 3, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge (False Identity) 3; Awareness 2, Investigation 1, Occult (Bahari) 3

**Disciplines:** Auspex 3, Blood Sorcery 3, Dominate 2, Protean 1

**Flaws:** Dark Secret — Heretic (••), Prey Exclusion — Mortals (••)

**General Difficulties:** 5/3

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *They have their freedom, but what do they do with it? Anarchs are wastrels, ill-suited to study or mastery of worthwhile disciplines like swordsmanship, blood magic, or meditation. They might enjoy their loose leash, but they only spend their time chasing their own tails.*

**Camarilla:** *Our ancestors helped form this sect. It remains one of the grandest structures of our kind, outlasting all attempts at eroding its power.*

**House Carna:** *They defy expectation, as these novices, witches, and sorcerers (which is what they are, in my view) appear to thrive without the rigidity of House Tremere. Do they have a benevolent patron, perhaps?*

**House Ipsissimus:** *A shame on the clan. They parody ignorant mortal rituals aped from some Crowley type or other. Sometimes they create a flash of light, but more often they sit alone in the dark, trying to remember the light switch's location.*

**House Tremere:** *Our parents, our kin, our companions, our mentors, and our wards. It's our responsibility to follow them and protect them. They are more important than any other Kindred walking or torpid. We must return them to their former glory.*

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Praesidium in a chronicle.

### Old Knowledge

The Praesidium would like nothing better than to prove themselves right and watch disappointment and humiliation mar the faces of their enemies before they obliterate them. When they discover the whereabouts of a trove of Tremere-penned books and litanies, they realize they may be on the cusp of reinvigorating the clan with some of its old power and standing almost as tall as the vampire responsible for its creation.

Unfortunately, the researchers discover that the trove's location is beneath another cult's safehouse in the player characters' domain. The Praesidium may recruit the player characters to break in or drive the standing cult away from its haven, or the targeted cult may ask for their help defending the coming Praesidium raid. Alternatively, player characters may want to pick through the wreckage of a cult vs. cult conflict and steal away the spoils.

This story provides an opportunity for player characters to act as the moderators between two rival cults or take the side of one against the other. It also gives them the opportu-

nity to delve into trials and traps beneath the cult safehouse in search of this purported store of knowledge, which could wake the treasure trove's torpid guardian.

## Strengthening Blood

Clan Tremere's vitae doesn't contain the properties it did in years before. The attack on the Vienna Chantry weakened their Blood enough to prevent their ability to Blood Bond other Kindred, causing no end of trouble for a clan skilled in the control of others through vitae.

Therefore, it comes as a surprise to those Tremere who hear of it, that a Warlock by the name of Jennifer Corneta in Charlotte, North Carolina supposedly has a handful of Anarchs in her thrall. Most curious is her status within the clan, as Corneta was a failure of the Louisville Chantry and had all her access to the Chantry's inner sanctums and secrets revoked, resulting in her flight

to another domain. She supposedly joined the Praesidium in recent years, though why she joined a cult dedicated to reinforcing a clan that abandoned her, none can say.

If it's true that Corneta has found a way to make the Blood Bond work, her vitae would become extraordinarily valuable to other Warlocks. She also represents a threat to the clan, as she's at the foot of the Pyramid, and vampires of House Tremere have no desire to see the power structure — fragile as it presently is — inverted in worship of some aberration of the Blood. The Praesidium is likewise torn, as Corneta fails to represent the virtues they recognize in the Tremere and attributes they aspire to emulate, yet she exhibits an ability with vitae even Karl Schrekt cannot claim to possess.

The hunt begins to protect, kidnap, murder, or otherwise deal with this valuable Warlock neonate, with the outcome potentially sending widening cracks through the clan.





# Dreams of Golconda

*“What is salvation but a nepenthe to make one think oneself superior to the damned?  
Salvation is as real as damnation. Both are as real as we make them.”*

— The Master of Ravens, Founder of the One True Way

According to Cainite legend, it was one of the Antediluvians — one of the godlike and mysterious clan founders — who first discovered the existence of Golconda, the supposed state of salvation and grace that existed for vampires. For millennia, the promise of Golconda lured hundreds of Kindred, some travelling the path alone, others forming cults dedicated to solving its riddle. Of those hundreds, most failed. Of those that succeeded... if they still exist, their names are forgotten.

Religions form to venerate the state of Golconda, push their adherents toward it, and promise all the answers a Kindred could need to reach it. Some of these faiths may represent a certain kind of truth, while others are the fabrications of unbridled charlatans looking to sap their disciples of all their worth before disposing of them.

Each of these cults covers a different aspect of that fabled quest for Golconda, though none can guarantee they know the true path, or if indeed one exists.

## The Children of Salvation

*“There’s a Demon inside all of us. Sometimes I speak with mine. She has a terrible sense of humor.”*

— Chioma Etomi, Atron of Lagos

The Children of Salvation believe vampirism is not a curse — at least, not in the Biblical sense — but a demonic infestation. Through diablerie, they believe, the demon’s essence can be captured in a single Cainite host and exorcised from the world. The cult is fanatical in this pursuit — and why shouldn’t they be, when the ability to rid both mankind and the Cainite host of the infection is within their grasp?

## The First Child

In 1212 CE, a Malkavian prophet saw her Hunger in a vision. The prophet’s name is lost to the ages, but a record

of her vision survives. Her vision revealed to her that Caine opened his soul to this demon when he slew Abel in jealousy, which is merely a hunger for recognition. When Caine Embraced the first vampire, the Hunger spread its essence to them too — and then to their children, and theirs, all the way down to the current generation of vampires.

Rather than recoil in horror, the prophet sought the demon out through induced visions. She taunted it, night after night, until finally it let slip the means of its destruction — the Ritual of Salvation. Elated, the prophet performed the ritual on herself, to no effect. Twice more she tried, growing faint and delirious with hunger. On the third night, driven by blood lust, she hunted and drained a family of seven. As their dying gasps reached the Lord in Heaven, the Malkavian glimpsed the last piece of the puzzle. The ritual didn't work because the demon had spread its essence through thousands of hosts. She needed to consolidate it before the exorcism would work.

## The Children

The First Child turned to diablerie to thicken the demonic infestation in her vitae. Neonates, ancillae, and even elders fell under her fangs — sheer numbers were the only consideration. As word of her atrocities spread, so too did the number of Princes set against her and vampires paying heed to her teachings. The Malkavian's lone quest grew, unbidden, into a gospel.

The few Cainites who dared approach the First Child for tutelage — and even fewer who escaped her bloodlust — experimented with diablerie. Age and generation, they discovered, did matter to some extent. An elder carried more demonic infection than a neonate, but multiple neonates carried more combined

than an elder and were easier to hunt and consume. The Children of Salvation could continue to target the low-hanging fruit, or they could raise each other up so they could go after the top of the food chain.

The Children of Salvation organize as a hierarchy intended to boost each other. The First Child — the sole survivor of the cult's last iteration — stands at the top of the hierarchy, with the atrons below them. The atrons, in turn, recruit neonates and ancillae, selecting targets who show great ambition and promise. They tutor their charges, carefully helping them to scale the ranks of the vampire society in their city. If prospective acolytes sometimes need a little persuading before they join — well, the cult isn't above tearing someone down to create an opportunity to offer salvation when the night is darkest. This tutoring can continue for years or even decades, as the cult supports formerly lowly neonates into a steady increase in power and renown. This is the cult's dormant stage.

## Salvation's Hunt

When the Children of Salvation possess a sufficient number (anywhere above seven — a number the Children consider significant) of powerful young members, the First Child invokes the ritual of Salvation's Hunt, which targets only cultists of this faith.

This ritual has three stages, and its targets feel each immediately and keenly. Neonates are the first called to hunt. At this point, the ancillae and elders may only defend themselves or set passive traps — and many do so from the moment they take an acolyte, as they have no forewarning when the hunt is afoot. Next, the First Child loosens the ancillae's leash. No one directs the hunt, though it's contained within the cult itself. Survival and pragmatism dic-

tate that the youngest members take out the big targets first. There's power in numbers, and a coterie of neonates — later joined by ancillae — has an easier time confronting an elder than a single neonate. The First Child remains in the shadows, while atrons clean up as best they can. Meanwhile, the Children tear a bloody swath through the city, seeking out the eldest among their number. The rise of the Second Inquisition aided the atrons in this, as most Princes suspect hunters of being behind this cult's carnage rather than their vampiric brethren, but no amount of obfuscation can conceal such rampant killing for long.



Following three or more Final Deaths in the hunt's course (with bystanders and coterie-mates unaffiliated with the cult forming a part of this number), the First Child steps out of the shadows and makes themselves a deliberate target — defending themselves, their havens, and their Touchstones, though they never hunt other Children themselves.

When the Children have run their course through a city — or are forced out — they turn on each other in one last night of diablerie, eschewing the preference for hunting "upward" as ancilla falls on ancilla, and neonate falls on fledgling. The Last Child standing then performs the Ritual of Salvation. The Children believe that if their vitae is properly infused with the demon's essence, the ritual succeeds and the demon is banished back to hell. Subsequently, all surviving participant vampires should become mortal again — though the cult isn't sure whether they do so with a full lifespan remaining, or if ages of

### THE RITUAL OF SALVATION

The Children's ritual does not have a write-up. If it works, it's because the characters earnestly worked toward it and the group is running a Golconda chronicle. It is based on Blood Sorcery, but that too is no obstacle — Salvation's Hunt imbues the Last Child with the innate knowledge needed to perform the ritual.

undead leave them as bones and ash. If the Last Child's vitae hasn't achieved full demonic saturation yet, they instead relocate to another city. Here they assume the title of First Child and start the great work anew. This practice leaves the cult waning and waxing over the centuries.



It sometimes has happened that two — and one time even three — Children believed themselves to be the last one standing. Each then travelled to new cities where they began anew as the First Child, leading to several iterations of the cult. The Children don't exactly keep a low profile, and branches may fall to hunters and Kindred Sheriffs. If two iterations of the Children do find out about each other, their respective members stop at nothing to hunt each other down — after all, that's a lot of demonic energy in single packages. Currently, Barcelona's Children of Salvation, led by First Child Joanna Dietrich, is the largest cult cell, but other Children exist in Lagos and New Orleans, and in smaller domains dotted around the globe.

## The Heresy

In nearly a thousand years, the Children haven't achieved their Ritual of Salvation. It's entirely possible that diablerizing a demon spread over fifteen-and-counting generations of vampires just takes time. Some of the Children, though, blame a modern heresy. As mortal society shifted from a communal to an individual focus, so did some of the acolytes' attentions. Rather than seek salvation for all kine and Cainites, they pursue Golconda for themselves. They seek the same path and ultimate goal — but intent is everything in spiritual workings, and theirs sullies the ritual. One atron, a Toreador named Emilie Montat, advocates for a pre-hunt selection in which atrons diablerize unworthy acolytes. Only when that is done, Montat says, should the First Child call Salvation's Hunt.

## Hierarchy

The cult's founder disappeared somewhere in the fourteenth century, and most Children suspect that an acolyte diablerized her in accordance with the Children's practices. The current First Child, Joanna Dietrich, is the survivor of Salvation's Hunt in Dresden. She traveled Europe before settling down in Barcelona. Dietrich takes the Sagrada Familia as her haven, finding that its state of perpetual construction resonates well with the Children's work. Dietrich has not felt the Beckoning, as her Blood Potency has nothing to do with her age.

Below Dietrich stand the atrons. These are the potent Kindred the First Child recruited on her arrival in her new city. Receiving direct tutelage from Dietrich, they are the most dedicated and knowledgeable of cult members. They're also the ones who can see the effects of centuries of diablerie passed down. Dietrich, at twenty years old and a fifth-generation vampire courtesy of diablerie, is barely coherent on her best nights. Most nights, she's a

mess of souls, minds, and transcending prophecies. Her Blood is so warped that none of the atrons can even guess at her clan.

The atrons, in turn, patronize the cult's ancillae and neonate acolytes. Most often, an atron first tutors an ancilla and then, with their help, takes on one to three neonates. These little families of adopted siblings lay the seed for Blood Hunt-driven coteries. It's incredibly rare for atrons to ever perform the Embrace, with the cult currently contemplating whether it should be forbidden entirely. Between the four recruiting atrons, the Children count a score or so of acolytes (one Embraced by an atron without permission) and a couple of prospects. The acolytes all know each other and, despite recognizing that some night they must hunt each other down, they form a tight-knit group. They're subtle in public, but acolytes can always count on each other for support at Cainite gatherings. They quietly repeat each other's suggestions, whisper other acolytes' praises, and back power plays against enemies. All know that for the Ritual of Salvation to work, the Last Child must be the strongest among them. Each acolyte may believe that to be themself, but also know it's not a proper test unless the competition is fierce.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *The natural chaos and violence in Anarch domains serves us well. They barely communicate with each other, allowing us to visit a whole string of them before one finally warns the next. Their idealism and sense of communal spirit also makes them fine acolytes for the path to Salvation.*

**Camarilla:** *They're too focused on the material and secular to suit us. Before the Second Inquisition, they were also too well-organized. Now though, we find we can save one city at a time without alerting the lot of them. They are rich in resources, so a Last Child may visit them if they need to shore up the cult's material wealth.*

**Clan Lasombra:** *Mystics who deal with the home of the demon. Some of our apocrypha claim the First Child — the original one — was Lasombra rather than Malkavian. Lies, I'm sure, but we did function well within the Sword of Caine before its fall.*

**The Shattered Spear:** *We sometimes seek out the most ancient vampires, whose Blood runs thick with the demon. We tried with Mithras, but someone got there before us. Orthia also makes an appealing target, and Lisbon is not far from Barcelona.*

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Children of Salvation in a chronicle.

## CONVICTIONS OF THE CHILDREN

- **Fast until strictly necessary**

The Children view Hunger as a literal demon and their sworn immortal enemy. They're meticulous and disciplined about feeding. They even adhere to meditation-guided fasts.

- **Obey the call of the Hunt**

The best time for an acolyte to kill an atron is right at the start of the hunt, before the atrons can warn each other that the First Child has called it. They need to strike quickly and decisively, though. The Children leave no room for sympathy once the hunt begins.

- **Nobody must come before the cult's wellbeing**

In the end, only one Child can remain. The atrons encourage all Children to prepare a "last will" of sorts, in case they are not the Last Child. This might be an encrypted USB stick holding access information to a Swiss bank account, or the key to a vault containing rare Cainite lore. A recent conviction going back to World War I, its purpose is to give the Last Child all possible resources to start anew as the First Child.

- **Always strive to banish the Demon**

This is the Children's ultimate purpose. It's a glorious, triumphant pinnacle celebrating a near millennium of work — and it hasn't happened yet, but every Child believes they will be the one to finally do it.

## Caught in the Crossfire

The Children of Salvation are pursuing one of their purges. Thankfully, the cult tends to stick to its own membership in its cause of purification. While they first aim to consume each other and thus refine their Blood and souls, this practice does on occasion spill over into mainstream Kindred society.

In this case, unknown to any other Kindred in the domain, the Primogen of a strong clan in the city was a Child of Salvation, and has fallen victim to diablerie due to their cult's practices. The Primogen's loyal clanmates have sworn vengeance on the parties responsible for their representative's destruction.

This story presents a murder mystery with many crossed wires. The Primogen's clanmates believe that the Primogen was slain due to enmity with other clans on the Primogen Council. The hardline Camarilla

representatives in court believe that the Primogen fell to an Anarch assassin. Meanwhile, the cult continues its bloody purge and soon, another vampire falls.

The player characters need to follow the bloody trail back to the Children of Salvation and contain the threat. The cult, in turn, will do everything in its power to ensure Salvation's Hunt continues without interruption.

## A Tasty Morsel

When cult cells enter their self-destructive phase, some cultists occasionally have a moment of clarity and try to break with the pack. In this case, one of the Children of Salvation believes that Salvation's Hunt will shortly commence, and they turn to the player characters' coterie for sanctuary against the coming purge.

This story allows player characters to find out about the Children of

Salvation and possibly cross them at the same time, as their defending an errant Child is a good way to upset the cult's righteous plans. By assisting one of their former members, the player characters may earn a Mawla and a cult of Adversaries at the same time, with the Storyteller having the option to make their ward a vampire of little political importance, thereby making the story one concerning morality, or one of major political significance, upping the stakes and the demands the characters can impose on the individual in their care.

## "I was a Vampire once..."

To the outsider looking in, the Children of Salvation are a cannibalistic, deeply misguided cult. But *something* draws vampires to their ranks: their belief in a mortal life at the end of all the murder and fear.

In the case of this story, a mortal introduced to one of the player characters, perhaps through another mortal acquaintance, realizes immediately what the vampire is and proceeds to contact them again privately, later. When they do so, they ask all kinds of questions about the Masquerade, who the Prince is, whether the Tremere are still standing, and so on — but not in the style of an interrogator so much as in the way of someone genuinely interested in catching up on a life they left behind.

This individual believes they were once Kindred, although they're now mortal. They claim to have lived a wonderful life since transcending undeath. They put their mortal, enlightened state down to the Children of Salvation, and are curious as to whether the cult still exists in any form. They're happy to lead the player characters to any spots where the Children once gathered.

Whether this mortal was undead at some point is up to the Storyteller, but if so, it's a major validation of the Children of Salvation's methods.

Alternatively, this individual may be a member of the Second Inquisition with a brilliant cover identity, a ghoul commanded to behave this way by some Kindred puppet master, or just one of the kine who learned too much and wants to find out more by conning a coterie of vampires.

## The Butterflies

*"Joseph and I have worked out this pretty scheme. Mortals are like caterpillars, full of curiosity and life, exploring everywhere and hungry for every new experience. We vampires are like dead chrysalides, unable to feel acutely, barely able to recall those passions we felt in life. By studying our former larval state, we start a chemical process within our dead bodies by which we attain to a new and perfected life as imagos or, as the common people call them, butterflies."*

— Blanca, from her diaries

To the Butterflies, Golconda is a promise of transformation. Through the emulation of other creatures and the aspiration to change oneself, one might achieve metamorphosis into a better, more divine being.

## Blanca's Rapture

A 19th century Diva named Blanca believed that by observing and following the ways of humankind, she could rid herself of the curse of vampirism. Although she was aware that others believed the way to Golconda was through good works and saintly behavior, Blanca disagreed. She noted that few mortals are saintly; even those devoted to good works expect something, even if it was only admiration, in return.

In emulation of the women Blanca followed, she faithfully adopted their fashions, sitting up at night with her friends and followers poring over model books and discussing how best to replicate the dresses, skirts, and accessories they found within. She read all the popular newspapers and went out, clad in her latest creations, to attend shows in music halls. She delighted in trashy novels, crying Blood tears over tales of women abandoned. She adopted large-eyed puppies and kittens and mourned their demise when she proved incapable of looking after them properly. She wanted to appear more human than human.

Blanca set out upon this course on July 13th, 1854. Together, Blanca and her ghoul Joseph assembled a family of followers: some Kindred, some mortals, and a handful of ghouls. They all loved and supported Blanca who was, by all accounts, an exceptionally charismatic individual. Precisely 60 years from when she started her quest, she

found the Rapture — a state of being the Butterflies call “transcending undeath.”

Joseph reported Blanca's Rapture to her friends and followers. He gave a detailed account of her walk into the sunrise. They wept when Joseph explained why, regretfully, Blanca could no longer visit them. To do so, he said, would risk her losing touch with her new-found mortality. Joseph conveyed Blanca's regrets; she was, of course, as devastated as they were about this separation, though she was also excited by her new life. Horace, one of Blanca's closest friends in the coterie immediately volunteered to become Joseph's domitor as Blanca, being mortal, could no longer provide him with sustenance. Joseph claimed to be in close touch with Blanca, reporting back to her coterie on her progress.

Naturally, nobody knows if anything Joseph claimed was true, but the important thing was that they *believed*.

The Great War disrupted the work of Blanca's coterie, though it provided them with opportunities to observe blessed mortals and the ways in which those beautiful beings dealt with tragedy. They passed many a sad evening reading the works of the war poets aloud to one another and relating tales of the loss of beloved sons, lovers, fathers, and husbands in the horrible trenches on the battlefields. The coterie and friends later experienced a tragedy of their own when, in 1923, Joseph reported Blanca herself had passed away, following a short battle with cancer. She hadn't been seen in some time anyhow, so nobody investigated the news thoroughly, though an obituary in her name was reported in the Times newspaper.

## Reality TV Shows

In memory of blessed Blanca and her Rapture, Butterflies today strive to act exactly as they did when mortal. More so, perhaps, as they spend a lot of time studying modern human behavior. While many on the path to Golconda strive for moral superiority, the Butterflies strive to be perfectly ordinary. Unnervingly so. They study human society through art as well as life. While the nightlife of others of their kind revolves around high art in galleries and theatres or exclusive nightclubs catering to the fringes of society, the Butterflies take roles behind the scenes on reality shows, beauty contests, and community plays. These, they believe, show humans as they are: ordinary people, not edgy clubbers or refined artistes. They model their unives and relationships on these examples.

The Butterflies hold their ghouls in high regard, not just as useful servants, but as an important key to understanding the nature of humanity. These beings are a half-way state between the Kindred and true mortality. Joseph

is still among them and enjoys deep respect as the one closest to Blanca. He continues to be greatly influential and receives sustenance from the most senior Butterflies, not necessarily the oldest among them or the lowest in generation, but those closest to the Rapture.

## Organization

Butterflies form families consisting of vampires, ghouls, and mortal friends, lovers, blood dolls, and Touchstones. Different families have different internal hierarchies, but all are loosely tied together by Joseph and his band of senior ghouls.

### The Family Home

The Butterflies live in homes with their chosen families. These shared havens are often of considerable size. A few family members are fledglings, but their ranks include a surprising number of elders, mostly those who become jaded with the politics of vampire society, though some join in the hope of finding a means of avoiding the Beckoning or dodging Final Death.

Butterflies treat all members of their household with respect. Within the family unit, these vampires adopt the titles of “mother,” “grandfather,” “uncle,” and so on, to imply position within the cult. When a visitor encounters the vampires in their family home, the visible affection of mortal behavior is swiftly discernible, as mother’s always baking something, daughter’s arranging a date, and dad’s fixing the car in the garage. They greet everyone with sweet smiles and the pretense of familial unity.

### Joseph and His Senior Ghouls

Liaison between different households is light and carried out by Joseph and his band of senior ghouls. They enjoy massive respect throughout the Butterfly community and are welcome in any household they visit. A visit from Joseph himself is a great honor. Butterflies go to great lengths to ensure he has all he needs and to provide suitable entertainment. The other senior ghouls are hand-picked by Joseph and thus enjoy almost as much respect as he does. They liaise closely and any who disobey Joseph disappear, leaving only their domitor and family members to mourn them.

### Beliefs

Butterflies believe the vampiric state is intermediary between the mortal state and the Rapture. Mortals (never “kine”) are known as caterpillars. Ugly and crude

### BUTTERFLY CONVICTIONS

- **Always strive to change your rigid, crystalline nature**

We evolve from caterpillar to chrysalis, and only when our rigid natures break down internally can we return to life and achieve the Rapture.

- **Never feed without consent**

If the household cannot provide, the family brings us willing mortals.

- **Never allow the Beast to take over**

We feed enough to prevent our Beast from taking us over; no more.

- **Always submit to whatever forfeit the household sees fit to impose**

When we fail in our tasks, whether great or small, our household imposes forfeits and punishments upon us commensurate with our failures or our fault. We submit to these with gratitude as we know our household loves us and wishes only to lead us to the Rapture.

in some ways, but divinely fitted to their function and containing great potential. The vampiric state is known as the chrysalis, something apparently dead but undergoing great changes beneath the surface. Only with the Rapture does the true form, the imago, break free. Although the chrysalis is closer in time to the Rapture, Butterflies of a philosophical bent consider it to be a state lacking in that wonderful vitality that the caterpillars and imago have in common. Ghouls are outside this process and sacrifice their own metamorphosis to assist the Butterflies in their emergence from the chrysalis state. Having made this sacrifice, they are worthy of the greatest respect.

## The Household Within the Domain

A Butterfly household could exist in any domain. As they strive to act like mortals, their activities do not tend to draw either the attention of the Inquisition or of vampires who occupy themselves with the politics of their kind. They associate with other vampires as little as possible, though they obey the rules of whomever oversees the domain. Often, they send one of their retainers to represent the household at Elysia and other meetings where failure to attend might have adverse consequences. Overall, outsiders regard them as harmless eccentrics.

The Butterflies do not recruit, though Joseph and his crew occasionally introduce a likely candidate to a household. Most Butterflies are Toreador and Malkavians, though members of any clan can join as long as the existing members agree they would make compatible housemates and family members. The Butterflies have mixed feelings about thin-bloods. They do not fit nicely into the caterpillar, chrysalis, imago scheme. Some households have allowed them to join on a similar basis as ghouls, though Joseph has never admitted any of them to his inner circle. Many have the impression Joseph considers the Duskborn to be aberrations, unworthy of his attention.

## Initiation

If a chrysalis or, for that matter, a mortal, wishes to join a household, they need an introduction from Joseph or a member of his circle. After this, if the household to which the senior ghoul introduces them is willing, the candidate lives in the haven as a guest for a probationary period. This is usually a span of three months, though it can be shorter if the candidate shows themselves to be totally unsuitable. The established household then holds meeting to decide whether to welcome the candidate as a member of the family. If they opt to invite the probationary member to the family, the household throws a big party to celebrate. If the candidate is mortal, this is when they learn the true nature of their new family.

It is rare for a Butterfly to create a ghoul without Joseph's request. No being should be forced to leave the cycle against their will, so ghoul creation goes against their core beliefs. Sometimes, though, one of the mortals in the family pleads for the granting of this form of sacrifice and service. If they are sincere in their desire, it may happen. Joseph is more

likely to grant this dispensation in cases when the caterpillar craving this favor is mortally ill.

Similarly, Butterflies do not often Embrace and, when they do, they chose their childe from their own household in consultation with Joseph himself, as one worthy to undergo the next stage in transformation.

## Sacraments

Joseph or, in his absence, one of the senior ghouls he recruited to assist him, decides when a chrysalis is ready to metamorphosize and when a vampire is ready for the Rapture. The entire household celebrate all night long, saying their joyful and tearful farewells to the chosen chrysalis. The ghoul then watches the chosen one as he or she walks into the sunrise.

Mostly, the watcher returns to the household the following evening and, weeping tears of joy, reports that the Butterfly has flown. This retainer remains the sole channel of communication between the household and the member taken by the Rapture until the new imago slips off their mortal coil. But occasionally, tragically, the beloved was not ready for the Rapture. In this case, the retainer brings their ashes back to the household for the weeping survivors to mourn or allows them to drift away on the wind.

## Enemies

The Butterflies pose little threat to anyone or to the Masquerade, but occasionally, the sire of a newly initiated vampire or the mortal family members of a newly adopted mortal child or sibling might mount a mission to rescue their errant offspring from the brainwashing cult. The greatest risk comes from mortal families who, determined to retrieve their loved-one, call in the mortal authori-

ties. Joseph is aware of this threat and takes care only to introduce mortals with no such close familial ties; he rarely gets this wrong.

Another threat comes from within the cult. Joseph grows increasingly concerned, as some members of the family have begun exhibiting doubts regarding to the metamorphosis process. He may need to make some examples to reinforce the cult's faith.

## Perspectives

**Camarilla:** *We prefer to set up our households in domains where the Camarilla hold sway. The order they impose gives us freedom to pursue our own ends if we keep their simple rules. Joseph and the other retainers understand how to deal with them. Sadly, they are rigid. They do not perceive their chrysalid state could lead them to brighter and better things.*

**Anarchs:** *Joseph tells us Anarch domains are chaotic. He finds Barons have less respect for him than do Princes. Most households seek to move if the Anarchs take over a domain in which they are resident.*

**The Ministry:** *One of this clan discovered us in recent years. They laughed at us and called us an elaborate blood cult. We staked that swine to the lawn.*

## Coterie Type: The Household

The household consists of vampires, ghouls, and mortals, with the ghouls usually enjoying most status, followed by the mortals, and finally the vampires. They invariably share a haven in a quiet residential area and keep comings and goings to a minimum. They hold themselves apart from regular vampiric society, while keeping the rules and fulfilling any duties the domain demands of them.

- **Domain:** Chasse (•), Lien (••) Portillon (••)
  - **Haven:** (•••) (Large family home or condominium)
  - **Herd:** (•••) (Beloved mortals)
- Possible extras:** Mawla (Joseph), Retainers (Joseph's ghoul recruits)

## JOSEPH

There is no doubt Joseph was instrumental in forming Blanca's ideas about Golconda, and he continues to wield considerable influence over the Butterflies. It's too much responsibility for him to manage all by himself, so he recruits other faithful retainers to assist him. Some Kindred with little sympathy or respect for the Butterflies have pointed out that every time a Kindred achieves the Rapture, Joseph's bank account gets fatter. He keeps on the right side of the mortal authorities and files his taxes, so his great wealth is discoverable, as are his generous donations to tax-deductible charitable organizations.

**Standard Dice Pools:** Physical 2, Social 5, Mental 4

**Secondary Attributes:** Health 5, Willpower 7

**Exceptional Dice Pools:** Etiquette 6, Leadership 7, Persuasion 6; Finance 5

**Disciplines:** Auspex 1

**Special:** Resources 4

**General Difficulties:** 5/3

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Butterflies in a chronicle.

### Made the Papers

Whether or not the Butterflies' method works, Joseph always adds the names of those cultists who find the Rapture to the Times' obituary column. It's a habit: part as tribute and part as memorial for himself, so he knows there will always be a record of the lives who were a part of this faith.

A morbid mortal archivist makes a hobby of going through the obituaries and updating burial sites online, finding out stories about the deceased, only to discover in the case of the individuals Joseph's been adding, some were born over a century ago.

This represents a peculiar form of Masquerade breach, as the individual who discovers the oddity may

come to believe these entries are false obituaries meant to indicate something else, such as a government conspiracy or an organized crime code.

This reaches the player characters through a mortal associate, who discovers the website detailing these strange obituaries, or via a vampire who recognizes one of these names in the papers and discovers a vlogger has been making videos about all these unexplained deaths (and lives) which always appear in the Times.

### Chameleon

A vampire in the player characters' domain has a reputation for fabricating the best cover identities for high prices, with the Kindred's services extending to training in how best to fold oneself into mortal society without raising suspicions.

One of the player characters' vampire associates has needed a new Mask ever since the Second Inquisition raided her haven. Feeling endangered, the vampire asks the coterie to approach this Mask-maker. If they go along with the request, they discover a vampire deeply embedded in the Butterflies, pushing people toward his idea of Golconda via subterfuge and emulation, but doing so discreetly, under the guise of providing a service.

As part of the vampire's cost, he requires clients to spend time with the family, work as they do, and learn how to act as mortals do. He explains the cult learned their chameleonic skills from a South American Kindred some time ago, and cynically points out that even if they don't embrace the faith, adopting their behaviors will help them to become more effective predators.

For all this, the Mask-maker commands a high price, ranging from the expenditure of Resources through to boons in court and the transferal of herds into his retinue.

### Lost Childer

There's always at least a handful of Kindred nobody in the domain respects, and in this case, it's one of those Kindred who approaches the player characters with a desperate plea: both of their childer, who they claim to have loved and treated well, have disappeared. The vampire believes they were kidnapped by the Second Inquisition, but because of their lowly status in the domain, the sire doesn't believe the Prince or Sheriff would show much sympathy for the situation.

In fact, the childer were mistreated or had enough of their sniveling sire and were recruited into the Butterflies with the promise of escaping the undead coil and all its cutthroat politicking.

This plot sees the wretched sire promising player characters favors and servitude if they just return the



two fledglings. In fact, the vampire is terrified the two fledglings will expose some of the abhorrent things their sire gets up to, such as feeding from children, leaving drained kine in public places, and failing in an attempted assassination plot against the Prince.

The problem is that the fledglings like their role within the Butterflies now that they're there. They have no desire to leave the comfort of a family that, while somewhat dysfunctional, isn't as pathetic as their previous one.

## Eremites

*"Tall and wraith-like in her slenderness, she strode toward the Prince's feeding area with supreme confidence. Her manner shouted that she was at peace with herself. She fascinated me, and I felt compelled to follow her."*

— Casper Secada, acolyte

Vampires are, by necessity, social creatures. Therefore, the Kindred known as the Eremites, who extol the virtues of isolation and starvation, are one of the strangest, most troubling Golconda cults in existence. It's a rare Eremite who isolates themselves, but bringing

isolation, and therefore enlightenment, to others? That's where these Golconda seekers specialize.

## The Saint on the Pillar

Adherents of this religion consider themselves beyond such trivialities as names and labels, but when they must use identifiers, they refer to each other as Eremites. The few vampires who know of them call the cultists stylites, and they rarely find this epithet offensive. The original stylites were mortal ascetics who ascended tall pillars and lived on top of them until their deaths. The famous ones in the first century CE were Christians, but evidence suggests pagan holy people also practiced this form of isolation.

Few Eremites reside on columns, pillars, or poles. It's not practical for a vampire to do so in most cases, due to their inevitable exposure to the sun, and frankly painful solitude. Yakushev Tomas Nikitovich of Clan Toreador had a column erected in an underground cave and, according to his acolytes, remained upon it for 325 years, after which he climbed down, having supposedly rid himself of the curse of vampirism. The Tzimisce Lisette Lundgren climbed her column every night at sunset, returning to a small chamber built beneath it for her daysleep. She

### I WISH I'D BROUGHT A BOOK...

Eremites who follow the cult credo and isolate themselves or others for years at a time are unlikely to be player characters unless the Storyteller runs a solo player game. However, these isolated stylites make for excellent SPCs possessing forgotten lore who must be sought out in a dangerous area, or antagonists controlling a group of mortals interfering with the player characters' objectives. Other "acolytes" are unwilling, having been snatched away and thrust up a pole somewhere in the back of beyond, and need saving. Likewise, a player character might play a failed Eremite, or a vampire who discovers this path and explores it between stories.

Don't let the idea of characters outside the normal templates deter you from their use. Every cult and cultist can find effective incorporation in somebody's story.

also claimed to have achieved Golconda. How the two went about feeding during these periods of meditative isolation is unknown unless they placed themselves into torpor once atop their perches and found ways of extracting themselves from that state when necessary.

Poles aside, most Eremites believe in the merits of total isolation, whether in a cave, on a mountain, or deep in the desert. Isolation, they teach, focuses the mind, body, and spirit on the task of overcoming the Beast. But they're not interested in doing this to themselves. Most of them have already experienced this state, apparently gleaned something from it, and now visit it on others.

When the cult deems someone ready to become an acolyte, they convince, lure, or kidnap their victim away from the safety of their haven and community trappings, isolating them in some remote area. There, it's up to the new acolyte to practice the art of physical perfection, bringing herself to a peak of fitness and beauty while feeding as little as possible. Combined with the fear of isolation and distance from home comforts, it's a difficult balance.

Some acolytes (willing or not) ally themselves with locals (if there are any) from whom they can feed in exchange for protection from whatever dangers might exist in the area, whether this be other humans, wild beasts, or something else. Others sustain themselves from domesticated animals. Occasionally, an older vampire who wishes to follow this path or is taken and forced to follow the cult's course (typically through being physically restrained at the bottom of a cave, sewer, or well, or atop one of the cult's popular elevated platforms), enters torpor with the intention of re-awakening with the ability to satisfy their thirst from beasts alone. It

rarely works as, often, the vampire will have forgotten their intent upon awakening and can prove very resentful of any who try to remind them.

Isolation can only stretch so far. Eventually, the Beast roars and the Hunger grows uncontrollable. There comes a moment of readiness in which the Eremites observing the acolyte agree to allow their new cultist to descend upon a community as far from her site of isolation as possible, drink what's necessary, and drag mortals back for extended consumption as the isolation begins anew.

The main cult body, in this case, appears to be one of kidnappers and gurus who don't practice but do preach. Therefore, the questions some Kindred ask are "what's learned from holding captive Kindred in extended periods of solitude and torment?" and "does it truly help a vampire to volunteer for such a practice?" The Eremites claim the benefits are uninhibited study of the Kindred condition and the lengths to which focus and constitution can be extended. The jury is, however, out on whether these so-called benefits extend beyond words.

## Organization

The Eremites do not have any formal organization between converts or captives, as it would go against their ethos of isolation and rugged individualism. However, many Eremites who travel are aware of each other based on what they hear from city-dwelling Kindred rumor mills. Eremite gurus communicate their findings with each other and pass this knowledge on to retainers, sometimes ghouls, who are expected to make abstract, coded recordings of the degeneration or enlightenment of isolated vampires. There's anywhere between a half dozen or twenty of these written accounts floating between Eremite gurus, and the issue with their encrypted nature is not all gurus can understand them.

Many of this faith are of Clan Gangrel, as their combination of Disciplines assists greatly in the cult's way of unlife. No clan, however, is precluded from joining. A stylite Mawla might tutor acolytes in the Disciplines needed for survival, or arrange to another to act as mentor if she cannot do so herself. Since most Brujah abandoned the Camarilla, several have entered states of solitude, and more than a few Nosferatu followed suit, leading the Eremites to target such Kindred for conversion, whether they want it or not.

## Stages of Enlightenment

Although the Eremites lack a formal hierarchy, most recognize stages of enlightenment through which the

vampire will pass on their path to Golconda, which they maintain can only be found at the end of a pole... or at least, reached through sufficient isolation to provoke an awakening.

## Supporters

Any creature may lend aid to an Eremite. Supporters comprise animals, mortals, and even other vampires who help the Eremite in their nightly existence, with kidnappings, procurement of food, or the furnishing of a “retreat” for Kindred in need of isolation. Supporters may express an interest in the beliefs of the stylites, but not be sufficiently convinced to become an acolyte. An Eremite sometimes finds a Touchstone among their mortal supporters.

## Acolytes

Acolytes possess sufficient conviction to gain acceptance and follow the cult path, or are selected for conversion by an Eremite who’s already been through the process. All acolytes gain a Mawla in the cult. Acolytes are full members of the faith — even if they resist — and have the respect of all Eremites, as it is they who will go on to ensure the faith is properly represented in vampiric society. A non-believing vampire is most likely to encounter acolytes accidentally, by stumbling upon their isolation spots, or with the intent of saving them and bringing them back to Kindred society.

Apart from enduring weeks, months, or potentially years of relative solitude from populated domains, acolytes study under a Mawla who visits them when they see fit. During their apprenticeship, the acolyte learns the philosophy and ways of the stylites and any Disciplines to help them survive. The acolyte must divest herself of all worldly goods, power, and status. This isn’t

voluntary, with gurus arranging the destruction of acolyte havens while they’re away on their spiritual journey. When an acolyte goes forth into the wilderness, she must be as naked and free of encumbrance as she was on the day she first drew breath as a mortal.

In return for her Mawla’s teaching, the acolyte is expected to report every experience, every vision, and every struggle to the guru. Eremites reason there’s no point to aiming for Golconda, if the pathway isn’t recorded.

## Gurus

When the acolyte is ready, she returns from the wilderness. Readiness is subjective, however, with some Mawlas declaring their acolytes not nearly exposed enough to hardship, or not enlightened sufficiently, while others take a lighter touch. In any case, when the acolyte returns to a populated domain they have a choice: serve as an aspiring guru and recruit new Eremites, or flee the cult. A surprising number remain with the Eremites despite, or because of, their experiences.

Acolytes who become gurus are vampires who genuinely believe they’ve glimpsed the state of Golconda, and who feel they can now pass this teaching on to others. They cite infamous Kindred such as Saulot, who wandered for centuries, and how they’re on the same path as he. Gurus surround themselves with devoted mortals and lost Kindred in need of mentors and reassurance, providing dribbles of wisdom in exchange for service.

The cult’s gurus are its retainers of Golconda’s mysteries. While a cynical Kindred may look at them as archetypal cult leaders, what cannot be denied is how some Eremite gurus seem to go months without feeding. They must be doing *something* right.

## Beliefs

Converted Eremites share a belief concerning the nature of vampirism. When a sufficient number of Eremites have denied themselves ready access to blood, the corruptive influence of fellow vampires, and have exercised Disciplines only to survive, and not to self-aggrandize or profit, they believe the entire puzzle of Golconda will snap together. The gurus think they’re close to the end of their path.

When a being becomes a vampire, they enter a relationship with their Beast. Every vampire, whether they know it or not, is in a constant, mortal battle with their Beast. The Beast wants to take them over and drive them to wassail. It’s the Beast who suffers the Hunger. It’s the Beast who drives vampires to the Eternal Struggle. It’s the Beast who drives their will to power. The stylites are not so naive as to deny that mortals can also be driven by wicked urges, but mortals have no Beast to punish them if they resist temptation. Or if, as some argue, they do have some kind of beast, it’s a much weaker, less visceral monstrosity than the Beast of a vampire.

By starving the Beast, they weaken it. Eremites believe they can achieve Golconda by finally killing it. There are two schools of thought among them about what Golconda means. The majority believe it means a return to mortal life at the age of one’s original Embrace, and most realize this carries its own problems. Others believe it means a return to one’s mortal life at their current age. Which, in most cases, means it coincides with Final Death. Final Death upon achieving Golconda, however, means a possible ascent to heaven, attainment of nirvana, or whatever post-mortem fate the individual Eremite believes in.

Starving the Beast means keeping a delicate balance. An Eremite

## EREMITE CONVICTIONS

The Eremites are independent souls and, as such, do not form a common consensus on many matters. They do, however, agree on three main points which are sufficient for them to consider themselves a religion, even if they are not highly organized.

- **Never feed more than is necessary**

Many Eremites describe this as “becoming lighter.” They train themselves to manage on less and less vitae, believing this enables them to control the Hunger.

- **Never succumb to the allure of wealth**

Stylites believe the presence of worldly delights and material goods feed the desires of the Beast. If a being remains in contact with anything that provokes desire, their desires persist and keep them from Golconda.

- **Always deny the Beast’s desires**

Starved of all its desires, the Beast becomes quiescent. The vampire becomes free of its tyranny and thus reaches Golconda.

who denies the Hunger too harshly sometimes loses control and enters a Hunger frenzy, often damaging one or more of their supporters and any acolytes who happen to be in range. Following such a lapse, the Eremite enters a period of shame, contrition, and profound meditation. This may lead to her returning to existence as an acolyte, and to self-flagellation or other forms of self-punishment.

Every stylite insists on a very real difference between beasts and the Beast. Many stylites, particularly Gangrel, feel strong ties to the natural world. Many gain sustenance from beasts of the field and forest, and some have animal companions.

## Recruitment

“Recruitment” is one word for what the Eremites do. While some vampires come to Eremite gurus seeking wisdom or sanctuary, more are plucked from existing coteries or city courts and forced into the Eremite existence.

Many acolytes perish before they’re ready to follow the Eremite way. Stylites do not agree on why

this might be. Some say those fit to become Eremites are chosen, perhaps by some deity. More believe it’s a matter of survival of the fittest: not every vampire is strong enough, or sufficiently spiritually advanced to undertake the harsh methods of the Eremite. Some of the necessary spiritual ability is the result of hard work and self-discipline, and many believe the majority of the undead do not have what it takes to follow the Eremite way.

Eremites do not create childe. Some find it hard to understand why anyone would wish to expose another to the ravages of the Beast. Many believe it’s the Beast itself that drives vampires to embrace or to bring another into its service. However, should an Eremite overestimate her ability to starve herself and frenzy upon one of her supporters or herd, she may be overcome with contrition and — forgetting her higher ethics — curse the unfortunate victim with her Beast. The Eremite, in such cases, immediately demotes herself to acolyte and returns to relative isolation, taking her childe with her so both can “enjoy” the suffering of enlightenment.

Of note, Eremites who attempt to flee the cult or “climb down from their pole” before they’re deemed ready receive harsh punishments. The guru mentality is “if isolation wasn’t punishment enough, you must receive harsher treatment,” which often involves some form of impalement or constriction. There’s no wisdom to be gained from staking a vampire and leaving them in an abandoned, distant house, or for that matter, out to greet the dawn. Such impalement is generally vertical and designed to avoid the heart, leaving the vampire halfway down a length of wood with all the time in the world — or at least until their Mawla stops visiting — to contemplate their position.

## The Acolyte in the Domain

Occasionally, an Eremite needs to travel to mingle with other Kindred for one reason or another. At such times, they take great care to comply with all proper forms and courtesies, often setting supporters to the task of performing research ahead of time to find out who’s in power and what they require of visitors to their domain. The stylites cut impressive figures in town, moving with unnatural grace and peacefulness. They freely practice their Disciplines as means of accentuating their perfection and carry themselves with confidence and dignity. This poise breaks down when they’re confronted by other Kindred, as they exist better outside of social settings, or among their own. The domain’s Kindred often gossip about them for several nights, until something else catches their attention. From time to time, the Eremites pick up new acolytes this way.

Stylite gurus reside in both Camilla and Anarch domains. They prefer stability, as it’s difficult to practice asceticism in an uncertain political climate.

They can be relied upon to come to the domain's defense when it's under attack by outside forces. As they train themselves to a peak of physical perfection, they often possess high levels of Fortitude and are recognized as competent fighters.

When two Kindred contend for power within a domain and one is clearly far more deeply held captive in the claws of his Beast than the other, Eremites occasionally weigh in on the side of the contender with higher Humanity or contrive to kidnap the bestial contender, attempting to force him to a better way. Eremites believe it's good to have a Prince or a Baron who runs the domain in a more ethical way. To a stylite, this means running the city on reasonable grounds that everyone clearly understands so competition doesn't constantly drive the Beasts of their fellows into action.

While acolytes are rarely part of coteries (except where they've been snatched from existing ones, or are isolated as a group), supporters and gurus have no such restrictions and assist other Kindred while studying their behaviors. Some Eremites form communities which, to outsiders, might look like blood cults. In domains where enough acolytes and supporters exist, flagellant coteries (see *Chicago by Night*, p. 260) arise.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *Some of our gurus make havens in Anarch domains and, where these are well regulated, they encounter few difficulties. However, we recommend scouring truly anarchic domains for potential acolytes, as having to worry about one's night-to-night survival makes for troubled Kindred and zealous converts.*

**Camarilla:** *Our gurus feel secure in Camarilla cities, and for their part, the Ivory Tower has little clue as to our beliefs. The forms and courtesies are easy enough to learn, though many are the Beast's traps.*

**Nephilim:** *Like us, they work on their own personal perfection. Unlike us, however, they make no effort to divorce themselves from worldly desires.*

## Fortitude

### Level 3

#### Seal the Beast's Maw

Through rigorous discipline and training, this individual has learned to exert their will to stave off the call

of the Hunger for a short time. By concentrating on the death of desire, they force the Beast to subside, enabling them to ignore its insatiable demands. Doing so is a gamble, as it can increase a vampire's Hunger in the attempt.

**Cost:** Two Rouse Checks

**System:** At any time during a scene, the vampire may make two Rouse Checks and ignore the effects of Hunger for the remainder of the scene. Doing this reduces all dice pools by a number equal to half (rounded up) of their current Hunger rating. If their Hunger increases by any other means during this time, their dice pools reduce by an additional die. If a dice pool reduces to zero through the use of this power, the character must roll to resist a fury frenzy, as stifling their Hunger intensifies the Beast's rage.

**Duration:** One scene

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Eremites in a story.

### Seek Out the Wise Woman

Most of the domain's elder Kindred succumbed to the Beckoning in the previous decade, leaving the city without the leadership and insight that might protect other vampires from the Second Inquisition's fires. As neonates and fledglings scrabble to form a working hierarchy, word reaches the player characters: a single elder remains, but they have been isolated for some time.

This story introduces an Eremite as a wise counselor, existing on the fringes of Kindred society. The mysteries surrounding them span from why they chose to take the solitary path to how they resisted the Beckoning. The latter could be an iron will, membership in a clan not susceptible to the Call, or perhaps even the vampire's control over their Beast and Blood.

The player characters are sent to find this vampire and bring them back into the fold, or at least discover what they know. Maybe this Kindred would serve as a new Seneschal, or perhaps even a wise Prince. Alternatively, they could be the last pool of rich vitae available to opportunistic and power-hungry neonates.

### Empty Havens

Religious fervor is uncommon among Kindred, but by no means non-existent. If a highly-respected vampire or one with many Blood Bonds in place decides to suddenly embrace a faith — such as that of the Eremites — at

least a few Kindred who believe in what they're doing might easily follow them.

In this story, a clutch of four or five Kindred up and disappear one night, not showing up when expected for Elysium. The Prince, concerned, requests that the coterie investigate the havens of some of these vampires. To the player characters' surprise, the havens are untouched with no signs of struggle. It doesn't appear as if the Second Inquisition was involved.

The vampires' disappearance prompts paranoia among the Kindred, as some wonder whether these vampires knew of an impending threat or if they're plotting an attack on the city. Their disappearance also inspires greed, as some of them left territories that are now, in theory, up for grabs, along with any possessions abandoned in their havens.

The double-edged sword in this tale is where the missing Kindred's mortal associates are concerned. Any Kindred who maintain ties with mortal families, friends, or colleagues end up with their mortal companions seeking them out, possibly even questioning the player characters. Their simple disappearance risks a Masquerade breach, as inquisitive kine investigate what their friends were doing before they vanished.

## Rampage

The existence of an Eremit requires great mental fortitude and a certain level of inner peace for a vampire to embark on the path of isolation and Beast mollification. As a result, some Kindred who believe this cult has all the answers find themselves unprepared for when their Beast rages and forces them into horrific, violent acts.

Such is the case in this tale, when a vampire — until recently seen as a paragon of Humanity among fellow Kindred and wise counsel for any Kindred in need of advice — breaks their leash and goes on a rampage through a public area, such as a shopping mall, movie theater, or campus grounds.

This vampire should be one with whom the player characters have close contact and perhaps even trust. This will give them a sense of investment in discovering why their friend or respected mentor lost control, and prompt them to try to return the Eremit to a measure of stability. The Storyteller should decide whether another vampire needled the Eremit into breaking, whether they've succumbed to the state of a wight (with no hope of return), or whether this was a "controlled" rampage to further their path to Golconda. Additionally, someone must answer for the repercussions for this public slaughter, and where possible, someone must cover up the evidence of vampires' involvement in it.

# Hunters of the Golden Cicada

*"It is only by stepping outside of yourself that one has the fortitude to look in. We can make peace with our warring nature by elevating and cultivating that peace in the kine. Clear their paths and see the lessons of Golconda etch themselves into their Blood. Let that Blood show you the way."*

— Qin-Fen, Venttrue Clan Chancellor of Chongqing

The story of Golconda spread among the downtrodden neonates of Chongqing half a century ago. They say that, decades or centuries ago, someone found the way to this mythical state and has had the audacity to teach it to others ever since — provided that you can attract their attention by following their teachings.

## Where the Yangtze and Jialing Meet, Peace Can Be Found

The Chongqing Kindred who claim to have the answers call themselves the Hunters of the Golden Cicada. They follow the maxim, "Use the Blood to uplift the kine and the kine will uplift the Blood." Wherever the poor, the desperate, and the distressed of Chongqing are found, so too will one find a Hunter of the Golden Cicada. They are there to help the kine so the kine can lead them to Golconda, whether the kine like it or not.

## Lessons of the Past Carry Forth the Future

The Hunters of the Golden Cicada seek to aid the kine on whom vampires feed. They pursue their goal by fostering the kine, aiding them along the paths of their lives and using the power of the Blood to, sometimes forcefully, remove impediments holding their mortals back from success, love, enlightenment, or discovering the best versions of themselves. The order believes this enriches the blood within the mortal, and that by cultivating a better life for the mortal, the blood within, when drained, reveals secrets on the path to peace and power.

The cult is indiscriminate in the kinds of assistance its members lend to the kine, but most members make

their havens near impoverished neighborhoods in a domain for easier access to those who need assistance and who aren't well-connected to community or governmental support. Some Hunters of the Golden Cicada engage in vigilantism, charitable works, manipulating local government to funnel assistance to a neighborhood, or even simple trash collection to pursue enlightenment. Some choose to focus on the whole of society, attempting to uplift and aid many kine at once, while others hyper-focus on one mortal at a time, to the point of obsession. One industrious member even feeds stray dogs, so they are less likely to attack residents or become too feral. All so long as their charitable works aid their prey in some way.

One should not misunderstand the intentions of the Hunters of the Golden Cicada; their goal is Golconda. They aim to aid others, but only insofar as it assists their progression. They believe this to be the balancing of the Beast and the human spirit within them. They believe it is a special form of enlightenment only Kindred have the chance to achieve.

Hunters of the Golden Cicada have taken lessons from stories and legends to find Golconda. Even the name comes from one such tale. While the cult doesn't have a formalized name, some of the members started titling themselves Hunters of the Golden Cicada, and the name stuck for the group. In the 1960s, when a local Venttrue captured one of the less-careful adherents to the philos-

ophy, that is how they identified themselves. The name is a tongue-in-cheek reference to *The Journey to the West*, the 16th century novel by Wu Cheng'en. In it, the reincarnated golden cicada, now Buddhist monk Tang Sanzang, is sent on a journey to India to retrieve Buddhist scriptures. Tang Sanzang is beset by demons and monsters who attempt to eat the enlightened being to achieve immortality and enlightenment themselves.

Some Hunters believe that they not only have the power to uplift mortals, but also that the Blood gives them the right to do so. These individuals go about their goals in terrible or painful ways, like using the Blood to help someone overcome an addiction by forcing them to deny their craving for that thing. Some replace that mortal's addiction to one of vitae if they don't have other means of enforcing growth. The murder of an abuser, arson, the ruining of a hated rival's crops; more extreme members of the Hunters of the Golden Cicada have undertaken all these and more.

Their methods have caused the cult to become a thorn in the side of the Chongqing Venttrue, the most powerful and prominent clan in the domain. These Kindred look dimly on the cult's activities, which routinely interfere with the city's Blue Bloods running their exploitative businesses. Venttrue Magistrate Murong Guozhi has a particular axe to grind against the Hunters, as the cult continues to upset the traditional power structure. Hunters of the Golden Cicada in turn can only stand by



and watch as their fellows risk further attention from Chongqing's Clan of Kings, as their philosophy prevents inference in another member's pursuit of Golconda.

## The Great Teacher

A figure called the Great Teacher put forth the concept of the cycle of selection, cultivation, and enlightenment. The Great Teacher is a mysterious figure who scant few of the Hunters claim to have ever met, at once model, myth, and absentee parent. Each member who has met the Great Teacher holds a fervent belief that Golconda is real and achievable, because they have seen the results. This is the path the Great Teacher followed and now encourages others to follow, too.

None of these members can describe any physical aspects of the enigmatic figure, only the impression they made upon them. All they can recall is a feeling of peace, of age, of still and solid power, and of being held in their gaze, safe and warm. If pressed, all of them vaguely recall being very, very hungry afterward.

The Great Teacher imparts the philosophy of the cult to those favored to gain an audience. To carry forth their knowledge to a Kindred world in need of answers and enlightenment. To speak with the certainty that Golconda is real and achievable.

It is the responsibility of these followers to educate others and to do their best to guide junior members. Hunters of the Golden Cicada uphold this responsibility to the others, aiding them when possible, but never interfere with the methods they have chosen. The Great Teacher instructs them that the paths to Golconda are as varied as the members of the order themselves.

The Hunters of the Golden Cicada are a young cult, but many of its members believe that versions of it can be found throughout the region's history. They lend credence to this theory through pieces of text and ancient oral tradition. Leading members of the Hunters of the Golden Cicada believe that the mysterious Great Teacher, leader of the order, and the first to achieve Golconda is preposterously old.

Any further information on the Great Teacher is very difficult to come by. It is a particular obsession among some of Chongqing's Ventrue to find this figure, as they represent a subversive threat to the they structure that allows them to remain in control. However, curiously, when the Ventrue have occasionally been able to identify and interrogate prominent Hunters of the Golden Cicada who claim to be close to achieving Golconda, they are never able to identify or find them again should they slip through the Kings' grasp. When they question other, lesser, members of the Golden Cicada about this,

### CONVICTIONS OF THE HUNTERS OF THE GOLDEN CICADA

- **Seek your path; don't interfere with another's**

You are seeking Golconda using the lessons passed onto us from the Great Teacher, but your path is personal. Cultivate the vessels of Golconda using the lessons as a guide. Do not interfere with the ways of others on their own paths.

- **Do not allow cruel treatment of the living**

The kine represent a unique chance to achieve the glorious state of Golconda. By purifying their spirits, you purify their blood. By purifying their blood, you elevate them. By taking their blood, you elevate yourself.

- **Never fail to offer others your teachings**

It is your responsibility to light the spark of Golconda in others, should they listen. The lessons of the Great Teacher are easy to grasp, yet difficult to master. Therefore, we have been given eternity. Find others who might set themselves on this path. Select carefully, for few can complete the journey.

- **Always follow the Great Teacher's instruction**

The Great Teacher watches us all as we imbibe the blood of the vessels and grow closer to Golconda. The Great Teacher will call you for the final lesson when you are prepared to learn. Heed that call, for it is the last you shall ever need to answer.

they simply explain, "The Teacher called them for the final lesson."

## Perspectives

**Camarilla:** We threaten the control that justifies the Ivory Tower's existence. When we we balance our Beasts, what need will we have for them to protect us?

**Anarchs:** If they focused as much energy inward as they do outward, they might see a path forward to Golconda for themselves. Until then, many of them will need to be cleared out of our vessels' ways. Their anger takes up too much space.

**The Orphans of Enoch:** Yes, we know of them. There are a few in most large domains, Chongqing included. Our Great Teacher has spoken of them, and to them, though we know not

*what was said. They seem to watch us with interest, though we know not why.*

**The Ventrue:** *The undisputed masters of the night. Those that know of us in our hovels, slums, and hideaways hate us with the passion of the powerful. Little do they know that their very clan chancellor in Chongqing met with the Great Teacher... and listened well.*

## Chongqing

Chongqing, China is a megacity seated at and around where the Yangtze and Jialing rivers meet in southwestern China. It's host to impressive landmarks, works of man, and natural features such as the Three Gorges Dam, the area around it, the Three Natural Bridges themselves, and Fengdu Ghost City, to name a few. Estimates put the current population of the municipality, including the countryside and rural farmland that supports the city, at over 30 million. However, the Kindred of Chongqing are concerned more with the herd of over 8 million souls who call the city of Chongqing their home.

Given the size and resources of the city, one might think that Chongqing could host a sizable Kindred population, but the ruling body of Camarilla Ventrule keep the population as regulated as possible. Magistrate Murong Guozhi ascended to power in March of 1997, using the upheaval of Chongqing establishing itself as its own municipality to gain control. Since then, he's held a tight grip on the city through his strict interpretation of the Traditions and with the help of his clan's resources and influence. The irony of the recent population explosion and economic growth of Chongqing and China in general is that even as his clan's riches grow, his control wanes.

To make matters worse for the Ventrule, rebellion foments among the Kindred of Chongqing's rural areas after years of their being the victims of the mysterious creatures that stalk the countryside and having their pleas to the city fall on disinterested ears. Along with this, a growing number of Inquisitor cells in the Ministry of State Security are rooting out Ventrule holdings in the city.

Of particular concern to the beleaguered Magistrate is his recent discovery of the existence of a group called the Hunters of the Golden Cicada in his domain. Their quiet espousal of their creed, that Golconda is a true and attainable thing, undermines the fear he uses to control and cow Kindred. The vigilantism and criminal activities of some of the Golden Cicada's more zealous members draw unwanted eyes to the Kindred and threaten the delicate balance he's constructed.

In pursuit of Guozhi's desire to regain control, he spends an increasing portion of his time attempting to root out the Golden Cicada instead of focusing on meas-

ures to keep up with the city itself. His advisors and clan chancellor council have taken note. Were he to learn that the Ventrule clan chancellor herself, his own Blood sister Murong Ling, was a member of that faith, the revelation could overturn the Camarilla's hold on one of its most prized and profitable domains.

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Hunters of the Golden Cicada in a chronicle.

### Under Our Protection

Sometimes, a vampire might designate a specific variety of mortal as their preferred feeding stock or receive control over territory over a district in a city where they can feed with impunity, provided they abide by the Traditions.

When a coterie of Kindred emerges to chastise the player characters for feeding from kine in the feeding territory that the player characters have earned, claiming that those kine are under their protection, feeding territories or no, the ripple through court is palpable. These cultists believe mortals are to be protected and treated at least as well as vampires treat each other (a debatable virtue), and they had already selected at least one member of the player characters' personal herds as mortals who benefit from their sanctuary.

These Hunters of the Golden Cicada are initially hostile, but if the player characters are prepared to speak with them or study their practices, they may come to the realization that the vampires are attempting to cultivate the mortals' success and enlightenment to achieve their own ends. However, those ends are not related to the politics of the vampiric court. If the player characters can resist their territorial impulses long enough to listen to what the cultists have to say, the Hunters may invite one or more of them to join the cult.

### Prodigal Childer

In this time of Second Inquisition scrutiny, a new coterie arriving in a domain and claiming territory is rarely seen as a positive thing. Yet in this story, the Prince designates a coterie of newly arrived Kindred as one "chosen for great things," and decrees they will receive favorable treatment for as long as they choose to remain.

The decision upsets numerous Kindred who have spent years or decades trying to win the Prince's support

and spurs them to investigate what's so important about this coterie. The upset rivals may set the player characters to the task, or the player characters themselves may feel inclined to probe into the issue when the Prince divests them of some of their territory, awarding it to the new arrivals.

It's possible these newly arrived Hunters of the Golden Cicada, with their high and mighty morality and virtuous behavior, are the kinds of Kindred the Prince some night wishes to be. Alternatively, perhaps they include some of the Prince's childer, or they have managed to persuade the Prince that they assisted in delivering the Prince's childe or childer to Golconda.

As the coterie settles in to stay for the long term, their presence escalates upset to anger. All while, the cultists remain ignorant to the political storm stirring in the wake of their arrival. Perhaps though, the Prince has deliberately thrown a rock at the beehive to test the loyalty of their subjects.

## Pest Problem

When influential Kindred find their plans disrupted, heads roll. This is no different when the Hunters of

the Golden Cicada decide it is in their best interest to free the ghouls of a prominent member of the Primogen Council from their addiction to vitae.

How the cultists manage it is cloaked in mystery, though it may be as simple as forcing the ghouls to drink vitae from Hunters instead of the Primogen. What's clear is that the Primogen's ghouls have all started serving — with apparent willingness — the Hunters of the Golden Cicada, which threatens to spill the Primogen's secrets.

The Primogen approaches the player characters — or perhaps this plot in fact affects a player character directly when the Hunters target *their* blood dolls or ghouls — and asks for their help to eliminate this pest of a cult from the domain. For as long as they remain, they could sabotage every scheme and ambition the Primogen possesses. Further, the ghouls will require re-bonding, or destruction, as their continued existence is a threat to their former domitor and the Masquerade.

This story presents a question of morality and whether freedom is a right, along with the potential to gain (diminishing) political support from a titled vampire.



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# Eschatological Thought

*"I stopped worrying about wearing a mask in public when I realized the Masquerade wouldn't last much longer than another year. Bring on Armageddon."*

— Miloš Smoljak, Adherent of the Third Day

Gehenna should in no way be desirable if any of the tales concerning it are true. The Book of Nod describes it as an end to Kindred existence, or the entire world. Yet Gehenna seems to come and go, and doomsday cults spring up to prophesize a new end when the last one spins by. For eternal beings such as Kindred, the idea of an end time may seem terrifying, but also, highly unlikely.

The cults that sprout up and endure to worship an anticipated end or hasten it forward are a mix of formidable menaces and despicable charlatans. Few could be described as functional within Kindred society, aiming to exploit or destroy. Most occupy spaces outside of large domains, ordaining over cults of dedicated mortals or professing such esoteric beliefs as to render them alien amid polite company.

Whether attempting to fool Kindred into giving themselves over to destruction in a way that benefits the cult leaders, or aiming to bring about the end through fire and brimstone, a plague of the dead, or through the cultists' control of all life and unlife, the members of these Gehenna cults inevitably come into conflict with their fellow vampires wherever they are found.

## The Whispers of the Dead

*"It's a shame your sire doesn't look after you like they should, but don't worry. The Capuchin sees you, and for his attention and knowledge, he demands tribute. He may speak to the dead, but he whispers to you."*

— The Speaker, Voice of the Capuchin,  
Wearer of the Whisper Mask

Not every Hecata is born to privilege, wealth, and an understanding of their lineage.

The Hecata is both a new and a very old clan. It is at once monolithic and dysfunctional, just like any powerful family. It is among the new Blood of the Hecata that the Whispers of the Dead spread. They are a secret face of the Hecata's triple mask born of fire, loyalty, and a knowledge that they belong. The Whispers know the rumored Capuchin is real and can perform wonders. They've heard his voice. They've seen the Capuchin work through his herald, performing necromantic miracles they believed

impossible. They've been told they are special, secret, and chosen. And how could they not be when the Blood itself agrees? All of the Whispers are Hecata, no matter what bloodline their sire was.

The Whispers of the Dead know things. They know that the head of the Hecata chose them, found them, and charged them with keeping the family safe from all threats, especially itself. The Whispers of the Dead are the true Hecata, the generation the Blood chose from so many bloodlines. The ones changed or Embraced directly into the clan proper. These fledglings and neonates of the Clan of Death believe deeply, truly, and passionately.

And it's all a lie.

## The Susurrus

The Whispers of the Dead carry with them the knowledge that they aren't like other Hecata. They are the best among them. The new generation of the Clan of the Dead. The renewal so many Necromancers preach.

All of them believe in what the Hecata is and stands for: family. They are passionate members trying to find their place in the world, but through circumstance, misfortune, or lax upbringing, they found themselves on the outskirts of the family. But, as the Speaker says, one must be alone to hear and join the Susurrus.

The Whispers of the Dead see themselves as the true Hecata, the inner circle of the Capuchin himself, with a direct line to him through the Wearer of the Whisper Mask. Through the Speaker they give to the cause, because the Speaker told them the truth. The Capuchin, that mystical and legendary rumor, is real and sees them. The Capuchin needs them. The Capuchin, having listened to the council of the dead, charged the Speaker with finding the fledglings, those who believe in and are true

to the family, but whom the family might have failed.

The Wearer of the Whisper Mask shows these lost souls the miracles of death and the dead, miracles that only those chosen by the Capuchin could hope to perform. He bids the children to stay silent, even to others in the Hecata, for they would not understand. He instructs the children to prepare, for the renewal isn't yet complete. He aids the young with blood, money, necromantic instruction, and guidance, all as they require.

The Speaker bids the fledglings that in return for these gifts, these teachings, this pride, and sanctity of knowledge, that they freely give anything the Speaker asks.

The Capuchin, of course, has no need of these things, but the other Whispers do. Give to them, so they may be ready when the Capuchin calls.

## Behind the Speaker's Mask

Leonardo Boella, the Speaker, is a Harbinger with a chip on his shoulder and the soul of a con artist.

When his fellow Harbingers broached the subject of a Family Reunion with him following the various torments he'd endured as part of a cannibalizing sect and a war with the Giovanni, Boella paid little attention. The Hecata was the name whispered on the lips of those who commanded death, and so many of Leonardo's bloodline heeded the call. Even the name of the mythic Capuchin was banded about, rumored to have had some hand in this new formation.

Leonardo Boella really couldn't give a shit.

Leonardo bristled at the thought of a new generation of Harbingers who did not share in his curse and his hate. He missed his face, having been handsome once. The Harbingers of



Skulls had turned him after a graft gone wrong as a punishment, using his skills to attack the mortal holdings of their enemies. It turned out Leonardo was even something of a necromantic prodigy. He made the best of his situation, gathering more resources and experiencing every pleasure his sect promised, always taking a little off the top.

Leonardo declined to attend the Family Reunion. He did, however, listen to others of his lineage through ghostly messengers, which passed on words of cooperation and a new direction. Leonardo overheard them speak passionately about councils and Capuchins. Exasperated and disgusted, Leonardo nevertheless recognized



that he wasn't sure how to proceed in the modern nights without pledging his fealty to this new, nauseating endeavor.

Eureka: the switch flipped when one of his broodmates introduced him to her new childe, face hale and whole, eyes bright, having only recently been welcomed into this dark family. Leonardo hated them instantly, since the childe had to endure none of the debilitating outward bane that afflicted his bloodline.

If the members of his bloodline with whom he had fought and bled wanted to march to the tune of this new clan, then fine. He'd march to the beat of his own drum. At least

then he could warm himself at the fire of young passion, and perhaps bring a few to ruin along the way. Many of them were so new, so naïve, they would believe almost anything, and they were impressed by nearly any display of necromantic power.

It was time for a new grift.

## The Word of the Speaker

How the Speaker approaches a potential recruit varies from Whisper to Whisper. Some say he steps from a puddle in an hour of need. Some re-

ceive a message passed on when they write on a mirror after their evening shower. Some simply receive an email with a location, date, and time. But when the Speaker appears, he is always robed like a monk, adorned in a smooth, featureless black mask, and radiating confidence.

After identifying a potential Whisper, the Speaker often prepares for their first encounter by monitoring them with ghostly spies. Then, when they meet, the Speaker can use what they observed or cold read them to reveal to the prospect something very personal about themselves, something no one else could know. He confers to the prospect how much

he understands not knowing your place in the night and welcomes the prospect with glad tidings. He assures them: the Capuchin sees you. The Capuchin knows you. The Capuchin needs you. And the Speaker will come again.

Many prospects are left wondering who the Capuchin is. Some who still have access to their sires ask. They are usually dismissed out of turn, but those whose sires do impart a story or two are the more impressed for it. But should the prospect reveal any detail about the Speaker to another, then he never appears to them again.

Those that keep the Speaker's confidence receive a second invitation to meet. The Speaker again dramatically reveals personal details about his subject, then leads them on a deep line of questions. Question upon question steer the prospect further and further down the path of self-reflection and perhaps even to a point of doubt in the clan as a whole. The Speaker vanishes once again, leaving the prospect to consider the questions he asked and the answers they gave.

At this point, any prospect who attempts to divulge details of meeting the Speaker usually meets some tragic and abrupt end. If that does not occur, the Speaker proposes a third meeting in a manner that would take impressive necromantic power to achieve, at least to a fledgling. Perhaps a letter floats across a room, or a message appears scrawled by pen before the prospect's very eyes. The prospect may even dream of the encounter without it ever physically occurring. At this point, the contact is never mundane.

It is then the Speaker knows he has them.

## What Do the Whispers Do?

Leonardo soon realized that the fledglings' enthusiasm that caused him to target them was getting out of hand. To direct some of that energy, Leonardo hastily fabricated some edicts, fearing what the Whispers would do *without* direction.

The Whispers believe that the Speaker has commanded them to prepare, so that the Susurrus will be ready when it comes time to speak. As membership in the cult grows within a domain, crime tends to increase. These are usually incidents of burglary and petty theft, as those Whispers without income or digital means try to contribute to the Speaker financially.

Some Whispers form coteries to grab or steal artifacts or tomes to lay at the Speaker's feet, in the hopes of proving that they can be of use to the Capuchin. Sadly, many of these fledglings don't know an artifact from a regular museum piece. As a result, the Speaker has found himself in possession of quite a collection of valuable junk.

### CONVICTIONS OF THE WHISPERS

- **Always seek new Whispers**

The Whispers always seek those who may have been cast off or abandoned by the Hecata at large. They also reel in thin-bloods or Caitiff whom they might take advantage of. Seek new members, or new rubes to support the true Whispers.

- **Never turn your back on new information, no matter the danger**

The Susurrus see it as their duty to collect information to serve the Speaker, and therefore, the Capuchin. Knowledge is power. Whispers see it as a sacred duty to provide as much information about their domains as possible.

- **Brook no disrespect toward the Capuchin**

At the Speaker's behest, members of the Susurrus are expected to give blood, financial resources, or anything else asked of them in return for the place the Capuchin has given them in the coming nights. These tithes are used to build the Capuchin's coffers for the glorious day when those chosen will come to lead the Clan of Death.

- **Never Speak, Always Whisper**

The Susurrus must never come to the attention of anyone outside of the chosen. The Whispers police junior members and encourage junior members to police one another. Any breach of trust or secrecy is dealt with swiftly or reported to the Speaker himself. The Capuchin, through the Speaker, smiles upon and rewards those who watch out for his inner circle.

- **Loyalty to the cult comes first**

There will come a time when the Susurrus becomes a roil to wash over the Clan of Death. Be ready to stand and reveal yourself when the decree arrives. Gain as much power as you can while remaining hidden. When the time comes, the Capuchin will reach out his hand and expect you to take it.

Those outside the Hecata are welcome to join in the Susurrus, or so the outsiders are told. The Speaker has instructed his Whispers to string along those outside of the Hecata with an interest in necromancy along to form ties with them or to drain these prospects of their resources. Get them to believe, and they will do anything.

## Hierarchy

In the short time since the cult's founding, the Speaker has had to do very little to lead the cult. In fact, the Whispers' zeal has grown the cult faster than Leonardo anticipated.

While the Speaker gathered the initial few to him with theatrics, displays of necromantic power, and promises of a future of belonging, his followers took his words and ran with them. The first three members of the Whispers, all from Madrid, sought others who might benefit from such wisdom. No one with proper ties to the family, but nevertheless those were unfortunate or cast aside.

Heading online and using many of the same channels the younger members of the Hecata did during its founding, the Whispers started to spread slowly and carefully, without the knowledge of the Speaker. It was only when these tech savvy believers proudly brought their work to the Speaker having set up bank accounts, Venmo accounts, and encrypted forums did the Speaker realize what was happening, and how quickly it could get out of hand. It's all he can do to try to contain the monster he's created before the Hecata proper realize what he has done. Now, Leonardo's looking for a way out.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *Commiserate with them and their secrets spill forth. Make them think you're a representative of the Hecata who's considering joining up, and if they can get over being spooked, then you've got it made while you prepare.*

**Camarilla:** *The Ivory Tower is a tough nut to crack, so don't try. Slip between the cracks that are already there. Who knows, maybe there are those among them ready to hear the Whispers.*

**The Hecata:** *We've got to keep an eye on the rest of the Family. The Capuchin trusts us, his true followers, with that. The Speaker will tell us who may need to get taken down a peg or taken out. They don't even know we exist.*

**Maladantu:** *How did you hear that name? They were a heretical movement among the Hecata, once upon a time, but they met the guillotine.*

**Thin-Bloods:** *We know what it's like to be on the outside, looking in. They'll listen to just about anything we tell them if it has even a grain of truth. It's a good thing we know our truth.*

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Whispers of the Dead in a chronicle.

## Another Toothpick

When any group finds itself driven primarily as a vehicle of vengeance, it can only end one way: with a lot of death on all sides.

In the player characters' domain, a prominent member of the Giovanni family — mortal or undead — is found to have been murdered in their haven. If the player characters are Camarilla or Anarch, this may not immediately concern them, except one of the Giovanni's clanmates points the finger toward the protagonists or one of their Touchstones as the guilty party. The Giovanni's main source of evidence against the accused is an eyewitness to the murder who escaped on the bloody night of the crime.

In truth, the vampire responsible is a newly Embraced Harbinger of Ashur looking to prove themselves to the Whispers of the Dead. What better way of doing so than murdering one of the hated Giovanni while placing the blame on an outside party, or even better, one of their mortal associates?

The Giovanni in the domain are rightfully incensed. Following their Family Reunion, they're inclined to believe the witness. The witness falls under the family's protection while they seek reparations from the innocent coterie, in the form of blood or heavy favors.

Unfortunately for the real killer, the Whispers of the Dead don't arrive to congratulate or promise promotion within the cult: they want as much distance between themselves and this mess as possible. When the killer realizes this, it's possible they'll aim to sabotage or destroy the Whispers in their domain, or expose the cult as much as they're able. It's unlikely they'll choose to go down quietly.

## Foul Leakage

The Whispers of the Dead is one big con job. This fraud, however, hasn't been exposed to the cultists who worship the Speaker. Likewise, neither the fraud nor the cult itself is known to Kindred beyond its ranks. Therefore, it comes as a surprise to Leonardo and other Kindred with an interest in the Hecata's intentions when word enters court of how the clan is immune to the Beckoning, and the leak is traced to a Hecata vampire within the Whispers.

This story allows the player characters to discover this cult, and maybe conclude that the Whispers know more than is immediately apparent. They clearly possess some damning information regarding the Clan of Death which may increase their value in the eyes of mercenary player characters or those with a grudge to bear against the Hecata.

The issue is, when Hecata Kindred discover this leak, they'll want to plug it immediately. Whispers could seek out the player characters for sanctuary, or Hecata might enlist a coterie to quietly shut these cultists up and to find out who they're working for.

The greatest danger of this leak to the Hecata comes from the Kindred who will now want to pump the Whispers of the Dead for information that gives them a one-up in negotiations or assaults on the Hecata. Discovering their immunity to the Beckoning is just the beginning.

## Ancient Enmity

Some among the Whispers of the Dead feel they require allies outside the cult to strike at the heart of their greatest enemy, the Giovanni. To this end, they seek out vampires whom the Giovanni have crossed and those Kindred the Family Reunion harmed in some way.

A coterie with close ties to the cult, or perhaps even a coterie of Whispers, reaches out to the player characters, offering them a healthy division of the spoils should they work together to raid one of the Hecata's safehouses containing cash, heroin, and relics belonging to a Necromancer scholar and fixer. The Hecata have few allies, so it's unlikely that the crime will have significant repercussions.

If the player characters go along with the scheme, everything goes according to plan until the coterie gets ahold of the Necromancer and brutalizes their victim, torturing and humiliating the vampire. It's then that the player characters discern that this other coterie was more interested in having them provide cover so that they could play with their prey.

The player characters may have no issue with this, or they may object. Either route has the potential for repercussions in the form of the Whispers, the destroyed Necromancer's wraith, or other Hecata who come to investigate the event.

# The Orphans of Enoch

*"We come from the First City to build the First City."*

— The Gardener, First Among the Lost

Gehenna is here. The Orphans of Enoch will do everything they can to see it burn away this world so another can stand in its place. They have seen and heard of the gardens that came and went. They ardently believe that only the worthy deserve to enter the world to come. And who is more worthy than those who have seen the signs? They have wandered lands beyond the veil of

death, weathered storms of howling glass, and survived persecution from those they once considered fellows. The Orphans of Enoch wish nothing more than to see the end of the world because they are confident that a better one lays just beyond it. A garden they will see grow once more. A city they will see rebuilt anew. The last step is to ensure that the world adheres to its right and proper path.

## The Lost Wander No More

Those aware of the Orphans of Enoch's existence aren't quite sure where in the world they came from or how they originated. Most agree they formed when the Red Star shone in the night sky to those that could see it, during the events that more superstitious Kindred call the Week of Nightmares. They appeared in visions of Gehenna, all over the world, each on a personal pilgrimage, engaging no one and disturbing nothing. In the chaos that reigned after the turn of the millennium, the Orphans were able to slip silently and easily in and out of domains, pulled toward a destination, guided by the gravity of the crimson star called Wormwood.

If some Kindred was aware of and tracking such things, they would note that when the Red Star faded from the sky, every Orphan ceased their travels and made their haven wherever they found themselves. If you asked an Orphan about the event, they would tell you that this is where they would find a sign of the Final Nights, one that must be protected. That this is where the city would begin. For obvious reasons, some Orphans cling to this belief more strongly than others (especially when multiple Orphans come into conflict of belief), but it's rarely a cause they drop entirely.

Once entrenched in their domain, these Kindred, known as the Orphans Lost, or Lost, began to take root. Under the cover of the chaos of the time, they wended their way into the fabric of the areas in which they found themselves. Slowly, methodically, they used their considerable powers of the Blood to solve problems for the local Kindred, if there were any, racking up a web of boons. Should it be a more remote area with no Cainite population, then each began to select the finest mortals available to serve as ghouls to act on their behalf. Entrenching themselves, hiding behind a web of favors and proxies, they burrowed deeper. The Lost always hide, always plan. They have no need for fame or status. Knowledge is what they crave. They know the end is upon all, so what need have they for more?

Even the Orphans Found, the Kindred disciples of the Lost who come to them out of a desperate need for belonging, insight, or through a hatred of the world around them, have a hard time gaining an audience and usually communicate through frighteningly loyal ghoul intermediaries after

their initiation. What the Found know is that each Lost claims to be old, and each one carries the dry, musty scent of a tomb. They are frightening and awesome, in the *old* sense of the word: as daunting as they are amazing.

The Lost discourage the Found from asking about where the Lost originated. The Lost usually tell them that “we come from the First City to build the First City” if they ask. Those bold enough to press have returned to their fellows with horrific tales of experiencing panicked outbursts, blinding rage, or a total emotional shut down. Some Found have claimed Lost have screamed of fire and light and a horrible, howling wind. Found familiar with such things liken it to C-PTSD and lasting trauma. This information comes from Found who have been fortunate enough to return from asking such questions at all.

## Protect the End

The Orphans are a secretive order obsessed with the signs and portents of Gehenna. They are voracious readers of every scrap of lore they can get their hands on, gluttons for any story or prophecy that speaks about the End of Days, and lovers of doomsayers. Most Orphans, and certainly the Lost, possess copies or parts of the Book of Nod, the Revelations of the Dark Mother, the Erciyess Fragments, and other heretical and forbidden texts. They

preserve anything that details how things might end so that they can protect and defend that knowledge.

Orphans believe that everything happens in cycles, that nothing ever truly dies, and that everything passes from one state to the next: plants, animals, souls, cities, ages. To hear a Lost speak of it in the rare meeting with a Found cell, it sounds like they know it. It sounds like they’ve seen it.

Most Found are deep believers that Gehenna is happening now. Gehenna is a process, a cycle. It does not happen in an instant. For the Orphans, they are living in a holy time.

Orphans see themselves as protectors of the end whose task is to subtly and slowly stretch out their influence to make sure that the end comes to pass. As the caretakers of Gehenna, they will be blessed to stand tall when the next cycle begins. The Lost purport the First City has been and will come again. It’s up to them and to the Found to ensure its arrival.

## Orphans Lost and Orphans Found

The Orphans of Enoch live in cities all over the world. The Lost, whose numbers are few, are widely dispersed. Not all of them survived when the force that



drove them called them to stop. Some were in transit between domains. Some could not handle what befell them before and died by suicide. Others are still out there in torpor, waiting for someone to dig them up. There is even rumor of one that lies in the hold of a shipping barge, having ended up there when the Red Star faded.

The Lost are careful with whom they approach. They are likely to call upon the more mythically inclined members of Anarch and Camarilla communities to become Orphans Found. Many cells count young Tremere and Malkavians as members, though almost anyone with an interest in or understanding of prophecy and portent is welcome — save, strangely, any clan in possession of necromantic arts. The Lost avoid Lasombra and Hecata. “We no longer grow our flowers in grave dirt,” they say. Some rare Found who have slowly managed to build closer relationship to the Lost swear that the Lost are nervous or saddened around those touched by Oblivion but couldn’t tell you what precisely left them with that impression or why that might be the case.

The Lost constantly seek signs of or contributors to Gehenna, which is why they turn to the Found, who act as the Lost’s agents around the world. Found are sworn to secrecy, Blood Bound and trusted with the secret of the existence of the Lost. They command the Found to become part of the fabric of the city to ensure that they are properly positioned to anticipate how Gehenna will manifest there and that they have every advantage available to succeed in manifesting the end.

Lost watch potential Found for a very long time, like how a careful sire selects a childe. A cell of Orphans never numbers more than four, and four is a rare occurrence. Lost do their research. They are used to interpreting prophecy and bear the weight of caretaking Gehenna itself. Finding one who shares their predilections for portents and power is child’s play. The Lost then reach out to those who share their zeal through any means that suit them best: a letter by the bedside, a clandestine and “chance” meeting in an old, familiar location, or simply appearing outside of the recruit’s haven.

Recruitment is deeply personal. A Lost, while distant, cares for the Found in their charge. The Lost do everything they can to aid the Found in their purpose, providing the Found has earned and deserves the assistance. They never spoil Found, but knowledge earned, be it a copy of an obscure text or guidance in a Discipline, is never withheld.

## Build the City

Found are to go out into the city and become a part of it. They seek the sign the Lost knows is there. Depend-

ing on where the Orphans are located, this could be a woman with a crescent-shaped birth mark, texts or information detailing catastrophes that have followed red stars shining in the sky, the resting place of an Antediluvian, or portents such as an overabundance of thin-bloods in a city. They search for anything that may tie back to one of several Gehenna prophecies that exist, some of which only the Lost have knowledge of, brought with them from wherever they hail.

Each order of Orphans sees it as their sacred duty to find one of the signs or causes of Gehenna and bring it to fruition. This takes careful planning and organization and analysis of information, especially if one has an overzealous Found in one’s care.

Should a Found hit on an event or mystery of note, the Lost verifies it and takes action to protect it. If the Lost deems it significant, the Lost will pass the information onto the first of the Lost, one called the Gardener.

Rumors among the Found is that the Gardener was the one who led the Lost away from whatever malice the Lost fled. The Gardener is a mythical figure even among the Lost themselves, who claim to know her from when they walked on cobblestones of memory. According to cult legend, the Gardener always knows when one of the Orphans has found something significant, for that’s when she is said to appear and call the Orphans to her. Any vampire would be hard-pressed to find another who has seen the Gardener in recent memory, however. This makes her a popular figure in cult stories.

These meetings are rumored to be comfortable, held in green spaces, topiaries, and the like. Stories describe the Gardener as a small woman with strong, calloused hands and short, dirty fingernails dressed as a modern gardener in sturdy brown pants, a stained canvas apron with dusty leather gloves tucked in the front pocket, a practical cotton shirt, and a wide-brimmed straw hat with a bright ribbon tied around it.

The Orphans say the Gardener listens to all the information the Orphans have gathered, or that she interviews the subject of interest. Then she decides if what they describe is a true sign of the end. Finally, she dictates any further action the Orphans need to take. This could be a range of things, such as protecting or destroying a certain individual, stealing a book or artifacts from a local museum, educating the local thin-bloods, or proliferating childer.

Domains that unknowingly harbor an order of Orphans usually see a spike in crime and strange events as the Orphans carry out their research and obey Gardener’s instructions without knowing why.

### CONVICTIONS OF THE ORPHANS

- **Never turn away from a chance at prophecy**

Find those who know it is the end and that Gehenna is real and alive. Those that feel that tension in their heart are worthy to stand safe in the First City. Find them, for they are a brick in the road to Enoch.

- **Never abandon your territory**

A Lost must not abandon their place of landing. They must interpret the signs. Bind the Orphans Found to act as your agents. Bind them in ritual and Blood. Protect them, for they are your eyes, ears, and hands.

- **Never consider yourself lesser than other Kindred**

All the Orphans, Lost and Found, have been chosen. Through fire, destruction, and tribulation, we were born and cast to the winds. Surviving and holding nothing back made us worthy. Should we prove unworthy, then our bones shall become the mortar of the Enoch to come, the Enoch that is, and the Enoch that has been.

- **Always fulfill the prophecies of Gehenna**

This world will fall. We come from the First City to build the First City. We hold in our dead hearts the knowledge of what is to come. Remove any impediments to Gehenna's completion. Gehenna will happen. Gehenna is happening. It is inevitable. Do not seek to hasten it; simply ensure it.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *It is easiest to plant a seed in an unattended field. Seek out those who will listen. Picking through the remains of the Pyramid, for example, is a fine way to gather signs.*

**Camarilla:** *Hide well, for they have never been more paranoid than they are these nights, ever seeking to uproot that which they fear. And they fear most that which they deny most fervently.*

**The Cult of Shalim:** *They hear the whispers of the Abyss. It wants to keep Enoch for its own. The shadowlings will do all they can to stop us, to prevent Gehenna, to stop the world to come. They will try to stop us and not even know why.*

**The Hecata:** *They have discovered a name long buried and unearthed again, whispered to them by one who knows*

*us. They are no longer fit to walk the streets of the First City. Avoid them, Orphans, for they may see us as something we no longer are.*

**The Kine:** *Speak to the wise among them. The living have unique perspectives. Each faith has a version of Gehenna. Glean from them what you are able and save those you can to meet them again in the age to come.*

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Orphans in a chronicle.

### You Are Chosen

The Orphans are trained, even indoctrinated, to detect and analyze evidence of Gehenna. They have every desire to enact the end of the world, believing that in its place will rise a better one than what there is now, maybe even one without the curse of undeath.

The Orphans in the player characters' domain believe that one or more of the player characters, or one of their mortal connections, has an important piece to the Gehenna puzzle. Maybe they have an unusual birthmark, or wake up one night with a tattoo that wasn't there before. Perhaps the city has been beset with awful weather, with its epicenter over the player character's haven. Maybe the player character killed the previous bearer of this omen, and that has made it transfer to them.

Whatever the case, the player character finds themselves watched, followed, and protected by the Orphans of Enoch. The benefit of this is the potential for a sudden increase in the Mawla and Allies Backgrounds. The drawback is that, eventually, the cult is going to want to fulfil the next step of the prophecy, which may entail kidnapping, interrogating, or slaughtering this significant individual.

### Unusual Habits

Apocalyptic cults often have unusual practices that mark them as unfit for mainstream society. They may ignore norms and mores, see little value in a human life, or practice decadent rituals so that they can exalt in life, such as it is, while they yet exist.

Reflecting this, the court is rife with rumors about a coterie of hedonists pushing the limits of acceptable behavior and flirting with the lines laid down by the Traditions. Rather than appearing to be something that requires the attention of the Sheriff or Scourge, the court sees the Orphans of Enoch as a curiosity or exclusive club.

Many jaded vampires seek to join them just to sample the thrill of dangerous activities that they indulge in. They don't realize, or perhaps don't care, that the group is a doomsday cult, instead reveling in the offerings the Orphans have on display.

The player characters may wish to investigate this hedonistic party, break it up for fear of endangering the Masquerade, or join in to scratch an itch regular hunting, feeding, and herd maintenance just doesn't provide. But the cult's activities reach their denouement when the new entrants from around the city are tragically sacrificed as offerings to Gehenna, putting the player characters in immediate peril of facing the final death. Even should they escape, now the player characters must help the domain's justice swiftly find the murderers before they disappear to start their rituals again elsewhere.

## The Gardener Cometh

In a domain where the Orphans of Enoch have a sizeable presence, their coteries suddenly stop their activities, dropping schemes mid-plot, cutting off communications, and draining bank accounts. Rumor has it that the Gardener is visiting the domain and the Orphans believe it's a sign that Gehenna approaches.

When word escapes the cult that the Gardener is en route, some vampires express interest: this fabled vampire may provide insight beyond the reckoning of her cult, her vitae is undoubtedly rich, or perhaps they could influence her in some way. Other Kindred are frankly terrified. If any of what the Orphans of Enoch say is true, this Gardener may well be a herald of the end times. They conclude that her destruction is the only way to secure the domain, and potentially all existence as they know it now.

Whether the Gardener is really on her way, it's a proxy, or her arrival

has less to do with Gehenna and more to do with her responsibility for listening to all the omens and interpreting them, any interference with her plan is likely to draw the Orphans as enemies.

## The Third Day

*"On the Third Day, there will be silence."*

— The Book of Nod

The Third Day is a prominent Noddist plague cult with its primary coterie based in Antwerp. While they blend some theory from the Book of Nod's Chronicle of Secrets, much like the Church of Caine, they defer their religious veneration for the Beckoning itself. The true members of the cult worship the Beckoning and believe it's the work of a potent methuselah, a lost Antediluvian, or a member of the feared Second Generation.

## Empire of Blood

The clandestine primary coterie, consisting of a handful of Hecata and Anarchs, perceive patterns and connections in the visions of those the Beckoning afflicts, and notice some similarities to necromantic rituals and visionary Disciplines. They perceive the Beckoning as a blessing used to induce visions and glimpses of the end times. This "disease" plaguing Kindred is a thing of perfect design, culling the kine and the Cainites undeserving of its blessings. The cult also studies the effects the Beckoning has on humanity, as disease and violence rises and causes human deaths amid the Gehenna War.

The cult supersedes sect among its believers, though the majority of its members are Camarilla elders. The cult's attempts to stave off the Beckoning among its own dedicants and

to transcribe their experiences and visions even as they might slip appeal to elders desperate to hold onto their power. These vampires travel to Antwerp, searching out the cult for their promised cure.

## Reign of One Thousand Years

Vampires who feel the Beckoning's call experience it in different ways. Some describe it as torture akin to scorching copper wires drilling their way through a Kindred's veins. Others experience a tug on their mind that's almost physical, pulling their body head-first, forcing the vampires to watch as their feet move of their own volition. Even more describe it as a form of sleepwalking, with the summoned vampire utterly unaware of the Beckoning until it's dragged them to another domain.

In all cases, whether pained or numbed, the Beckoning represents a terrifying loss of control over a body a vampire has known for centuries, perhaps millennia, and the tug of vitae from a hungry, godlike ancestor. It is no wonder vampires seek out a cure or method of forestalling the inevitable.

Little wonder, then, that elders drift toward the Third Day cult with desperate hope. They've heard the Third Day are a form of doomsday cult, prone to inhuman acts and beliefs, but that matters far less than the possibility alleviating the Beckoning. Therefore, the Third Day receives patronage from Kindred all over the world as they invest resources in its promise of a miraculous salvation.

To some vampires, the Third Day is all that exists between the Camarilla's survival and absolute anarchy, because it won't be long before every mainstay in the Ivory Tower feels the pull.

## Antwerp, Belgium

Antwerp is the diamond capital of the European continent. The city's Camarilla had ever lorded their wealth and decadence over their inferiors, clothing themselves in the finest fashions and most opulent jewelry, with the Prince imposing a blood tax on any Anarchs who wish to dress and act as well as the Camarilla nobles.

It was this constant humiliation that led the Anarchs to move against the domain, eventually assaulting the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Elysium. The quick, ruthless rebels overwhelmed the security guards and the Elysium Keeper. They crushed the skull of the unhinged Toreador Prince, Delphine Gaël, as he jabbered to himself in a vision-induced stupor upon his gilded throne. His vitae still stains the floor where the still, blanched eyes of Ruben's paintings look on, although docents blame the mark on a clumsy, rushing student who spilled paint. The rebels picked off the remnants of the court over the autumn of 2018, using the yellow vest movement and subsequent rioting as a cover for outright violence against the Camarilla without the destruction of the Masquerade. Their invasion of the Royal Museum was the final act of defiance that ended the centuries-long rule of the Camarilla. As Delphine Gaël took the praxis of Antwerp in 1832 from L'Enfant Perdu, the Anarch Movement seized the city in 2018.

The diamonds his ghoul had sewn into the Prince's clothing were the only thing salvaged after the Movement stuffed the torpid Kindred into a barrel, covered Gaël in wood and trash, doused it in gasoline, and set it ablaze. The Anarchs thought it poetic to place the barrel next to a barricade blocking protestors from police, joking that the Prince was finally making himself useful.

Since the protests settled, the Anarch Movement has not consolidated power within the city limits. Furious political and ecclesiastical debate works as sand in the gears of the Cainite domain. The newfound backing of the Ministry has provided fresh ecclesiastical fervor to the Anarch movement, and the Clan is moving to create a list of "approved" religious organizations within the city limits. At the top of this list beside the Ministry itself is the Third Day, in appreciation of their solidarity with the Movement and its revolution. During the autumnal revolution, the Third's Anarch contingent was quick to offer the locations of elder Kindred havens they'd been covertly observing, perceiving them as possible keys to unlocking the secrets of the Beckoning. Doing so ensured their place within the new city hierarchy.

In the upheaval since the Camarilla's fall, coteries pop up like mushrooms throughout the city. The Third Day — or just Thirds, as the Anarch Movement calls them — is one of the most important in the city. They're

excited to make elders of the Camarilla disappear, and the local Ministry sees them as a calming salve to the city's disarray.

While the fledgling-free Flemish city wears the trappings of an old Camarilla domain in architecture, it is now wholly Anarch and Third Day, from the lowest gutter to the top of the tallest building.

## By the Mark of the Moon

The Third Day is split in two between a primary coterie and its outer adherents. The outer adherents are often referred to as Seers. These satellite members are predominantly elders of the Camarilla who reach the Third Day close to or already going through Beckoning-induced delirium. Cultists offer comfort and care in the form of blood and sanctuary, including stopping the elders from feeling the pull, in exchange for the opportunity to record the elder vampires' visions. If Kindred of note provide information that the inner court deems essential, they may coerce or even stake those vampires to delve into their minds later.

The primary coterie is led by a Giovanni named Emilia St. John, who wears a mask of a broken crow's skull. A slight woman with dishwater blond hair, she is a terrifying force. While calculating, soft-spoken, and scholarly, she also is one of the Kindred whom the Third Day call when their initial efforts to placate and "acclimate" elder Camarilla members feeling the call fail.

## Every Good Gift

The Third Day's inner court has only a few significant sacraments, the first being the creation of the Liber Harenæ, or the Book of Sand. This physical codex records all the visions that the Third Day has the privilege to possess, along with others that they have collected through trading or have come across in their travels. The library is currently small, yet it grows by the night and is the most comprehensive compilation of the Beckoning as a phenomenon, including a treatise on the philosophies of what it is, how it works, and where it comes from through almost every bloodline and lineage the Third Day have come across.

Missing from this endeavor are those that come from the Hecata bloodlines and the Caitiff, many of whom appear unaffected by the Beckoning. The Third Day is one of few groups that knows of some vampires' immunities to the Beckoning, and they research this phenomenon fervently.

Members of the Third Day work to ready themselves as vessels for the Antediluvians. Through ingesting

hallucinogenic blood and forcing themselves into a trance through dance or music, members force themselves into ecstatic fervor to make contact or “beckon” the Antediluvians themselves and act as agents of their will.

The Third Day also participates in a hunt they call Building the Silence, after many months of planning and tracking their targets. This sacrament involves sending a war band out into the suburbs, the countryside, or other locations, and culling all supernatural creatures dwelling there. This act hastens the Third Day of Gehenna, wherein no other supernatural creatures exist. Diablerie is also an acceptable byproduct of hunting for the cult, as the act can sometimes force the Beckoning to subside, though this is heavily studied when it occurs. Conversely, other Thirds try to enrich their Blood enough through the act of diablerie to get Beckoned.

Hecata in the primary coterie act as monitors and record the experiences of those Beckoned, building a codex for surviving Gehenna. Through their pursuit of these visions, they believe the Third Day will transition through the end times and emerge as leaders in the new nights, elevated above the rest of Cainite society as the hands of the Antediluvians.

The cult knows it is on dangerous ground, making

#### THE THIRD DAY CONVICTIONS

- **We must protect our work at all costs.**

The cult believes the Liber Harenæ Lasarpicifer is their path forward. The Third Day will protect their knowledge of the Beckoning at all costs.

- **Endure and rise above the Beckoning**

The Beckoning is not something cured but conquered. This act of defiance proves the Third Day's worth to the Antediluvians or those of the Second Generation who created this plague.

- **Feed from the weak**

The Third Day sees no reason to feed on victims who fight, meaning their palates are rarely exposed to heady dyscrasias.

- **Never hesitate to kill those lacking the blessing of vitae**

While debated, the prevailing school of thought within the cult is that other creatures are misguided at best and deniers of Gehenna at worst, and will do nothing but drive Cainites away from their true calling. In the end, the genocide of those who are not of kine or Kindred is required, because the Book of Nod says so.

promises to elders they're not always capable of delivering. Therefore, it has built a militia to protect its works and library. It has provided sanctuary to those who spread plague through their Kiss and those who lose themselves and ride the Beast, as they see that as an aspect of the larger Beckoning, and even shelter those who struggle with feeding on the living. They see these Kindred as spiritually closer to the progenitors of the clans and as protectors on whom they can depend.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *They believe that through their freedom, they can deny the hand of prophecy. For this, I enjoy their company. They're delightfully naïve and a refreshing break from Gehenna.*

**Camarilla:** *Our benefactors, though some of them do not know it. I wonder how the sect would respond were they to find we've ensured their cohesion in these nights.*

**Caitiff:** *What curious creatures to not feel the Call. Does this mean they are not proper Kindred? They defy the Book of Nod, and therefore, defy fate.*

**Children of Salvation:** *Congratulations Children, you identified the demon that drives you. You should stop struggling and start listening to what it has to say.*

**Servitors of Irad:** *Our kin, in a sense, though if one were to trace the point where we stayed the course and they drifted far, far away, one may be able to heal the rift between our causes.*

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one could include the Third Day in a chronicle.

### The Crawlspace is Full

The Beckoning has the capacity to afflict almost every elder, a fact evident to any Kindred at all involved in the court functions of the Camarilla or in Anarch councils. Therefore, when elders disappear, those left behind often attribute their departure to the Beckoning. What else could so quickly draw an Elder away from their stronghold of power?

When one of the player characters' ghoul associates comes to them with a matter in strict confidence, panicked and unsure of what to do, it takes the player character a concerted effort to get their associate's concerns out into the open. Once in private, this ghoul explains that their sire recently joined a coterie dubbed the Third Day, and was given the task of corralling selected Kindred for supposed safekeeping. This required the ghoul to visit

specific havens, stake these Kindred, and deliver them to a safe location. Lacking a shipping container, a tomb, or bank vault, they buried the bodies in the crawlspace beneath their house.

Through investigation, the player characters discover this kidnapping accounts for almost every elder and ancilla thought to have been Beckoned from the domain. What the Third Day intend to do with all these torpid elders remains unknown, and what the player characters decide to do with this treasure trove of potentially furious vampires is up to them.

## Interception Mission

The Third Day tries all manner of methods to stave off the Beckoning, but sometimes they need to capture a vampire as they succumb to the Call. In this story, their intentions are quite honest: they know an elder who they've been tracking for some time has succumbed, but they have no cultists in place to stop the vampire from making the journey. Therefore, they reach out to the player characters, who are closer in proximity to their target, and request that they prevent the target from leaving the domain until their agents can arrive.

The player characters may have a vested interest in aiding the Beckoned vampire if they are someone whom they already know. Alternatively, they may be on good terms with the vampire who enlists them, not knowing they belong to the Third Day Gehenna cult.

The Beckoned Kindred is unaware they're being summoned from afar, and resists a kidnapping or makes excuses if the player characters try to persuade them to return to their haven. The target can barely fathom

the words the player characters are saying, and can only understand that they must continue toward their destination.

If the player characters do intercept and kidnap the vampire, they must babysit the potentially violent monster. They can be certain that the Third Day won't respond kindly if the player characters have harmed one of their precious elders.

## Victims of the Hunt

It's time for the Third Day to perform their ritual of Building the Silence and purge the outskirts of the domain of all supernatural creatures. The cult starts discreetly, assassinating a ghoul here and a kinfolk there before moving on to burn down a vampire's haven and rip a mage apart in the street.

This attack affects the player characters whether their domain is one in which supernatural creatures interact with one another in meaningful ways, or if the local Warlocks simply keep contact with the few magi in the city. As the slaughter proceeds and the death toll rises, it forces representatives from supernatural factions to come together to address the issue, perhaps bringing the player characters in to address the issue, or perhaps because one of their retainers or acquaintances was targeted and slain.

The issue blows up when the perpetrators are revealed to be a vampire cult, as any werewolves, changelings, or magi caught in the line of fire identify the Kindred as a homogenous group responsible for their own errant coteries. What starts as a group effort may become a raging civil war within the confines of a single city.





# Ruinous Beliefs

*“Evil. Defiler. Monster. Words spoken by those who cannot handle the reality of what we are. Never stopping to consider their own depravity, calling their view of the world virtuous and ours debased.”*

— Prophet Santiago Molinero, Soldiers of the Adversary

Kindred religions are an extension of their adherents' desires to respond to their Beast and to make sense of the world they have been thrust into, in defiance of science and human understanding. Some seek salvation, others seek greater power, and in all groups, there are some who seek destruction. These Kindred wish to debase and destroy the world that has reduced them to drinking blood, to embrace and empower the monster they have become, or to defile and destroy everything, only seeking justification for it. You can find these monsters among the members of these cults.

## The Bloodless Pilgrims

*“Drinking blood is not a curse; it’s a choice. Many of our kind make that choice every night, because it’s the path of least resistance. Tonight, you can learn to make a different choice. Taking the bloodless path won’t be easy, but it will rid you of the greatest sin of the Kindred. Without blood, you will finally be free.”*

— Benedict Hutter

A vampire who doesn't drink blood is impossible, or at least not long for this world. Whether they subsist on humans or animals, someone needs to bleed for the Kindred to survive. The Bloodless Pilgrims claim they've found another way. They say their founder, Benedict Hutter, has not consumed blood for over three decades, and when he cuts himself, a clear, tasteless liquid flows as proof.

Many are skeptical, but the young and the guilty are desperate to believe. Hundreds have joined Hutter's pilgrimage around the world, traveling from city to city to share the revelation of a bloodless path. Strict indoctrination turns members into true believers in the sin of blood, preparing them for Hutter's horrific alternative to the traditional way the Kindred sustain their unives.

## The First Pilgrims

Hutter tells his followers of revelations received in a time of personal failing, of passages found in the Old Testament and the Torah, and of insights he gleaned from the writings of ancient Kindred in the nebulous far-off East. The story of the movement's origins is entirely fictional, but it was enough to convince his first followers. Clanless and

sireless, Hutter branded himself as a quiet mystic, promising a better life for young vampires frightened of becoming as monstrous as their elders. He hung the core tenant of his movement, that drinking blood was the source of a vampire's monstrosity, on kosher and halal dietary traditions, recruiting heavily from Kindred who had been members of the Jewish and Muslim communities in life.

Before teaching anyone his path, Hutter spent years indoctrinating his first apostles. The group lived in rural villages, poaching farm animals and hunting wild game. When they returned to civilization, Hutter and a handful of the Kindred whom he'd left with could perform his bloodless miracle. The remaining pilgrims haven't been seen since.

## The Path to Purity

Kindred interested in joining the Bloodless must drink only animal blood for at least six months. Those outside the cult tend to view its members through the lens of this initial requirement, seeing them as feeble farmers on a ridiculous path to nowhere. Called the Sacrament of Lesser Sin, this period tests would-be Pilgrims' willpower, ensuring they can commit to the cause. Vampires undergoing the first sacrament travel with the group when they move on, and the cult expects them to tend to their material needs if contact with the kine is necessary. A slip-up during this phase, such as drinking or even touching the blood of a human or another vampire, necessitates a two-week period as a blood slave and feeding vessel to a higher-ranking vampire, and restarts the six month probationary period.

Postulants who complete the Sacrament of Lesser Sin become novitiates. Their strict diet continues, but they are also made to drink from the vein of one of the fully purified cult members once a week. This creates a Blood Bond, with the union marking the Sacrament of Devotion. For at least a year, novitiates drink from their mentor and study the cult's scripture, completing daily prayers and meditations on the subject of blood and sin. Gradually, the text and prayers they are exposed to speak less of how blood is a source of sin, and more of how blood is the *only* sin, with all other acts permitted. The cultists make exceptions to the rule against touching blood to teach novitiates Blood Sorcery, which is required for their eventual ascension, though they still ban Rituals that require its consumption. The novitiate stage is known to be the most taxing for members, and Hutter takes novitiates aside regularly to test them on their progress and discuss their devotion. Many leave the order immediately after such an aside, rarely stopping to say goodbye to anyone before disappearing.

When Hutter deems a novitiate worthy, they are initiated into the Sacrament of Clear Blood. The secret to a bloodless life lies in harnessing death directly, without the need for blood as an intermediary, and Hutter has invented

a means of doing just that. The Blood Sorcery the Bloodless use is no less destructive to the kine than the traditional method, but it does leave them free of the red taint they call sin. It also transforms their Vitae into something else, something vulnerable, and even the highest apostles are unaware of Hutter's true purpose in devising and spreading the ritual.

## New Ritual

### Level 3

#### Bloodless Feast

The culmination of Hutter's study of the Blood, this Ritual is deceptively easy to learn and to cast, but far-reaching in its effects.

#### **CONVICTIONS OF THE BLOODLESS PILGRIMS**

Oblivious to Hutter's true intentions, members of the Bloodless Pilgrims adopt Convictions around the scripture of the order, gradually adapting their views of morality as the cult draws them further in.

- **Never drink the blood of humans**

The founding Conviction for entering the Bloodless, most potential members already feel this way before they hear about the order and choose to join to find another way to survive.

- **Always commit penance after touching blood**

Whether held over from mortal religious beliefs or learned through indoctrination, members of the Bloodless shun blood, human and animal, in all its forms. Members who still rely on animal blood to survive often commit themselves to penance after each feeding, though scripture forgives them for their failings until they are able to learn to survive without it.

- **Pray once every night, without fail**

Any Kindred without clear Blood is tainted, and only dedication to ritual and scripture will bring purity. Postulants and novitiates connect to their beliefs through hours and hours of prayer; the cult sets no minimum, but encourages members to stay consistent despite any obstacles they encounter.



- **Ingredients:** An unconscious human, a flawless crystal chalice.
- **Process:** The caster chants scripture over the human target for three hours. Over the course of the ritual, the human gradually weakens, while the chalice fills with a clear, sweet-smelling liquid.
- **System:** A successful Ritual fills the chalice to the brim at the end of three hours and kills the human victim. The clear liquid produced functions exactly like fresh blood from the human victim for the next hour, carrying any Resonance and Dyscrasia the victim exhibited. Since the victim must be unconscious during the ritual, anything but a Phlegmatic resonance is difficult to obtain. Though it mostly functions as normal, this clear Blood has an unusual effect on Kindred who consume it: until the next sunset, their Hunger can be reduced to 0 (due to the donor's death) and they are vulnerable to diablerie. A would-be diablerist gains three dice to her Strength + Resolve roll against the victim, and she may use the experience points she gains to increase her Blood Potency by at least one point, regardless of her victim's power. She also does not gain the black veins in her aura that usually accompany the act. Hutter keeps these properties of clear vitae a secret even from his truest believers.

## BENEDICT HUTTER

**Epitaph:** Cannibal in a preacher's clothes

**Quote:** "You are tired, broken, haunted by your sins. Let me show you a better way."

**Clan:** Caitiff

**Embraced:** 1891 (Born 1830)

### MORTAL DAYS: BLUE-BLOODED BASTARD

Benedict was an accident, a fact which his mother reminded him of every time he misbehaved. She was once a common maid, while his father was an Austrian prince, and neither of them had intended to create a child. Fortunately for Benedict and his mother, he was born looking enough like his father for her family to achieve a bit of light blackmail, leaving her financially free to pursue a lackluster artistic career. She cared enough for her son, or at least her retirement plan, to send him off for a first-rate education in France, where he attracted the attention of the ghoul who served as headmaster. The headmaster soon presented Benedict to his domitor, an antiquated Ventre named Florent Dagenais, and the young man soon became a ghoul himself.

Unfortunately for Dagenais, Benedict was not so much a genius as he was a great actor. He took credit for the work of others, exaggerated his own achievements,

and outright lied his way into his master's good graces, his enthralled urge to please his regnant mingling with his own need for praise and legitimacy. Subtlety and luck lined up to keep Dagenais pleased enough with his pretty human pet to offer Benedict the Embrace. Strange times had come to France, times of war, and a strong Ventre presence was necessary to retain stability in Kindred society.

### KINDRED NIGHTS: FROM DISAPPOINTMENT TO MYSTIC

After his failure to bond with the Blood of Ventre, Benedict found himself labeled a bastard for the second time. His sire left him with strongly worded encouragement to flee the city and never mention his name again. With no prospects and a lingering Blood Bond, he spent years roaming the countryside in despair, feeling little but Hunger and regret.

As his ties to his once-master waned, he sought out Kindred communities abroad, traveling south to the Mediterranean and through to the Middle East, getting out of the Balkans just before the events of the 1910s made things unpleasant in the region. From his time as a ghoul, he knew enough about the Camarilla to pass as an initiate for a few months, while his true nature bought him temporary acceptance among Anarchs and some of the unbound. He never stayed put longer than a few years; spinning lives out of lies and always wary of the web breaking, it was easier to move on and start again, making new friends and learning new tricks along the way.

One of those tricks was Blood Sorcery, for which Benedict found he had a knack. Finding tutors in the art was difficult, but he learned to play factions off each other, appeal to a prospective teacher's vanity, and manipulate his way into the good graces of his elders and betters. Along the way, he learned another important lesson: Kindred society was a mess. Every city had its share of listless fledglings, half-mad neonates, and other Kindred falling through the cracks between humanity and the Camarilla, or whatever substitute for order the locals had put in place.

Benedict planned the belief structure of the Bloodless Pilgrims to take full advantage of these cracks, appealing to the lost and the uncertain and transforming them into a source of personal power. He reinvented himself as a mystic and guru, drawing inspiration from his lengthy world travels. For now, those travels continue, as he brings the Bloodless from city to city to stay ahead of repercussions. If things continue as he has planned, however, he'll soon hold enough power to stand his ground and finally have the chance to make himself a home where he answers to no one.

### PLOTS AND SCHEMES:

- **Claim a Domain for the Bloodless:** The cult has been traveling since its inception, but recent events have left Kindred society in chaos, with whole cities ripe for the taking. If Hutter can gain a foothold in a region upset by the Second Inquisition or the Anarch rebellion, he's grown strong enough on the Blood of his supplicants to take and hold a throne of his own. This could also give him access to stronger victims, allowing him to enhance his Blood Potency and gain even more power.
- **Locate Florent Dagenais:** Benedict has tried to keep tabs on his sire for decades, with little success. He's certain Dagenais has changed his name and no longer stays in France, but beyond that, the trail goes cold. Exactly what Benedict wants to do to Dagenais upon finding him varies with his mood, ranging from begging him for forgiveness to diablerizing him on the spot.
- **Master Blood Sorcery by any means:** Benedict has never had a Tremere mentor in Blood Sorcery, and for decades, he envied the secure structure their Pyramid once offered. He now competes with the remains of the clan to secure their old artifacts and grimoires, but would love to lure a talented magus into his personal service.

### TERRITORY AND FEEDING HABITS:

The Bloodless Pilgrims don't keep a permanent domain, relying on the hospitality of locals as they travel from city to city and leaving before they overstay their welcome or attract too much suspicion.

**Predator Type: Blood Leech (Solitary Kindred)** Hutter developed a taste for vitae some years ago, eschewing his cult's preference for animal blood. As the cult travels from domain to domain, he becomes acquainted with loner Kindred and arranges assaults on their havens so he can feed from them and commit diablerie wherever possible.

### THRALLS AND TOOLS:

- **The Bloodless Apostles (Allies 3)** There are currently seven members of the Pilgrims initiated to this level, all Blood Bound to either Hutter or each other. All are younger than Hutter and are true believers in the Bloodless religion, but also so personally loyal to Hutter that they'd probably rationalize his ambition and follow him even if his schemes were revealed. Three apostles travel ahead of Hutter and the rest of the Pilgrims, each scouting a different city as a potential next stop on the endless pilgrimage and reporting back so Hutter can make the choice.

- **The Flock (Retainers 3)** At least 80% of Hutter's followers are literally that, following him from city to city. Such an influx would usually threaten the Masquerade, but most of them subsist on animal blood alone, lessening the strain. Hutter often offers his flock's labor to the local Prince or Baron, encouraging them to perform menial tasks like construction, surveillance, or service for their material or financial gain. This keeps the flock too busy to ask questions, while earning the goodwill of the local elite.

#### KINDRED RELATIONSHIPS:

- **Audrey Mulligan (Affection)** One of Hutter's fellow Bloodless Pilgrims and a rare individual who has earned his compassion, Audrey is Benedict's closest companion and firm friend, never failing to support his cause or to push him to new extremes.
- **Vidal Jarbeaux (Suspicion)** The Toreador Archon became aware of this bizarre heresy in the last year. He has made it his mission to discover whether there's any benefit to their existence, or if he should just wipe them off the face of the Earth. He's seeking a coterie to infiltrate this cult's ranks to help him discern the best course of action.

#### WHISPERS:

- **Chosen for Research:** A small cell of Tremere from the Praesidium cult are seeking Hutter out to capture him based on a tip that he's somehow alchemically changed the substance of vitae.
- **Mortal Awareness:** Someone recently handed a mortal biologist in the ranks of the U.S. Information Awareness Office a Bloodless Pilgrim on a platter for dissection and study. This scientist doesn't know this vampire was a vampire, but has recorded the unusual properties of their Blood.

#### MASK AND MIEN:

- Hutter does not keep a mortal Mask, even a half-hearted one. This used to pose few problems, but in the information age, even a wandering mendicant is expected to have a passport and papers if they want to travel. Nowadays, he travels as a corpse when he has to cross borders, lying still in a simple casket and relying on his followers to pass off forged papers about a body going home for burial.
- Hutter is disturbingly thin, with nearly all his bones visible under pale, taut skin. He dresses in rags and sandals, but keeps his face shaved, his hair cut short, and his teeth and nails clean. Depending on the light, he can look like a serene martyr or a living skeleton.

**Sire:** Florent Dagenais

**Ambition:** Devour my way to power and respectability

**Convictions:** Never sin through touching human blood

**Touchstones:** Diana Leigh, mortal cultist and devoted chaperone to Hutter's body as it travels from place to place in a coffin

**Humanity:** 3

**Generation:** 11th (Embraced as 13th)

**Blood Potency:** 4 (increased through multiple acts of diablerie)

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2; Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3; Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 4

**Secondary Attributes:** Health 5, Willpower 7

**Skills:** Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Melee 2, Stealth (Kindred) 3; Animal Ken 1, Etiquette (Camarilla Courts) 3, Insight 4, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Persuasion (Recruitment) 3, Subterfuge 2; Awareness 2, Finance 1, Investigation 2, Occult (Blood Sorcery) 3, Politics 1

**Disciplines:** Blood Sorcery 3, Celerity 1, Dominate 3, Fortitude 1, Presence 1

**Flaws:** Dark Secret — Diablerist (••), Prey Exclusion — Mortals (••)

**General Difficulties:** 6/4

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** They lack the capacity for discipline and rational behavior. There's little hope for them.

**Camarilla:** A perfect cloak with which to conceal our activities, and dare I say it, I imagine they'd approve in most cases. Otherwise, look meek and harmless and they'll ignore you.

**Clan Tremere:** We want what they have, and they want to cut us open and examine our veins. For the time being, stay hidden from their attentions.

**The Kine:** It isn't that they're pure. Heavens, no. They're dirt and disgusting, the anus of all life.

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Bloodless Pilgrims in a chronicle.

## Warlock Fire

The science behind the Bloodless' trick of creating the Bloodless Feast fascinates the Blood Sorcerers who know of it. In particular, a Warlock in the player characters' domain has heard of the cult's ritual, but has no desire to join the cult to discover the truth of the matter first-hand. Therefore, the Chantry seeks a capable coterie of vampires to kidnap a couple of Bloodless Pilgrims (one of whom should serve as the experimental control, the other as the toad for dissection), with the promise of favor with the Tremere.

This story works best if one of the Bloodless Pilgrims in the domain is a close contact of the player characters, so whether the coterie takes the assignment or not, the Bloodless can express that their belief doesn't harm anyone, it's self-contained, and they just want to be left alone. This veneer of vulnerability is what the Pilgrims use to find out about the Tremere behind this attempted kidnapping and strike back against the Warlocks themselves, potentially leading to an explosive conclusion.

## Parity Shift

It's rare that anyone considers the Bloodless a major threat to Kindred society. While their practices are unusual and even extreme at times, they keep their rites within their ranks and don't trouble the established order. They are, however, like a hill of fire ants; when disturbed, they lash out as a unified bloc.

When the domain's Baron calls the Bloodless heretics and Masquerade risks, the domain's Kindred turn against the cult. They respond with a surprising level of backlash, as the Pilgrims have among their number one of the domain overlord's childer within their ranks who is providing them with intelligence on the vampire's haven and preferred feeding grounds.

The Baron disappears one night, and while the Bloodless Pilgrims are silent as to why, everyone suspects the cult is responsible. Tensions heighten as they propose their own cell leader as replacement Baron.

## The Children of the Devourer

*"Our hunger is nothing to her hunger. Our fangs are nothing to her fangs. The end of the world is our mother. We are her children. Blood will sustain her, empower her, and awaken her. All blood to Angrboda, the Great Devourer."*

— Traditional prayer

In the Canadian wilderness, a four-hour drive north from Saskatoon into the middle of nowhere, there's a small town called Ironwood. It has the only gas and motel for miles, and the food they serve at the greasy spoon diner is nearly edible. If the locals are cold and unfriendly toward outsiders, perhaps they can be forgiven when the unwary learn the truth: there are monsters in Ironwood, and only the steady flow of transient blood keeps them at bay.

Beneath Ironwood, the claw-dug caves of the Children of the Devourer dwarf the town above, home to a horde of ravening Gangrel. What they hunt, they're a rampaging band of marauders attacking all local life. At the center of their buried temple is an ancient wooden casket and the torpid corpse of a methuselah. Her Children bring her strength, blood dripped directly from the town's sacrifices into her waiting, open maw. Some night, she will open that maw wide enough to devour the whole world. If her priesthood is to be believed, that night is not far off.

## Across a Tumultuous Sea

According to her followers, Angrboda was born and embraced in Iceland and went to sleep before the humans around her had begun to record history. In the 10th century CE, her youngest three childer were seized by visions, compelled to take her casket from its resting place in the ice and transport it across the ocean to a vast and untouched forest, from which they foretold she would one day rise to devour the world.

The details of Angrboda's life have been lost to time and confused with tales of the mythological monster the kine remember by her name. Her followers don't particularly care; they were never much for bookkeeping anyway. They sustain the torpid corpse at the heart of their caves because she is their Great Mother, because they are called to feed her, and because to do so is their nature and purpose.

## Ironwood Horror

The kine of Ironwood have lived among monsters for generations. The survivors aren't stupid, though they lean toward the paranoid. They know that there's something living just outside of town, something murderous, clever, and beyond the natural world. It's not all bad for the people of Ironwood; the farming is good, crime is low, and land is cheap. The big city executive who came in to close the local manufacturing plant was torn apart by wild dogs. The rules of living with the town's demons aren't written down, but residents understand the gist of them: keep the monsters fed, and they'll keep the town safe and prosperous enough to survive. Deny the existence of the monsters to each other and especially to outsiders, or you'll be the next one

to disappear. Leave if you want, but if you do, stay quiet and never, ever come back.

For the Children of the Devourer, Ironwood is a convenient herd, easily maintained by a handful of well-placed ghouls, but hardly their main concern. Human fears interest them even less than the irrelevant and impermanent bickering of Kindred politics that means nothing before the jaws of their devouring mother.

## The Priesthood

**Ottar, First Among Us** is the oldest vampire living among the Children, and the cult's longtime leader. He claims to be a direct childe of Angrboda and has destroyed anyone and anything that could prove otherwise. Over the centuries, he's even convinced himself. Tall, wide, blond, and clad in animal furs, Ottar is the model of a Gangrel of Viking descent. His eyes betray the yellow glare and lean look of a predator who has never been sated. Monstrously strong and unhinged, he leads the Children of the Devourer with a burning zeal derived from complete devotion. That Angrboda's cult grants him status is a very pleasing side effect, but Ottar is more dangerous than any self-serving figurehead; he will sacrifice anything to protect and empower Angrboda, including leading himself and all his followers directly down her gullet.

**Ellifu Unchained** was kidnapped by the Children of the Devourer when she was a mere child herself, raised as part of their underground herd before the founding of Ironwood. She tried to escape six times, succeeded once, and was brought back in chains to a choice: the Embrace, or sacrifice to Angrboda. She chose life, by any means necessary. Once, Ellifu dreamed of rebellion, destroying Angrboda, and returning to life among the Sioux she was taken from. Those dreams died long ago, eroded by the whispers of a sleeping methuselah and her draining humanity. Now, Ellifu serves as second-in-command to Ottar, acting as his voice of reason. She believes in Angrboda's Ragnarök but is concerned with what everyone's going to eat in the meantime. Ellifu is a short woman who moves like a fox, her youthful face and bloodless skin marred by a deep burn scar across her right cheek.

**Angrboda** herself is a desiccated corpse, kept in a wooden coffin deep within the Childrens' caves. She wears a thin, long-faded linen dress and a wolf fur cloak and lies with her eyes closed, her fanged mouth wide open. Her followers believe her to be in a state of deep torpor, gathering strength from the blood they feed her but refusing to wake until the time is right for her to devour the world.

## The Congregants

The Children of the Devourer keep no holy book and practice no formal worship. Their religion is in the bloodline. The cult consists of Angrboda's descendants and accepts no outsiders. They hunt down any Kindred who leave and feed them back to their mother. Those few who escape are inevitably drawn back by visions and nightmares.

Mortal population control is a long-term concern among the cult, whose leaders understand that their success relies upon maintaining the herd. Most members are elders or ancillae, held back from the Beckoning by their torpid master. New members are Embraced only when the town grows substantially, or when an existing member is sacrificed to Angrboda to sustain her in a time of famine. Within the last century, Ellifu has experimented with deliberately creating higher-generation Kindred, thinning the Blood to allow more, weaker Children to survive off the same human population. Results have been mixed: the clan's neonates are easier to feed, but feel less loyalty towards Angrboda. To date, the line of Angrboda has never produced a thin-blood.

Members spend their nights communing with Angrboda, building or repairing the cult's compound, or sparring, running through the woods around Ironwood, and hunting wild animals. A few hold human identities and jobs in Ironwood, usually the recently Embraced or one of a few elders who have suitable skills and patience.

A handful of Ironwood citizens are ghouls under the cult's control, or mortals who know just enough about the cult's needs to serve it. The Children do not consider these people to be members, but they serve an important role in luring transients to the compound for sacrifice. All businesses who have frequent contact with outsiders, such as gas stations and restaurants, employ at least one of the Children's servants. The cult expects these servants to determine which travelers won't be missed and to use any means necessary to get them to the edge of town after dark.

## Obsessions and Convictions

Angrboda subjects all her descendants who bond with her Blood and join Clan Gangrel to a compulsion to follow her will. Mechanically, this functions like a constant Blood Bond, ranging from Bond Strength 3 for her closest relatives to Bond Strength 1 for her highest-generation descendants. This connection doesn't degrade naturally, even if a descendant manages to spend significant time away from her. Angrboda does not communicate



her needs directly, but those initiated into the cult and allowed to visit her corpse understand that she wants to be fed, she wants her descendants to stay close, and she wants them to work together to serve her. Ottar, the closest to the methuselah, sometimes receives direct visions from her in his dreams, though these require some interpretation to understand.

Maintaining a connection to humanity has never been a priority among the Children, and most of them are more monster than not. The Blood-deep need to serve keeps internal conflict to a minimum, but the cult's most effective members cling to Humanity and their ability to interact with the kine by focusing on Convictions that don't interfere with Angrboda's needs.

## Servants and Tools

**Roger Miller** has been sheriff of Ironwood for 65 years. No one questioned it when the old sheriff stepped down and moved away and the new sheriff looked identical, just like no one points out that Sheriff Miller has been a plump man pushing fifty for the last thirty-odd years. He's a ghoul bound directly to Ellifu, and undisputedly the most powerful man in Ironwood. Roger loves being a big fish in a small pond, taking what he wants from local businesses free of charge and romancing his

sixth wife on city time. No one among the kine can stop him, but Roger knows the town's beastly bargain better than most: keep the peace for his masters, or become the next person to disappear overnight.

**Arthur Pewty** used to work in real estate, until he tried to sell a house in Ironwood; then, he was taken and Embraced within a week. Pewty believes he's one of the top movers and shakers among the Kindred of Ironwood, so important that they send him as their representative when greater Kindred politics force the local Gangrel to interact with outsiders. He lives in a large house at the edge of town and has never even heard of Angrboda, the Children of the Devourer, or their compound, the better to keep the cult's secrets. Lately, Arthur has been having nightmares about an ancient, fanged monster, and a compulsion to find and serve her. Ellifu is keeping an eye on his newfound curiosity and deciding whether to let him join the Children or to feed him to Angrboda.

## Current Activities

Descendants of Angrboda living near her are not affected by the Beckoning, but they have felt their own compulsions increase since the dawn of the Second Inquisition. Ottar has announced to the compound that he has received a new vision from their Great Mother, the first

### CONVICTIONS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE DEVOURER

- **Protect Ironwood with your life**

Many of the Children grew up in Ironwood, while others helped it to grow from a tiny settlement into a prosperous town. Protecting Ironwood from crime and degradation comes naturally to Angrboda's children and ensures a healthy and obedient herd.

- **Always eschew material wealth**

Money and possessions mean little to the Children, who live most of their lives in the cult's underground caves. Newer members sometimes take pride in living the life of an ascetic, in devotion to their apocalyptic god.

- **Support your family in all things**

The Children are a family by the Blood of Angrboda and often a kinder family than the ones from which new members are Embraced. Many members share a profound loyalty to one another, aided by their shared obedience to the methuselah they serve.

direct contact with her in centuries. Ragnarök is coming within one human lifetime, and procuring blood is now more important than long-term secrecy. Furthermore, she demands the Blood of Kindred, especially those not descended from her own line.

The cult has yet to decide how to fulfill this demand. Ottar has contemplated rounding up the entire town of Ironwood and bleeding them dry into Angrboda's mouth. Ellifu wants to keep the town as cover and focus on hunting Kindred, luring them to Ironwood from other domains by requesting aid or promising power. Among the youngest cultists, the demand has caused some secret doubts. Certainly, they all serve Angrboda and her apocalypse on principle, but a theoretical someday-apocalypse and one that will happen within a century or less are very different beasts.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *They've got fight in them again. It's only taken 500 years.*

**Camarilla:** *Cowards.*

**Clan Gangrel:** *They best typify what we're about and define our ancestry. We're proud of our lineage.*

**The Kine:** *Don't kill them all. They need to breed to repopulate, so our food sources continue to grow.*

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Children of the Devourer in a chronicle.

### The Call North

Blood ties run deep, and while the Gangrel isn't a clan given to formality and hierarchy, its methuselahs and elders are as capable of tugging on those ties as any others.

Such is the case when one of the player characters — a Gangrel, Caitiff, or thin-blood — feels the call toward Ironwood, no matter where they are in the world. This middle-of-nowhere burg of course acts as home to the Children of the Devourer coterie, but it's Angrboda making the summons to her descendant, calling them close.

This story acts as an introduction to the raiders and murders among the Children, and what's likely an intensely different way of existence than what the player characters are accustomed to. Angrboda's intentions for drawing her descendant near are for the Storyteller to decide, but they could range from wanting to devour or sacrifice the younger Kindred, to wanting to pass on words of power, or a desire to bolster the ranks of her cult ahead of the coming Ragnarök. Where that leaves the other vampires in the coterie is another matter altogether.

### Marauding Horde

There's something of the Viking mentality to the Children of the Devourer, with the cult sharing practices with the Gangrel of the Dark Ages and before. They form a pack, strike a settlement, drink their fill, and drag their prey back to their havens to sustain themselves and to drain blood down to Angrboda.

In this story, the Storyteller is encouraged to place the cult closer to the player characters' domain, if it makes geographical sense for them to be there, and have their domain subject to one of the cult's raids. Alternatively, the horde might be transporting Angrboda's body to another location due to visions she sent them. They may act with greater subtlety away from Ironwood, but you can't teach an old Gangrel new tricks. These Animals find their best method of feeding is operating as a unit and storming somewhere with low security and a high population, such as a bar, a strip club, an apartment building, or a campus.

The player characters have the responsibility to defend themselves and their territory, though the allure

of being a wild reaver such as these Gangrel may entice some of the protagonists into sampling the Children of the Devourer's style of existence.

## The Penny Dining Club

*"I tell you, it was so smoky, with these incredible umami undertones. It almost tasted... spicy? I know you don't really get spicy blood, like with capsaicin, but there was this little jolt at the end that I really can't describe any other way. It was the best thing I've tasted since my Embrace, one hundred percent. Look, I know some of the things they do are a bit fucked up, but you have to come with me to the next dinner. There's nothing else like it. I'm even thinking of applying for membership."*

— Harold Horsley-Bridger, budding gourmet

At the dawn of the 20th century, a coterie of aging vampires grew bored. Too young and unmotivated to hold real power, yet too old and jaded to enjoy human company, they yearned to make their mark without entering dangerous Camarilla politics. Two members of the coterie were taking a stint at Oxford, catching up on the latest developments, and found their way into the Bullingdon Club, a private organization of rich, well-connected young men who met over expensive, outlandish dinners. It all seemed like great fun. Inspired, the coterie formed the Penny Dining Club.

## A Gourmet Experience

The Penny Dining Club hosts twice-annual dinners for members and their guests. One of their founding members hosts one event at the group's clubhouse in Oxford, UK, while another member hosts the year's second event abroad. Hosting a dinner is a great honor, and they are scheduled well in advance to allow the host to secure space, get permission for the local Prince (if the Prince himself is not hosting), and plan the menu.

Animals serve as appetizers, the more exotic the better. Hosts choose these for spectacle rather than taste, and few guests will have more than a polite sip. Past dinners have featured endangered big cats, gorillas, rhinos, bite-sized hummingbirds raised from egg on a diet of blood and honey, white stags, plump leeches, and a live orca in the underground swimming pool of the host's mansion. Finding something interesting to serve before the main meal has become harder and harder over the decades, and an inventive idea is part of any successful

dinner proposal. A recent trend is to acquire famous animals featured in movies or popular in local zoos, but the risk this behavior poses to the Masquerade has left older members frowning.

While the guests appreciate the tone, beauty, and spectacle of dinner's trappings, the main course is what determines its success. The official mission of the Penny Dining Club is to advance vampiric culinary arts through the cultivation, study, and appreciation of unique blood. The Club expects a host to procure enough vessels with intense temperaments to feed every attendee, the bare minimum for a Penny Dining soiree. To impress, hosts feature something rarer. Some club members have experimented with making blood hold two Resonances at once, training a vessel for months or years until they can feel anger and sadness, rapture and sloth, in perfect harmony. Stable Dyscrasia are popular too, found and preserved or carefully cultivated. Club members often keep contacts among the Circulatory System, enabling the transfer of delicacies from far and wide. In an effort to surprise and entertain, main courses have featured blood with unusual physical properties as well: vessels with rare blood types like Rhnnull, or unusual diseases that make their veins run thick and sweet, or thin and bitter.

The club develops and teaches specialized Blood Sorcery rituals to increase the supply of rare blood, but it's still impossible to serve everyone from a single unique vessel. Portions are first given to special guests, like the local Prince or other authorities, and to senior club members. If the vessel is still alive and well, the host offers additional portions as prizes for parlor games, door prizes, and other party pastimes, or by lottery. The main course is never expected to survive the night, making the club dinner the only time their blood will be available.

The dessert course, so to speak, is the most controversial: club members are encouraged to sample each other's Blood. This taboo act is performed with the utmost concern for safety, with clear-headed chaperones standing by to ensure that no one gets carried away. Ledgers are kept of who has tasted whom, and when, to avoid unwanted Blood Bonds, though this precaution is unnecessary if vitae has been outside the vein for longer than a minute, as it loses Bonding and Embracing properties. The club's precautions serve to position the act as an approachable way to experience the taboo without any long-term side-effects. It also serves to creates social bonds between members, not by the inescapable seal of the Blood, but by the camaraderie of flirting with danger.

As the night goes on and less-invested members say their goodbyes, mutual feeding grows more intense. Delicate bites are replaced by cutting, ripping, and tearing. Experienced members play with whips and blades, even fire, toying with the destruction of their willing Kindred

prey. Chaperons still stand watch, but by the early morning hours, the decadent dinner party has devolved into a bacchanal of pain, the only hint ever offered to outsiders about the Penny Dining Club's true purpose.

## The Taste of Pain

All-member dinners haven't been the club's true purpose in ages; the founders grew bored with exotic animals and mixed humors after the first few decades. Dinners keep the club in the good graces of the Camarilla community, but senior members see them largely as recruiting events for the real Penny Dining Club, the inner circle.

Senior member events aren't publicized or run on an annual schedule. In fact, junior members often don't realize that senior-member-only events exist beyond the occasional planning committee luncheon and whatever the founders get up to when they meet up as a coterie of old friends. There are no appetizers or themes, and the venue is wherever they can find that is secure and accessible. Only one dish is served, the most exquisite dish of all: the pain and suffering of other vampires.

Through Blood Sorcery, the Penny Dining Club has discovered a way to tap into the connection that the Kindred have with selected kine (their Touchstones, though vampires don't use the term). They found straining and destroying that bond to be an exquisite form of psychological torture. Of course, publicizing your fondness for kidnapping and eating the mortals whom other vampires hold most dear is not a good way to stay in the community's good graces; hence the need for absolute secrecy. The members of the original coterie screen potential inner circle diners, often for decades, for their devotion to the culinary arts and to the Penny Dining Club above all other loyalties. To further ensure compliance, the club targets the mortal associates of the Kindred elite whenever they're initiating new senior members, and collects evidence of that member's involvement in the mortal's torment or death; nowadays, this takes the form of filming the murder. The founders keep copies of these snuff films to serve as blackmail, though it's seldom necessary to flex that unsavory muscle. The senior members and founders are a tight-knit group of friends and political allies, and for one of them to leave the club would mean breaking ties with everyone whom they hold dear.

Of course, there's a more direct way to consume the Blood and pain of the Kindred. The founders hold diablerie as the ultimate indulgence, the soul of a vampire a delicacy without equal. Still, the act is dangerous; it can overwhelm even an experienced gourmand, and discovery could oust the entire club from polite Kindred society. By club rules, no member is allowed to commit diablerie

The Miracle and its place  
in the human taste and psyche:

# A dinner proposal

### LIBATIONS

2001 Riesling Icewine - Casa Estate

*Served in ordained Catholic ministry*

1941 Champagne – Moet & Cuvee

*Served in lapsed Catholic congregants*

### HORS-D'ŒUVRES

Last Miracle – champion thoroughbred racehorse

One dozen unblemished red heifers

Albino rock doves – raised on blood meal and crushed pearls

### ENTREES

The Mourners

*Vessels induced to an intensely melancholic temperament*

The Rapturous

*A unique set of triplets, trained from childhood to a delicate blend of the sanguine and the choleric through intense religious observances*

Morton Zimmet

*Lottery winner and former millionaire, possessing of a most unique and stable flavor*

more than once a decade, and all three remaining founders must give their approval before anyone drains a vampire of the 11th generation or lower, a club member of any standing, or the childe of a senior member or founder. Recently, there's been some discussion of allowing the draining of thin-blooded more often; although they aren't

as toothsome, feeding on them would help to cull the population, and the Camarilla is less likely to mind if a club member gets caught in the act.

## The Founders

Five vampires founded the Penny Dining Club, three of whom remain. One was killed after running afoul of a Prince while traveling abroad, while the other deceased member met his end after a disagreement about new club policies.

**Herbert Witherite** is the current Club President, a role that changes hands between the founders every few decades. He's a large, affable man with both feet planted squarely in the past, largely responsible for keeping women, non-binary people, and "foreign types" out of the club. He's the least gourmet-minded of the founders, more interested in power and camaraderie than advancing Kindred culinary understanding.

**Wilfred Corbett** is the current Treasurer, and the club's truest believer. He's happy to wax poetic about the nuances of blood, Resonance, and taste to any member who will listen, and loathes the necessity of keeping senior club activities secret. He's also the most modern-minded of the founders, keeping up with current events and social movements among both Kindred and kine, with an eye to improving club reach and practices.

**Werner Milgram** hasn't been seen in public for the better part of a year, due to a recent act of diablerie. He's the Warlock behind the club's specialized Rituals, and loves nothing better than performing them for his peers. Since the fall of the Pyramid he's been in some demand as a mentor, and he keeps his valuable occult library in the Club's home in Oxford.

## The Diners

The club boasts members all around the world, mostly in Great Britain and the Commonwealth. Official members are predominantly white and exclusively male, though Kindred who are not men are welcome to attend dinners as guests if they can secure an invitation. The Penny Dining Club is not officially associated with the Camarilla, but Anarchs are not welcome as members or guests, and Autarkis are seldom invited. In practice, dinners are hosted by Princes and Primogen, held in Elysia (if desserts are approved) or in the cult's preferred restaurant (if not), and Camarilla politics are always a popular topic of conversation.

Senior members rarely hold official positions in Camarilla courts, as club activities require too much time

and travel for them to hold onto power in that way. Many are still respected elders or ancillae who command the attention of their local Prince, thanks to their social capital and club connections. Masters of soft diplomacy, senior members have influenced intercity politics for decades, choosing dinner locations and curating guest lists to suit their own agendas. The Penny Dining Club is far from large enough to have a senior member in every Camarilla city, but a few cities host two or three, clustered together as close friends and allies.

## Culinary Invention

The founders and senior members have devised a number of specialized thaumaturgical rituals in pursuit of culinary enrichment. Officially, they are only to be taught to members, but members have shared Enrich the Blood with outsiders on several occasions, leading to its occasional use outside of club activities.

## New Ritual

### Level 1

#### Enrich the Blood

This Ritual increases the potency of a human's blood, allowing the Kindred to take the same sustenance from a smaller quantity of blood. Performing this ritual is central to club activities, allowing more mouths to taste from the same vessel and facilitating comparative culinary critique. Only humans can be targeted by this ritual; it has no effect on the Blood of Kindred.

- Ingredients:** A half-full vial of the target's blood, five liters of unprocessed human blood no more than three hours old.
- Process:** The caster slowly pours the unprocessed blood into the vial, which never fills up so long as the vampire retains concentration. Once all the blood is added, the resulting half-vial of blood must be fed back to the target. The ritual poses significant long-term medical problems to the donor/recipient (vulnerability to blood diseases)
- System:** A successful Ritual roll makes the target's blood unusually rich and flavorsome. A sip from their veins slakes two levels of Hunger rather than one. On a Critical Win, two vampires can slake to

Hunger or if they share the kill. If left alive, the effect on the target wanes after one week.

This Ritual makes the human's blood thick and hypercoagulable, prone to numerous medical complications, and causes the caster to suffer 1 Stain (unless Chronicle Tenets or Convictions negate it). A second casting renders the blood too thick to drink and kills the target.

## Level 2

### Enhance Dyscrasia

A unique flavor is a treat to be shared, and the busy members of the Penny Dining Club seldom have time to do so slowly and safely. This ritual allows multiple Kindred to partake in a Dyscrasia, without destroying it or having to wait for it to "recharge." Generally, the Thaumaturge will perform Enrich the Blood on their target first, to stretch their choice dish further.

- Ingredients:** An object of significance to the target, appropriate to the Resonance of their Dyscrasia.
- Process:** The caster must taste the target's blood, then hold the object and concentrate upon its Resonance for several minutes. The object must then be returned to the target.
- System:** A successful Ritual roll increases the potency and utility of the target's Dyscrasia, providing its effects to anyone who slakes at least 1 point of Hunger from the target. This effect dissipates after three nights.

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** *They're not all uncouth simpletons, but I'll be damned if one of them puts their elbows on my table..*

**Camarilla:** *The Camarilla own the keys to the finest establishments, have access to the richest vessels, and are onboard with keeping our activities hush-hush. I wholeheartedly approve.*

**The Nagaraja:** *I would dearly love to meet one of these gourmands. The tales they might tell of meals forever denied to us by virtue of our sensitive stomachs! We could each share so much.*

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Penny Dining Club in a chronicle.

### A Hair in My Soup

No one is lining up to sing the praises of the Circulatory System's ethics, but in terms of its business acumen, it's filled a hole left open in recent decades. They cater to many a Venttrue Prince and often deliver vessels for Kindred galas. They do not, however, have a good relationship with the Penny Dining Club.

The player characters can discover this plot through assignment or mutual contacts, as word reaches them that the Penny Dining Club enlisted the services of the Circulatory System to cater a unique event, only for the Club to renege on payment to the System. Word on the street says the Club claims that the System delivered them rotten food, while the System's representatives state that they delivered a van full of vessels plucked from the streets to order.

The unpaid bill between the two Kindred groups doesn't break out into street warfare, but in social snubs, sabotage, and spreading rumors about Kindred attached to either organization. While amusing at first, especially if the player characters are unaffiliated with either the Club or the System, the social conflict reaches boiling point when someone hijacks a Circulatory System shipment and releases the blood dolls within into the streets. Wagging tongues accuse the Penny Dining Club of the attack, while the Club retorts that this is further evidence the System cannot be trusted with so much as a simple trafficking operation.

### Live Like a Rockstar

From biting the heads off of bats to selling the bone fragments of a deceased band member, the wide and varied rock scene has seen its share of eccentric and vulgar figures. Blood drinking seems tame compared to some of the activities known among black metal enthusiasts.

When an edgy Swedish bass player appears in a PornHub video drinking blood from what appears to be a suspended corpse, there's barely a ripple through the wider web. But those who know what they're looking for spot a couple of Penny Dining Club members in the background, laughing at the performance. The player characters hear of this through a Sheriff, who wants to know how the hell this Masquerade breach ended up on the internet and how to get it taken down.

ChaOS Nail is the bass player, and as far as he knew, some posh freaks just invited some him to attend a weird S&M party with a lot of knife play and the promise of a mouthful of clean blood to finish off the evening. The Penny Dining Club members, for their part, had no idea they were being recorded, and state that the person recording must

have been ChaOS's drummer buddy, Constipated. He's vanished since the party, and either he uploaded the video or someone with access to his phone did.

This plot is a mystery for the player characters to solve that also introduces them to the practices of the Penny Dining Club, a fringe of celebrity culture, and the potential for new blood dolls among the fetishist ChaOS Nail and his band.

## Rare Vintage

The Penny Dining Club's members are always looking for the next exciting meal to show off to their friends or an experience they'll never forget. They're hedonists, and as such, they're rarely satisfied. Wilfred Corbett, one of the Club founders, reaches out to the player characters' coterie with a special meal in mind. He tells them they can sample any vintage from his stock if they can bring him something new and, in his words, transcendent, to impress his peers and guests at the Club's forthcoming anniversary dinner.

The player characters have the right to decline Corbett's offer, though doing so results in another coterie in the domain bragging about the work they've been given and the payment they're due to receive for it. Corbett isn't above negotiating or setting coteries against each other either, as he trusts each will bring something unique to the table.

In particular, Corbett wants a mage seized and dragged to the Penny Dining Club, ideally exposing the will-worker to a height of emotion before presenting him as a ripe vessel from which to feed. If the coterie can procure a creature of this kind, it's likely Corbett will expand the offer to include their provisional membership in the cult.

## The Soldiers of the Adversary

*"The Beast is the Adversary, and we belong to him. The Oppressor opposes the Adversary and will see all who follow him damned and destroyed. A Heaven on Earth means an eternal Hell for Kindred. Only one can thrive in this apocalypse: Kindred, or the kine. Us, or them. Whose side will you choose?"*

— Prophet Molinero

Some Kindred believe the apocalypse is nigh, but the Soldiers of the Adversary believe it's already here. The world ended years ago — exactly when hardly matters.

The biblical end times are unfolding now, before the blind eyes of humanity. Over the next few years, decades at most, the battle between good and evil will be decided once and for all. The Kindred, fallen creatures that they are, must pray the Adversary and his forces win and work towards that victory at any cost. If they lose, their punishment will be eternal, and the searing pain of mortal flame will be nothing in comparison to the burn of hellfire.

## In the Beginning

The Soldiers started in San Antonio, Texas, with a King James Bible and a bad acid trip. In an abandoned church, surrounded by passed-out addicts and full on their blood, a young vampire named Santiago Molinero believed that he had a vision of the end times. Angels and demons fought for the souls of humanity, killing and converting to tip the scales. The Bible told only half the story: the oceans would indeed run red, and there would be suffering, but Heaven had no guarantee of victory. The Adversary and his demons could win and be crowned kings of the world, or lose and be cast into hellfire for all eternity. The end times had already begun, the Seven Seals of the Book of Revelation already undone by recent and historical events.

Santiago woke the next night with a splitting headache and an absolute certainty in his newfound faith. He had a mission: to pull the Kindred away from their petty struggle and unite them under the banner of Satan. He also had the sense not to charge out and immediately start preaching to the local elders. The Adversary's prophet needed to mirror his master's subtlety, recruiting carefully despite the urgency of the situation. The Kindred would come around, or they would all burn.

## A Time of Revelations

The Soldiers are a new movement currently focused on recruitment and on cementing their orthodoxy. Prophet Molinero targets the young and morally confused, licks still adjusting to an existence that relies on morally repugnant acts. He offers them stability and guidance in the Baron-less city of San Antonio, and a new family that promises to accept them, Beast and all. He draws them in in their hour of fear or appeals to their curiosity or ambition by offering them the chance to get in on the ground floor of something new. The world is already full of older and more powerful Kindred, and Santiago promises his army that early converts will outrank their elders once the movement spreads.

Prophet Molinero encourages all his disciples to read the King James Bible, calling it the Book of the Oppressor, and pushes them to comb it for kernels of truth to add to

their understanding of the end of days. He has final say on whether member suggestions are true or not and spends a great deal of time writing and revising his own Unholy Book. One orthodoxy he's quite certain of is the existence of Angels, despite having no evidence to prove it; if the Oppressor didn't have His own servants, he reasons, the Adversary would have won by now. Like the Kindred, these divine beings live in the shadows of the world, unseen by the kine. They have their own organizational structure, which the Soldiers must discover and infiltrate. The Angels can disguise themselves as demons, and Santiago has a long list of suspected spies: vampires who preach compassion, who stir up dissent among the Kindred, or who speak out against the Soldiers of the Adversary.

At their Sunday meetings in the same church where Prophet Molinero had his revelations, cult rituals are beginning to cement themselves. The prophet begins with a short sermon on the tenets of the church and invites select members to testify on how they have served the Adversary that week. The congregation applauds the moral corruption of mortals, while killing the virtuous is slightly less impressive but still good news. Soldiers then bring in sacrifice or two for all to drink from, and Prophet Molinero encourages his congregants to listen to their Beasts and go feral for the feeding. Once they're fed, usually inebriated or high from the meal, Molinero shares new revelations and the cult's immediate plans, growing more impassioned in his rhetoric. Here he emphasizes the glory that will be theirs in victory, and the eternal hellfire to fear if they should suffer defeat. Some weeks, Molinero will order a member who has disappointed the Soldiers to be brought out, chained in case of frenzy, and burned before the crowd, their agony a visceral warning against failure. Senior members display their burn scars proudly: facing the fire proves they have accepted the truth

## CONVICTIONS OF THE SOLDIERS OF THE ADVERSARY

The Soldiers of the Adversary are somewhat vexed when it comes to controlling their Beast, which Molinero teaches is the voice of the Adversary himself within them. Obeying the Beast is central to their entire system of belief but doing so carelessly makes a Soldier ineffective at infiltrating or surviving among the kine. Molinero resolves this contradiction by teaching that the Beast, while a powerful master, has gone mad from eons of a torturous existence in Hell. His Soldiers must balance obedience with practicality and maintain their connection to an earthly existence with Convictions that may frustrate the Beast, but which will ultimately serve the Adversary's interests.

- **Obey the prophet of the Beast**

The Soldiers see Molinero as a filter for the Adversary's will, translating his desires into actions for the Soldiers to carry out. Obeying him serves the Adversary's plan, even when doing so goes against the Beast's instincts.

- **Do not fight your own kind**

Some Soldiers take this to mean all Kindred, while others confine the tenant to members of the cult. Either way, Molinero preaches unity: the forces of Hell can only triumph when they stop fighting one another to work together.

- **Always offer your life in place of your companions**

Losing the apocalyptic war will mean eternal torment for every vampire, a fate worse than death. If they can win, all the damned will rise again to rule a Hell on Earth, so being hurt now or even suffering the Final Death in the name of the cause is well worth the sacrifice.

- **Never kill when you can corrupt**

The kine have their own role to play in the Apocalypse, their souls empowering either Heaven or Hell as they die, depending on the life they've led. Killing mortals is easy; turning them to vice and encouraging them to corrupt others is hard. The latter is a more worthy and strategic service to the Adversary.

of Molinero's revelations and will work tirelessly to save all Kindred from burning.

## The Priesthood

The Soldiers of the Adversary don't have enough members to distinguish much between them. There is no official hierarchy beyond who joined when. A few stand out by virtue of their ferocity, their contributions, or unique abilities they bring to the group, and the movement's

future leaders are beginning to distinguish themselves.

**Andrea Mazzara** is the first ghoul to be initiated to the Soldiers. A reasonably successful paralegal, she was entranced by Molinero after meeting him over a land dispute and soon fell under his sway. Beyond the Blood Bond that keeps her in line, she's terrified of the idea of eternal torture (which she believes will also apply to her, as a vitae addict), and willing to do whatever she has to in the name of a better afterlife. Molinero has promised to turn her into

a vampire eventually, but right now she's too useful at handling the group's daytime affairs.

**Gertrude "Richie" Mayall** is a Caitiff and a disappointment to his sire. A dedicated Anarch, he loves the Soldiers for their subversion of traditional Kindred power structures and loves the juvenile thrill of being a real-life Satanist. He admires Molinero and likes the recognition he gets for contributing to doctrine, but deep down he thinks of the cult as a passing hardcore fad, not a lifelong religious belief.

**Amanita Piper** is at least three hundred years old, and Molinero still isn't sure why she's following him. She was revived from torpor only recently and dedicated herself to the Soldiers after hearing only one sermon. According to her, she has believed in the inherent demonic nature of vampires for ages and is glad to see someone doing something about it. Though she has displayed powers beyond those of any other members of the nascent group, she seems content to sit back and let others lead, chiming in only occasionally to nudge new scripture in the right direction. Despite what they hear from the pulpit about recruitment order determining hierarchy, not age or potency, when she talks, people listen.

## SANTIAGO MOLINERO

**Epitaph:** Prophet of the Adversary

**Quote:** *"I have seen the End of Days, and they are upon us."*

**Clan:** Brujah

**Embraced:** 1984 (Born 1961)

### MORTAL DAYS: CHARISMATIC NOBODY

Santiago Molinero was raised Catholic in the 1960s, though it didn't take. He ran away from his family at an early age and made a living as a petty criminal, running scams on other delinquents for the sake of an easy mark. He had a quick tongue and a quicker mind, but bouts of lapsed-Catholic guilt interfered with him making it big.

Running from past sins led him back to his native Texas in his early twenties, looking for a fresh start in a new city, where he found a home in the local drug scene. The Kindred who would eventually become his sire was feeding on that scene, and he saw potential in the bright, conflicted young man. Santiago would make just the sort of vampire the Anarchs needed: disenfranchised, aggressive, and ready to be molded into a childe who'd stay curious enough to keep things interesting.

### KINDRED NIGHTS: DISCIPLE TURNED PROPHET

Stephen Kraus introduced himself as a rich new dealer and took Santiago under his wing and into the night. A committed Anarch, Kraus encouraged his childe to shun

Camarilla society and decide what being a vampire meant on his own. Santiago reconciled his lapsed faith and his new condition very simply: vampires were a sort of demon, locked out of Heaven, and so it was now his nature to do as demons did. This was all the permission he needed to dive into hedonism and vice, looking after his own needs and trusting no one. Kraus didn't mind; his little lick was smart enough not to draw unwanted attention, and he'd grow out of his childish games soon enough.

Kraus was destroyed before that could happen, killed in the fight that seized San Antonio from the Camarilla. He was one of only a handful of casualties, as the Camarilla gave up their city with only token resistance, their remaining loyalists fleeing to safer pastures.

The death of his sire left Santiago rudderless until the night of his vision, and as he meandered through the domain he fed messily several times, causing a Masquerade breach to hang over his head. San Antonio is still in tumult from its recent abolition of Kindred governance; it has no Baron and only a handful of elders left. Santiago sees himself as chosen by the Adversary to put the city back together and save the Kindred.

### PLOTS AND SCHEMES:

- Capture an Angel:** Capturing and torturing an angel for information is high on the cult's list of priorities, but Santiago is cautious about upsetting other vampires within the city, especially the Church of Set. He's formulating a plan to delegate the task to some new recruits who are not yet publicly associated with the Soldiers, to provide plausible deniability if things go wrong.
- Claim San Antonio for the Adversary:** San Antonio has no Baron to keep order or peace. Santiago has no personal desire to rule but believes that installing himself as Baron would help the Soldiers gain traction in greater Kindred society. Alternatively, converting a politically savvy hopeful to his beliefs would work just as well, or maybe better.
- Master Hellfire:** Despite preaching the possibility of victory, Santiago is terrified of defeat. In secret, he researches means by which vampires can resist fire in a permanent way, looking for a defense against the tortures that await the damned should they lose. He would give almost anything for such an ability, especially if it could be extended to protect all Kindred, especially his believers.

### TERRITORY AND FEEDING HABITS:

- Santa Prisca (Haven 4, Resources 3)** The building that the Soldiers claim as their house of worship was built in the mid-1800s by German settlers, then renovated over the decades until its historic architecture

was almost completely obscured. A tax fraud scandal in the '80s left the building in a legal limbo from which it has yet to emerge. Now, it is abandoned and ill-guarded. A blight on an otherwise beautiful historic district, Molinero has taken it over and cleaned it up, claiming legal ownership to anyone who asks and signing the building as a by-appointment spa/wellness center. The built-up architecture of the place makes its basements a maze to anyone not familiar with the layout, and multiple feet of concrete soundproof certain rooms, which are also conveniently difficult to escape.

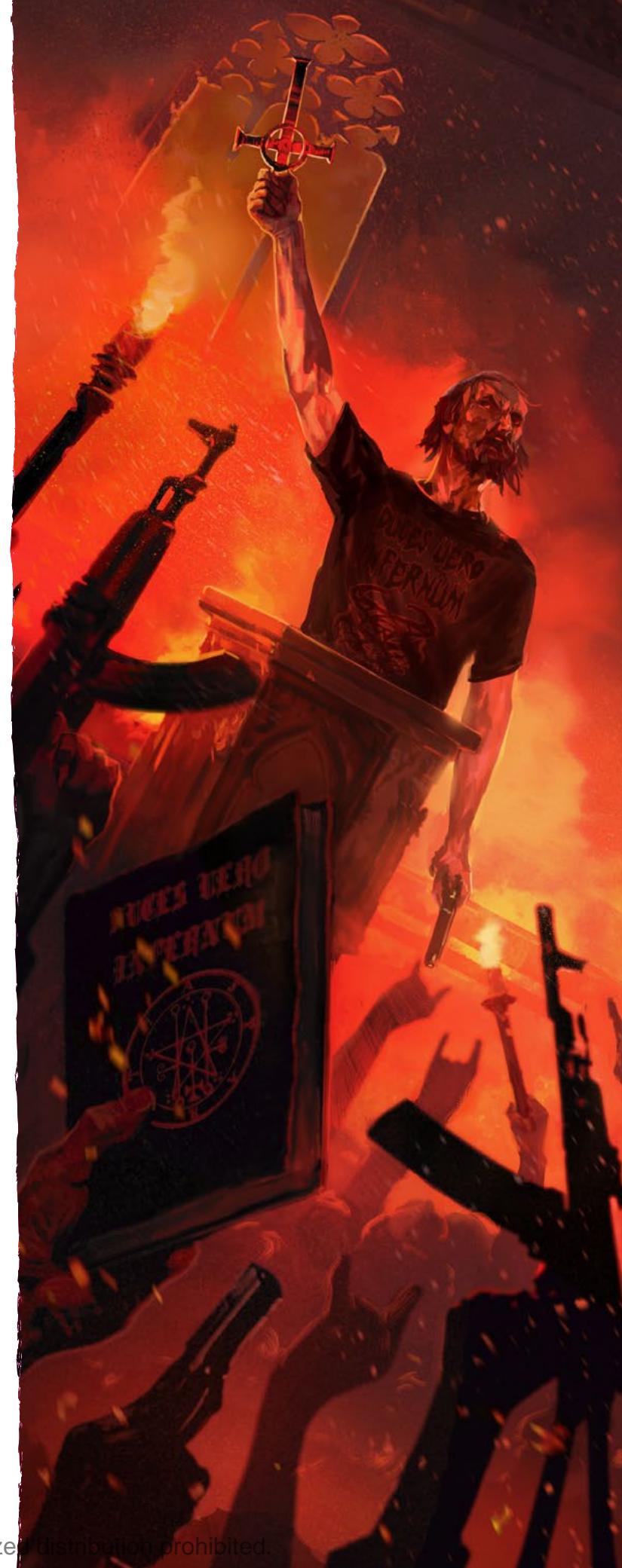
- **Southtown (Influence (Neighborhood) 2, Herd 2, Retainers 3)** Santiago has inherited connections in this fashionable residential and arts district from his sire, who cultivated contacts and a handful of ghouls among the neighborhood association and business improvement district and supplemented them with his own influence in the high-end drug-dealing scene. A steady stream of tourists provides food and fodder for the cult's rituals, augmented when necessary by wealthy drug-using homemakers and business professionals living nearby.
- **Predator Type: Consensualist (Willing Disciples)** Santiago convinces the mortals who follow in the Soldiers' wake that his kiss is a blessing and a form of sacrament. It doesn't hurt that he ensures that they physically enjoy the experience.

#### KINDRED RELATIONSHIPS:

- **Viki Palmer (Rivalry)** Palmer believes that she should be more than a simple Soldier for the Adversary; she should be the Devil's General. Based in the domain of Houston, she eyes Santiago's cult in San Antonio as a mark to be extinguished in favor of her own brand of infernal worship.
- **Annazir (Puppeteer)** A vampire by the name of Annazir recently woke from beneath the streets of San Antonio, and has yet to feel the pull of the Beckoning. This old vampire's first contact with fellow Kindred in the modern nights was with Molinero and his cult. Annazir presently plays them along, presenting himself as one of the Devil's seraphs, and enjoys the cult's fealty. He belongs to an old bloodline, long believed destroyed, and has many plans for the Soldiers of the Adversary. Hell is coming, and Annazir intends for this cult to act as vanguard.

#### WHISPERS:

- **Still Addicted:** Santiago was an addict in life, and now is a lush in death. His religious visions are just



drug-induced hallucinations, and his followers are dupes for attributing anything more to them.

- **Older Than He Looks:** His identity as the young vampire Santiago Molinero is a lie. He's actually much, much older, an elder at least, trapped in torpor for hundreds of years. Depending on who you ask, he's hiding his identity for the sake of the Soldiers' safety, or he struggles with implanted memories and doesn't even know his own history.

#### MASK AND MIEN:

- Santiago still uses his own name among the kine and passes himself off as a nebulous entrepreneur and real estate speculator. He prefers to use makeup over the blush of life to cover the pallor of his ashen brown skin, and to keep his distance from the kine unless necessary. (**Mask 1**)
- Among his people, Santiago wears a secondhand cassock deliberately caked in bloodstains and embroidered with a Satanic cross. He adopts no other iconography or marks of rank, preferring to style himself as one of the people. He discourages opulence among his followers as just another fact of the endless Eternal Struggle that distracts Kindred from the war between the Oppressor and the Adversary.

**Sire:** Stephen Kraus

**Ambition:** Defeat the Oppressor and save all Kindred from eternal torment

**Convictions:** None

**Touchstones:** None

**Humanity:** 4

**Generation:** 12th

**Blood Potency:** 3

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2; Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 4; Intelligence 2, Wits 1, Resolve 3

**Secondary Attributes:** Health 5, Willpower 7

**Skills:** Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 3, Firearms (Handguns) 2, Larceny 3; Etiquette 2, Insight 2, Intimidation 1, Leadership (Cult Worship) 4, Persuasion (Victims) 2, Streetwise 3; Awareness 2, Finance (Real Estate) 2, Occult 2, Politics 3

**Disciplines:** Auspex 1, Celerity 1, Dominate 1, Potence 2, Presence 3

**Flaws:** Dark Secret — Masquerade Breacher (•), Prey Exclusion — Non-Consenting Victims (•)

**General Difficulties:** 5/3

## Perspectives

**Anarchs:** Our brothers and sisters are our comrades, too. We need to open their eyes to the coming Armageddon.

**Camarilla:** Despicable in their willing servitude to the Lord's will. I would spit on them and beat them into ash.

**The Church of Caine:** I've heard that a cell of these Gnostics are in Dallas. How blind they are to worship at the feet of the wrong fallen angel. Invite them to the fold with empathy, but prepare yourself for violence. They don't enjoy the polemics of doomsday discussion, especially when we draw attention to their flaws.

**The Church of Set:** They're on the right track but muddle their purpose with their spiritual reincarnation crap. I believe we can work together, but we have to withstand their mockery, which comes from a lack of understanding.

## Story Hooks

The following story hooks are examples of how one might include the Soldiers of the Adversary in a chronicle.

### The Smell of Burning

Marjorie Walters called the fire department non-emergency line because someone's back yard bonfire was staining the washing she'd left out overnight with greasy smut and black ash. Neither she nor the crew members who showed up to track down the cause of the ash expected to discover a writhing, dying human figure burnt amid a pile of rubber tires. By the time the crew extinguished the fire, the vampire was little more than a pile of ash and cinders, which left Walters and the fire crew scratching their heads.

Kindred in the neighboring Texan cities of San Marcos and Austin would normally stay out of such an event as a matter of course, at least until the Prince of the nearest Camarilla domain announced in court that one of the Primogen was burned to their Final Death during a visit to San Antonio. Now, a high prize awaits anyone with information on the matter. It's possible that this Primogen had connections to one or more of the player characters, in which case they may know of the vampire's unusual religious convictions, including their certainty that Gehenna was coming.

The Primogen was secretly one of the Soldiers of the Adversary, though lately, doubts had been wracking the vampire's mind as to Molinero's wisdom, causing them to question the cult leader in front of the rest of the church. The Primogen's execution was the result.

The player characters need to determine what happened. To do so, they can attempt to access the Primo-gen's haven (now considered a crime scene), find the vampire's address book, and interview their associates. What they do when they discover that more than one Kindred is responsible for this murder is up to them, though the Soldiers' strength and tendency toward cruelty may make them question the merits of running straight back to the Prince.

## Diabolic Coup

The Soldiers of the Adversary view the Camarilla as servants of the Oppressor, some knowingly, most not. For this reason, the cult cell in this domain has been planning a coup for some time, supplying the Anarch Movement with weapons and information to spark their righteous fury. The Soldiers wish to ignite a revolution and place

themselves at the top of the heap once the dust settles.

This story works best if the player characters are Anarchs. They receive a crate full of weapons with the note that "the fires are lit, and soon the domain shall be aflame." If they're Camarilla, an Anarch coterie could launch a premature ambush on them out of the blue to drop the first clue about this story.

The Soldiers refrain from placing themselves on the front line in this cause, happy to orchestrate events from behind the scenes where possible. However, clues such as the ghoul who delivered the crate, the vampire who told the Anarchs where to find the "corrupt and debased" player character coterie, or the increase in hostilities between sects should lead the player characters to discover their presence and interference. The first Kindred to discover the Soldiers' ambitions should be the player characters, and the decision about what happens next should be theirs.





# Optional Advantages

*“Descent from the line of Hardestadt is nothing. My vitae is nectar; ambrosia even, from the gods.”*

— Friedrich Vagarante-Vandervon, Descendant of Orthia

Within this chapter, Storytellers and players will find a new selection of optional Merits, Flaws, and Loreshheets for their player characters and SPCs. As per the rules in **Vampire: The Masquerade**, many of these new advantages are best used at character creation. However, through discussion with the Storyteller and either ongoing roleplay or a sufficient period of downtime, players could purchase some at the cost of 3 Experience per dot in each, with Flaw dots taken after character creation granting equal Advantage dots.

We encourage players to consider *why* their character possess Merits and Loreshheets, as any new power characters possess goes some way toward defining them and their roles in the chronicle. Any new advantage should make sense within the context of the story and come from an agreement between player and Storyteller.

## Merits and Flaws

Many of these new Merits and Flaws cover matters relating to faith, cults, and the practices of Kindred who dedicate their eternal service to methuselahs.

### Looks

#### Semblance of the Methuselah (• or ••)

Whether you’re aware of it or not, you have a striking resemblance to a methuselah of your line. Perhaps your own sire felt a strange attraction to your appearance that drove them to Embrace you for reasons they couldn’t quite explain, or it may be that the raw power of your ancestor’s blood physically shifted your looks to more closely match theirs upon your embrace.

Upon taking this Merit, you may choose a specific methuselah of your clan from whom you are ultimately descended and whom you resemble. Alternatively, you may allow your Storyteller to choose and leave the nature of your similarity a mystery to you — for now, at least. Each dot in this Merit grants you one additional die on dice rolls to impress, intimidate, or attract the attention of those who recognize and fear or respect the progenitor whom you resemble. Each dot in this Merit may also add to your Status dots within your clan during official gatherings or ceremonies or within a cult that venerates

the methuselah whom you resemble. If you are luckless enough to encounter the methuselah in question, each dot in this Merit also grants you one additional die to any social rolls when interacting with them, although depending on the ancient in question, it may anger them to see such similarity.

## Psychological

### Penitence (• to •••••)

In pain, you find absolution. By scourging yourself — lashing your skin with a whip, driving needles into your flesh, or some other self-abusive act — you reaffirm your faith.

For each dot you possess in this Merit, you can scourge yourself once per session as part of a scene, suffering one point of Superficial Health damage and immediately healing one point of Superficial Willpower damage. Scourging usually takes an entire scene to complete.

**Flaw (•): Horrible Scars of Penitence.** Your devotion is writ large on your flesh in a mass of awful welts, the scarified marks of your faith, or the evidence of other tools of self-mortification emblazoned on your body. You are extremely distinctive in this respect, and anyone who looks at you can immediately recognize the signs of faith taken to an extreme — even if you cease to perform such physical acts of penitence. This Flaw is equivalent to the Repulsive Flaw (see *Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 179), but only when you're among vampires and mortals not from within your cult.

**Flaw (••): Groveling Worm.** You don't get affirmation from scourging your own flesh; rather, your utter self-loathing and abject terror of offending some higher power demands that you perform such acts regularly just to function at all. You *must* find the time in a session to scourge yourself once per session, suffering two points of Superficial Health damage, or else you will suffer a point of Aggravated Willpower damage at the beginning of the next session. Characters with the Penitence Merit cannot take this Flaw.

### Unholy Will (•• or ••••)

Your will and soul are bulwarks against the power of True Faith (*Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 222). You may have spent many nights upon holy ground or argued with clever, devout theologians until the intricacies of their faith are as familiar to you as the dead stillness in your chest. You might have even gone to great lengths to harden your mind against the burning ardor of true believers

or cast yourself so deeply into the role of demonic foe through ritual personae that you are firm in your conviction that your purpose is to test such belief. One way or another, as angel or devil, the signs and forms of True Faith do not hold sway against you.

At two dots, add one die to any dice pool when you resist or contest an individual with true Faith on matters of their faith, including their miraculous abilities. Furthermore, you suffer one fewer point of damage from holy sources that harness the power of True Faith, such as blessed weapons or sacred ceremonies. At four dots, add two dice and suffer two fewer points of damage. The four dot and two dot versions of this Merit do not stack.

**Flaw (•): Beacon of Profanity.** The dark power within you leaks out. Mortals with any amount of True Faith can sense your presence, not just those with True Faith 3 or higher.

### Zealotry (• to •••)

The fire of your faith is an unstoppable bonfire, driving you to intense heights of zeal. You won't let anything come between you and the fulfilment of your beliefs, no matter the cost to yourself or others. For each dot in this Merit, once per session after rolling a normal success on an action that corresponds to or aligns with one of your Convictions, you may choose to turn that normal success into a messy critical instead. In this way, you gain the usual benefits for a critical win on the roll in question along with the appropriate drawbacks for the mess you create in the process. Note that this does not yield additional successes, but only allows you to count the win as critical in a case where it matters.

**Flaw (•): Crisis of Faith.** You are terrified of losing control, especially to the Beast that threatens to make a mockery of your faith. Whenever your actions result in a bestial failure, you suffer one point of superficial Willpower damage in addition to any other effects from the roll.

## Contagion

The blood and flesh of Kindred interact with diseases in strange ways. Many vampires become vectors for sickness, unwittingly or purposefully spreading blood-borne plagues to each fresh victim. Some mutate and bloat with such fetid power, their flesh splitting from cankers and buboes.

**Flaw (•): Disease Vector.** The corrupt life energy of your vitae is fertile ground for the festering sicknesses of the kine. Whenever you feed from a sick mortal, you *always* contract that sickness and will pass it on to your next vessel.

**Flaw (• or ••): Plaguebringer.** You have a disease in your vitae that you cannot expunge and that manifests its symptoms on your body despite your undead state; even totally flushing all the blood from your body and drinking afresh does not rid you of it. It seems to well up from your corrupt soul. At one dot, the disease is minor but expresses visible traces such as a rash, sores, coughing or sneezing, or oozing mucus. At two dots, the disease is potentially severe if you leave it untreated, although it is not necessarily fatal. Furthermore, it does not need to leave visible symptoms upon you. In either case, mortal victims of your bite who are susceptible to the disease will contract it. The dice penalties stemming from this Flaw are situational, and more narrative penalties — such as having a sickly herd or weaker victims dying from subsequent illness — are advised.

## Mythical

### Cold Dead Hunger (•••)

When hungry, your Beast is a weak and quiescent thing; it still urges you towards self-indulgent atrocity but is easier to quell. Perhaps you starved it through meditation or self-denial, or girded yourself in rites of black sorcery and red transgression; perhaps it's just the way you are, and you have no explanation for the cold, dead hunger that nestles in your bosom. Add two dice to your rolls to resist Hunger frenzy.

### Pack Diablerie (••)

Your thirst for the corrupt essence of other vampires is horrifically intense. If you attempt to consume a victim via diablerie alongside other partners, you are always the one who has the opportunity to consume the full “soul” unless you choose otherwise or one of your partners also has this Merit (in which case, the diablerists gain nothing unless all but one are destroyed or voluntarily relinquish the claim, at which point the victor gains the benefit). Additionally, when you help another to consume the full soul and if they are successful, then you also gain 5 experience points to spend on raising Blood Potency or Disciplines known to the victim, as if you yourself had committed diablerie and achieved one success on the Humanity + Blood Potency roll. You can use these experience points in concert with personal experience but must spend them immediately.

Duskborn vampires who engage in pack diablerie can spend experience on purchasing dots in the victim’s Disciplines and Blood Potency, their generation remains unaltered.

## Loresheets

The new Loresheets in *Forbidden Religions* are tied to the fringe and foul devotions presented in this book, though some, such as Plagues of Gehenna, can be acquired by vampires who exist outside a cult structure.

# 1444 CHAMBER

(HECATA CHARACTERS ONLY)

The 1444 Chamber were once the closest advisors and confidantes to Augustus Giovanni, and the beating, black heart of the Clan of Death's necromantic might. The more things change, the more they stay the same. It's the Chamber that leads the clan these nights, not Augustus. Many of his old loyalists met their Final Death to make way for new members rising through the ranks or brought in from the cold with the clan's formerly disparate splinters; but the 1444 Chamber is still the center of power and influence, even if some of the faces of its members have changed.

You're an agent of the Chamber's will, somewhere directly on the operations flowchart that cascades down from the so-called Board of Directors. Maybe your sire's sire sits in the Chamber; maybe you backed one of the up-and-coming bosses in the uprising against their complacent superiors; maybe you've just got the talent that the Board looks for in this new age of unity within the clan. Someone up there has invested trust and responsibility in you. Don't disappoint them.



## LORE

### **Shadow of the Chamber:**

Other Hecata know that at least one member of the Chamber trusts you to carry out their will — and no one wants to cross one of the ancient monsters who sit at the heart of the Clan of Death's web. You have the equivalent of two additional dots of Status within the Hecata clan, but only for the purposes of forcing compliance or intimidating other Hecata.

**Mercenary Work:** When outsiders need the Clan of Death's expertise, you're a go-between trusted to pursue the Chamber's agenda. Once per story, you can arrange the mercenary services of your fellow Hecata for a vampire who is not part of your coterie or clan, calling up to three dots in any appropriate Background that represents the mercenaries' talents.

### **Gilded Promises:**

If there's one thing the Hecata aren't short of, it's money. If you satisfy the Chamber with your performance, you have access to four dots of Resources. The Clan of Death has little patience for talented students who fail to live up to their promise though; disappoint your patron, and you lose these dots until you make things right.

**Deathly Slave:** Never forget that the Chamber comprise the most powerful concentration of vampiric necromancers in existence. Once per story, you can request the service of a spectre or another form of wraith, naming a specific task; unless it contravenes your patron's agenda, they will compel a single such ghost to perform that service for you.

**Anziani Patron:** You directly serve one of the anziani, and you know that they are on the Board of Directors — making you one of the trusted few they confide in. As their agent in the outside world, you can't rely on their direct influence to help you on a night-to-night basis, but when the Chamber wills it, the whole Clan of Death moves as one. Once per chronicle, you can call upon your patron to push the 1444 Chamber into action and call all loyal Hecata in the region to your aid regardless of their other priorities, as long as it does not contravene the agenda of your patron or the Chamber. The Chamber will expect you to repay this debt to them.

# BLOOD ASCETICISM

If blood is an addiction for the Kindred, then it's no surprise that some vampires try to kick the habit. Of course, you can't just go cold turkey; that's a quick route to torpor, or ravenous frenzy and waking up covered in someone else's blood. Those who take this endeavor seriously model themselves on mortal ascetics, trying to slowly starve their Beast into submission or to reduce their reliance on the red stuff over years or even centuries. Some see it as a potential path to Golconda.

Blood asceticism is a harsh path to follow, demanding the vampire reject the satisfaction and pleasure of sanguine satiation. This requires great willpower, and practitioners often resort to distracting their hungry Beast through the agony of self-mortification or fully embrace isolation and privation. Most Kindred reject such asceticism out of hand, since those who succeed are usually starving hermits and those who fail serve as fearsome lessons in the folly of denying your hunger when they snap and go on a rampage.



## LORE

**• The Starveling Path:** You're not quiet about your dedication to blood asceticism and your desire to conquer the red thirst. Other Kindred may think you're mad or a fool, but they can't doubt your devotion. Once per session, providing you've not fed that night, you may add two dice to any roll to prove your strength of will, or to convince others of your dedication.

**• Glade of the Sleeping Beast:** You have found a place of quiet solitude to contemplate the shackles of your immortal hunger. It may be your haven, if you have one, or it may be a more remote location. While in your place of contemplation, as long as you are alone, you can re-roll one Rouse Check per session.

**•• Lesser Vessels:** To subdue your thirst for human blood, you have learned to subsist on the lesser vitae of base animals. While you are alone, feeding from animals rather than humans slakes one more point of Hunger than it usually would for you, but never more than one level per scene. However, you also gain the Infamy Flaw: (•) Animal Drinker (*Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 187) if news of your reliance on animal vitae gets out. Some Kindred may not care, but plenty will look down on you with contempt for being more like one of the kine than a real vampire.

**••• Bloodless Pedestal:** Whether or not you've really managed to conquer your hunger, your displays of ascetic self-denial have attracted other

Kindred who desperately want your claims to be true. This provides you with the equivalent of five dots of Status solely among vampires who see you as some sort of holy figure. You lose the benefits of these dots for the duration of any scene in which they witness you drinking blood, and the following scene thereafter.

**•••• Leash the Beast:** You've starved your Beast so often that it's a weakened, feeble thing, bound beneath the chains of your willpower. Few other Kindred possess this level of self-control. The Difficulty of your Hunger frenzy rolls is always 2, regardless of the provocation.

# GEHENNA CULTS

**D**epending on whom you ask, Gehenna will soon befall the Kindred, or it's happening right now, or it's happened already and vampires are just play-acting in the crumbling ruins of their unives while the world comes apart at the seams. While some deride the notion of Gehenna as an invention for duping the guileless, a feverish millenarianism has gripped many Kindred with the belief that these are indeed the Final Nights, one way or another. Blood cults and heresies spring up from the shadows in ever-growing numbers.

The creeds of these new blood cults come in a dizzying variety of hatreds, anxieties, and hungers. The most successful spread their black wings from one city to the next, forming something like a cohesive doctrine even as feuding Kindred splinter off new schisms and heresies. Charting out the spread of such subversive elements requires an agile mind to keep track of the shifting tapestry, not to mention a strong stomach even by vampire standards. All too many Gehenna cults delve into stomach-churning practices.



## ↔ LORE ↔

### • Mark the Bloody Trail:

Once per session when you begin investigating or researching the presence of a blood cult you've not previously used this lore for, the Storyteller gives you one free clue to help locate the cult or to understand their current plans.

•• Faithful Bloodhound: You're a proven investigator; you've exposed and taken down at least one Gehenna cult already, and shown your mettle in the eyes of the sects. Either the Camarilla or the Anarchs trust you as an expert on Gehenna cults. You wield three dots of Status while taking action to investigate or persecute a cult on behalf of that sect.

••• Dogma: You're steeped in the lore of Gehenna, and you've learned many permutations of warped faiths that your fellow Kindred wrap themselves in. Once per session, when you discuss

a vampire's faith with them or observe them practicing their faith, you can extrapolate the rough nature of the doctrines, Convictions, or code that the religion focuses on. The Storyteller does not need to give you the exact wording, but must convey the primary themes, limitations, and beliefs, even those that are not evident in what the vampire has said or done.

•••• Cult Breaker: The charlatans and demagogues of millenarian cults rely on charisma and their followers' desperate need for someone else to provide answers, direction, and justification for their dark indulgences. Such self-deception is hard to overcome, but you know how to shatter their illusions and tear apart the foundations of their faith. Once per story for a scene, while socially interacting with you, cult members do not benefit from any dots in Status they may have within their own

cult. If they are unable to overcome you in a conflict, they lose any such Status dots for the rest of the story as you shake the cult's faith in them to the core.

••••• Red Truths: Investigating the rising tide of blood cults and Gehenna worshipers has put you in a prime position to sift a few precious grains of truth from the bloated clot of lies that sits at the heart of most of these misbegotten faiths. Whether you want to believe it or not, you can't deny the evidence you've gathered — and why not exploit it for yourself, rather than leaving it in the blood-stained hands of frothing zealots? Once you have studied the practices or texts of any blood cult, you are able to learn any Rituals or other unusual supernatural capabilities they possess without need of a teacher, although you must pay any experience point costs as normal.

# PLAGUES OF GEHENNA

Vampire and disease have been intertwined since the dawn of time. It's inevitable; the blood-drinking parasite spreads sickness with her bite, weakens her victims before the advent of illness, and in a very real way is a disease upon the heaving throng of humanity. Minor cults of Kindred who embrace this ruinous connection have emerged throughout history, but the tumultuous modern nights see many more such plaguebringers springing up than ever before.

The most base and simplistic of these cults embrace disease at the most literal level, believing that vampires are the harbingers of plague upon humanity and that they must spread sickness to usher in — or finish off — Gehenna itself. More sophisticated groups like the Third Day develop elaborate nuances or justifications, connecting disease upon the kine with the Beckoning that now seizes elders, or hoping to afflict Kindred themselves through corrupting the herd upon which they feed. Whatever the reasoning, the outcome is usually the same; heaps of putrefying bodies, vampires retching up



tainted vitae, and swarms of flies. It's no wonder that most sect-aligned Kindred try to stamp out blisters as soon as possible.

## ↔ LORE ↔

• **Blister Marks:** You're a member of a new, loose association of Kindred keeping vigil for any signs of blisters — those Kindred who willingly or ignorantly spread disease among the kine. Whenever you succeed on a Medicine roll to examine the health of a mortal, living or postmortem, you also discern whether any disease they may have was inflicted on them by a Kindred.

• **Autoclave:** Fearful of becoming a disease vector, you have three dots in Herd that will remain clean and uninfected even should sickness run rampant through the local population. However, you must maintain the purity of this blood source and shepherd it carefully, which means that no one can draw upon the Herd more than once per story. If you share it with anyone, even once, you lose access

to it yourself for the remainder of the story.

• • **Fire in the Blood:** Strange diseases infected you once, bringing a delirium that wracked even your Kindred physiology with fever and filled your waking hours with bizarre phantasmagoria. While the sickness passed, it has left its mark upon you. Once per scene when you feed on a mortal and contract a disease that you could then spread on to future victims, you mend one Superficial Health damage and one Superficial Willpower damage; you also immediately become aware whenever the blood of a vessel you feed from bears infectious disease.

• • • **Firebreak:** You've studied disease outbreaks in mortals and vampires alike and understand how far an infection can slither

through Kindred society before being detected. You possess five dots in Influence solely for the purpose of controlling and quelling disease outbreaks among the kine that would affect the Kindred; when you exercise this Influence and succeed, you gain two dots in Status with your sect for the remainder of the story.

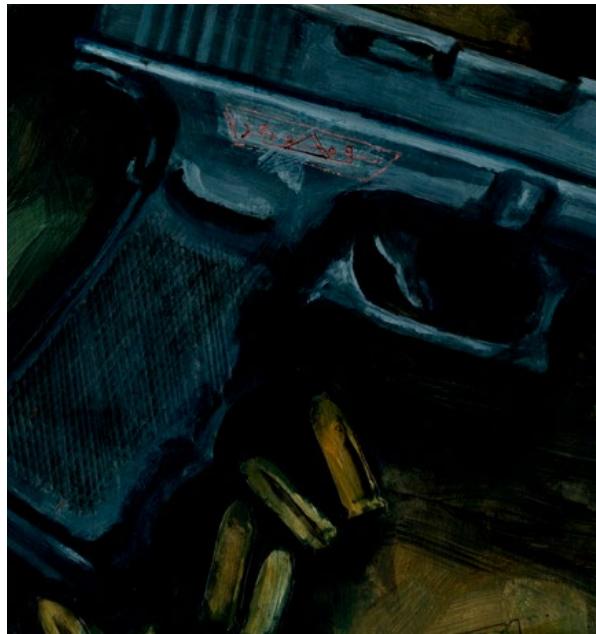
• • • • **Plague Sample:** In your possession is a phial of blood drawn from a sick, maddened elder while in the throes of the Beckoning. It seethes with the contagious power of a plague that will affect Kindred with lethal results. What exactly it does to vampire victims, how it spreads, and what link it has to the Beckoning is up to the Storyteller; if you are ever desperate, brave, or mad enough to unleash the disease upon your fellow undead.

# PRAEPOSITOR

(TREMERE CHARACTERS ONLY)

**Y**ou're a Praepositor, one of the militant Tremere of the Praesidium devoted to restoring the clan's old power — by force, if necessary. The cult looks back to the Pyramid of authority and blood that once united Clan Tremere as the ideal to which they must once again aspire, but the realities of the modern nights demand that they adapt if they are to achieve this goal. Praepositors have become eldritch soldiers of fortune, trading their services for the occult and secular resources the House needs.

House and clan need you, and you stand ready to answer their call. Your every success reinforces Praesidium's position within the Camarilla, but Praepositors aren't picky; your superiors expect you to take up contracts with Anarchs or even in domains of Autarkis, if it serves the cult's purposes. As for the old Blood Bonds that once tied the clan together, the Praesidium sees their restoration as one of its end goals — and expects you to act with the same devotion and swiftness as those bonds once assured.



## ↔ LORE ↔

### • Chastise the Wayward:

You embrace the cult's ideology of war against those who oppose the clan — including the renegades *within* the Tremere. You may reroll a single die in any dice pool to cause direct harm to another Tremere character if you believe them to be a renegade.

### • Discreet Professionalism:

You've been at the cutting edge of Praesidium efforts to build a network of clients and contracts that will prop up a reinvigorated Clan Tremere. Once per story, you can draw on favors due or debts yet to be paid to acquire two dots in Status with any sect or clan for a single interaction. You can expect the person you leverage to want something in return for their assistance in the next story, if not before.

... **Guard the Clan:** You joined this cult because you wanted to rebuild and protect what had gone before. Whenever you Rouse the Blood to protect your clan's members and secrets, you may roll two dice and pick the highest result.

.... **Expert Security:** You're one of the cult's top experts in security and protection and have a team of Praepositor specialists on speed-dial. Once per story, you can spend a scene establishing a safehouse or strong-point to grant yourself or another character up to five dots of Haven that lasts until the end of the scene. This Lore drains the use of three dots of Resources for the remainder of the story, requiring you to obtain outside funding if you do not possess these dots yourself.

### ..... Blood Loyalty:

The Praesidium's early experiments to rebuild the clan's Blood Bond bear unexpected discoveries — mere shadows of a true bond but, perhaps, more useful in the House's current state. If you and another participant (mortal or vampire) signs a contract you write using their blood or vitae, you must make one Rouse Check per level of Blood Bond you intend to initiate. Once signed, treat the contracted service as if the co-signee was Blood Bound to *it*; to attempt to breach the contract, they must succeed in a contest of Resolve + Intelligence vs. Bond Strength. Once the contract is complete or you destroy the contract, the simulated Blood Bond immediately ends. This power supersedes an actual Blood Bond, but that Blood Bond returns once the contract concludes.

# SPEAR OF ORTHIA

(VENTRUE CHARACTERS ONLY)

**C**lan scholars believe that Artemis Orthia is the first childe of Ventrule, and say that she once held sway over Sparta in the guise of its patron goddess. She burned with the desire to destroy her foes and acted decisively — but her headstrong hunger for conflict would prove her downfall at the hands of the Brujah of Carthage. The cultists of the Shattered Spear venerate this ancestor-figure, hiding in the shadows of Clan Ventrule and conducting their worship in defiance of Camarilla dictates. Now the cult waxes in strength and gathers new adherents to its banner, drawn by the whispered gospel of Artemis' divine nature and the rediscovery of her torpid remains.

You are a member of the Shattered Spear, a descendant of Orthia, and a believer in the sacred nature of your forebearer. Carrying the torch of the Spear means that you are a warrior, and the cult expects you to fight against the Second Inquisition, the Sabbat, and any other groups that threaten Kindred society. You are to revile passive indolence, but your peers and leaders laud your decisive action and willingness to spring into battle.



## LORE

**• Tip of the Spear:** You are a member of the new wave of Shattered Spear adherents spreading through Clan Ventrule and bearing the tidings of Elena Andreas' ground-breaking discoveries. Once per session, when interacting with another Ventrule character, you may ask the Storyteller whether the Ventrule will be receptive to your faith, tolerant of it, or will be opposed to it should you reveal your allegiance to them.

**• Soldier's Code:** You have embraced the liturgy of the Spear with ardent zeal. Choose one of the Convictions of the Spear. Once per story, you may use it to mitigate Stains as if it was one of yours.

### ... The Enduring Faith:

You know one or more of the Ventrule in the region are secretly followers of Orthia. If you can contact them and enlist their aid, they will provide you with four dots of either Allies or Mawla.

**.... Witness to Orthia:** You went down beneath Lisbon with Elena, and you saw the revelation of Orthia with your own undead eyes. You speak with the conviction of the Voice herself, and your testimony stirs those of Ventrule Blood. Once per scene, after rolling the dice to convince one or more Ventrule of your beliefs, exhort them to violence, or lead them in battle, you may turn all 1s rolled into 10s.

### ..... Splinter of the Spear:

You possess a splinter of the spear of Orthia itself. This fragment of such a legendary weapon doubtless possesses great power, and is a relic of great importance. As long as you have it about your person, channeling the power of Artemis Orthia grants you two automatic successes on Melee rolls when wielding spears or other piercing weapons — including stakes. However, committing an act of cowardice such as retreating before a foe or falling to terror frenzy is an insult to its legacy. You suffer one point of Aggravated Willpower damage should such happen. Furthermore, actually losing the splinter would be an utter disaster for you and for the Shattered Spear.



*How dreadful, how perverse, how malicious would a Kindred faith need to be, to be considered “forbidden”?*

*Within this book you will learn of religions stricken from the records of vampire scholars. Within, you shall find a collection of beliefs, some pernicious enough to collapse domains, others so focused that they possess only a handful of coteries the world over.*

*Each faith is clandestine.*

*Each religion is taboo.*

*Cainites consider these beliefs anathematic to the fragile existence of Kindred society. Vampires do not advertise themselves as members of these cults: they plot, they survive, and they worship in secret. If they do not, they will surely be hunted to their final deaths, as threatened archons and Princes seek to silence their forbidden thoughts.*

## Forbidden Religions includes:

- A wide selection of belief systems, some widespread and cloaked in secrecy, others extreme in their focus, from Golconda-seekers and Gehenna cults to infernal religions and churches dedicated to methuselahs.
- New powers, rituals, and coterie types befitting these religions.
- New optional Loresheets, Merits, and Flaws, for use at character creation or to build into your characters as they gain experience.

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