

Children of the REVOLUTION



20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE

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Introduction

Revolution is like Saturn, it devours its own children.

— Georg Büchner

Introduction

The Kindred are no strangers to strife. Indeed, most Kindred thrive on the sorrow and discord of the mortal world. Where better to feed than in a domain racked by rebellion? Where better to make a mortal vessel disappear after a chance overfeeding – or an intentional indulgence – than in a location known to be suffering a period of chaos, war, or sedition?

Revolution is more than a convenient setting in which to find sustenance for the Kindred, however. Certain Kindred Embraced in times of tumult, whether in the mortal world or the secret world of the Kindred, find themselves almost predestined to have an impact on the society of the Damned. In the past, Kindred led armies, slew kings, begat heresies, and laid the foundations for what would eventually become the sects and even Traditions. Tonight, though Cainite society may already exist in a global context, Kindred who arose during times of dissidence or rebellion may find themselves the authors of equally significant acts. The times may be gone for an undead warlord to fearlessly spur his mount into a column of Charlemagne’s paladins, but the impact of his actions is surely no less felt, especially

in times of instant, global communication and the urgency of the modern nights.

Themes

With that in mind, the core theme of Children of the Revolution is that Kindred Embraced in “interesting times” often find themselves as catalysts or casualties of other “interesting times.”

Practically, each of the Kindred detailed in Children of the Revolution embodies her own theme. Collectively, though, some trends do emerge among the assembled undead. For instance, a great many of these vampires, many of whom associated themselves at one point with open rebellions, have ended up making a very comfortable place for themselves. More than their Disciplines or Attributes, many of the undead depicted herein have amassed significant collections of Backgrounds – and Resources in particular. Rebellion is a profitable business when played with the cynical realism of the practical Cainite, especially in the World of Darkness, where the downtrodden – Kindred and kine – want a savior. Once the idealism of a Kindred’s passion of choice wanes under the weight of years, he can often still commoditize it, trading on a reputation

of opposition to a corrupt institution such as the Sabbat or Camarilla while enjoying the benefits that the institution offers. Look at the Sabbat: a fire-and-brimstone doomsday cult sword worshipping the destruction of the Antediluvians and elder tyranny... yet guided by a clashing confederation of those selfsame elders and even Methuselahs, many of whom possess a material comfort notably lacking among the shovelheads and field agents who fight and burn and die under the banner of the Sword of Caine. At least the Camarilla is (somewhat) honest in its “Fuck you, I was here first” rhetoric. Not that anyone inclined to an attitude of revolution would accept that sort of logic. But once the revolution in question equilibrates, often becoming much like the event or situation it replaced, the ideas of the revolution almost certainly still resonate. That’s when they become a byword, a brand, or even a pillar of the new regime’s stability. And that’s where the revolution becomes a tradeable identity. Now that we’ve chased the corrupt Ventrue conspiracy out of town, well, it certainly couldn’t hurt to confiscate some of their assets or lure their contacts, could it? Otherwise they’re just going to waste....

That corruptive influence frequently proves too tempting for most Kindred to resist, especially when urged by the Beast or indulged by a crumbling Morality. After all, how does denying yourself help others who might be suffering? If a Kindred finds an advantage, even if it’s at odds with the party line of his rebellion or outlook, who does it help for him not to take it? Wouldn’t the opposition, whoever that is, seize it for themselves if they found it? When your players’ characters meet the characters in this book, will they buy into the ideology? And if their personal revolution succeeds, will the pendulum swing the other way? Will the old revolution prove to be the corrupt enemy of the next revolution brewing among the next generation of the undead? History suggests it’s so.

Assamites

The Assamites play both sides of revolution. Some of their most lucrative contracts for assassination come in domains in the midst of rebellion, power struggles, or other dangerous *détentes* among powerful but vicious Kindred. At the same time, in domains where Assamites hold sway, the Path of Blood and the codes of Haqim make for an orderly society, at least to outsiders’ view. Internally, the Clan of Assassins is as rife with schism as any other, but the clan practices a philosophy that places common external enemies before enemies within the Assamite order itself.

The result is that most Assamites are drawn more from revolutions in the mortal world than they are in the midst of turbulent Kindred events. The Assamite Embrace is rarely one given in haste or without consideration, and many Assassin sires watch their potential childer for years if not decades before performing the act. Even when great events shake the foundation of Kindred society, the response of the Assamites is more often to vanish into the shadows and formulate a plan than to throw cannon fodder in front of the problem. This pragmatism surprises few who know the ways of the Assassins.

One notable exception colors the history of Assamite stoicism in the face of upheaval. After the Convention of Thorns, when the Assamites deliberately placed themselves outside the Camarilla, a period of open war between the Assassins’ Clan and the Ivory Tower began, and lasted for almost a decade. During this period, the Assamites performed the Embrace with uncharacteristic profligacy. To hear them tell it, they had no choice: The combined might of seven clans had been turned against them, and the only thing saving them from extinction was the ability to induct new members into Haqim’s brood. Comparatively few of the Assamites Embraced between 1493 and the early 16th century still exist, having succumbed to torpor or met Final Death during this wartime, but those who do survive have been tempered in the flames of the single most defining conflict in the clan’s history – which, when discussing the Assassins, speaks greatly to these vampires’ acumen, guile, and tenacity.

Brujah

Unsurprisingly, Clan Brujah has no few of its members brought into the night during periods of mortal or Kindred conflict. Given the passion with which the Rabble hurl themselves into the closest available violence, it might even be argued that *most* Brujah Embraces occur in times of revolution, with the only question being the scope of the revolution that spawns them. “Revolution,” to a Brujah, can be a tremendously personal thing, and a one-Kindred vendetta against a hated Prince, entrenched Elder, or ambitious movement among a domain’s fledglings might constitute a small-scale sedition that demands the punitive or proactive Embrace of a new Brujah. The other clans may see such Embraces as ill-considered or even quixotic, but few are the Rabble who give a flaming fuck what those other clans think.

Hypocrisy characterizes many Brujah Embraces as well. While the Rabble are quick to align themselves as agents of change and fighters of the privileged status quo in calcified domains, they rarely extended such progressive outlooks to include the kine. Oppression works just fine for many Brujah when it's a question of mortal influence versus vampiric dominance. It's one thing to strike out against a hated Elder, but, hey, a Kindred needs blood. Rejuvenating an area of urban blight might be the way to counter The Man's influence, but it sure makes it a pain in the ass to feed. In light of this, many Brujah Embraces come from a misguided attempt at correcting the mistake of killing a mortal vessel while engaging in some personal crusade against a foe. Indeed, some Brujah even Embrace in the hopes of preserving a rapidly dwindling Humanity, reasoning that it's better to "save" an individual via the bleak doom of the Embrace rather than letting her die. During times when the Rabble consume a great deal of blood – such as when using their Disciplines frequently to fight, well, whomever – such backhanded salvation occurs frequently.

Followers of Set

The Setites are no stranger to times of upheaval, and, especially among Kindred society, are responsible for creating no small share of their own. To a certain segment of the clan, the ultimate Setite goal is arguably a revolution: the resurrection of their dead god-progenitor that may presage (or prevent) the rising of the rest of the Antediluvians. To the opposite-aligned faction of the clan, the dark secrets of the world, including the inscrutable movements of their deathless founder are mysteries to be protected. Whether for or against, the Setite oeuvre deals with changes on a scale so great that the world shudders when the Snake Clan's shadow falls across it.

When the Followers of Set Embrace, they do so with a purpose often absent from the less cultic lineages of vampires. However, like the other independent clans, their isolation from mainstream Kindred society gives them a narrow focus into which to Embrace and inculcate their childer. In many cases, Setite Embraces end up a victim of the corruptions they peddle, but in many more, the outsider status of the clan meshes well with dramatic world events. The Setites are masters of taking these opportunities wherever they may find potential new clanmates. What better way to ensure devotion and even fanaticism from their childer than to expose them to the dark powers and pleasure of the Kindred condition at the same time they're heady with

the potential of changing the way the world thinks? What better time to become a vampire that at the apex of one's revolutionary career?

Of late, the unrest in the ancestral home of the Setites on the African continent has provided no shortage of rebellions, coups, upheavals, and dictatorships against which to cast their neonates' Embraces. On the one hand, this is a boon to those fledglings, who are often emboldened by the spirit of independence that tonight sweeps across northern Africa and who feel a lesser sense of oppression than Kindred Embraced into the clan during less democratic periods. To the detriment of the other clans and the greater world, however, this bold mindset comes draped in one of the most secretive, sinister, and immoral clan cultures among the whole of the Damned. These young Kindred have seen firsthand that revolution works and that striking out against a corrupt order can yield results – and those results are the chilling ideology of the Setites.

Gangrel

In many cases, the Outlanders' concept of revolution comes as a result of outside forces. As Clan Gangrel rarely undertakes any course of action as a unified entity, even on a local level, the Clan of the Beast experiences upheaval only when events conspire to drag them into it. Too few of them care for Kindred politics or even mortal events enough to bother with such things when more pressing, primal needs consume them nightly. Rare exceptions do occur, but the most notable revolution-born Kindred of the clan found themselves Embraced during mortal or territorial struggles more so than in the shadow-games that consume the more cerebral clans.

This means that when overlap between Kindred and mortal interests occur, though, that the Gangrel may find themselves siring progeny in an effort at self-preservation. Those Gangrel who have given it much consideration often feel that such "protective Embraces" are the height of irony, however, for the truth of the matter is that while there may be safety in numbers, those numbers mean that a greater number of Kindred are sharing the same, finite amount of vitae. More wolves in the pack may make it easier to bring down the prey, but it means a lesser share for each of the predators. The ugly truth of this is that, just as certain members of the animal kingdom kill their own young, an Outlander may well find it prudent to destroy his own progeny after she's served her purpose in the wake of revolution. Such is the way of the War of Ages.

From the perspective of such progeny, however, fuck that. Just because some gnarly old creep wanted to sacrifice a fledgling to the torches of a mob or the fangs of the Archons doesn't mean they have to shut up and take it. Given their ferocity and their unholy resilience, even a Gangrel neonate is tough to kill, and not at all likely to bare her throat to a selfish sire just because he thinks she's outlasted her usefulness. As such, times of revolution see the Embrace of many Outlanders, and also see hostilities flare within the clan, rather than the usual survival apathy that characterizes the Outlanders' bestowal of the Curse of Caine.

Giovanni

What have the Giovanni accomplished that they haven't actually stolen from someone else? They steal power by compelling the dead, steal influence by blackmail and threat of violence, steal wealth from legitimate producers, and even stole vampirism from the dead heart of their patron progenitor. They are the carpetbaggers of Kindred society, the whores traveling in the wake of the marching army, the lice on a wretched beggar.

The Giovanni play to their strengths, of course. They're not the most numerous clan, but they possess vast resources for a faction so comparatively small. Culturally, the Italian Necromancers are used to seeing change and taking advantage of it. In a positive context, the Renaissance that spawned the initial wealth of the Giovanni family represented a massive humanitarian revolution, to which the Giovanni attached themselves and by which they became rich in lucre and influence. Numerous mortal political shifts over the intervening centuries have also given the Giovanni not only ample opportunity to capitalize on changes in power structures, but also to observe what happens before those shifts. Forewarned is forearmed, and the Giovanni have witnessed enough mortal revolution of all scales to know when to cease relationships with allies who are about to be exposed as cronies or cut off commerce with agencies that are about to be exposed as corrupt. For some Giovanni, turning over interests in these compromised contacts to younger Necromancers is a test of a low-status vampire's mettle. If the Kindred can eke out some last burst of utility from the disgraced flunky or, better, restore a ruined moneymaker to profitability, that's a fast-track to esteem in the clan. The weakness of this facet of the Giovanni lies in their limited numbers. Their experience is deep but not broad: They know how to watch for signs of change on the wind in their immediate environs, but they're less

capable of predicting such disruption in domains not their own, and thus remain somewhat parochial.

As a general rule, the Giovanni Embrace their childer from a different pool than the other clans do, given their familial structure, so the timing of those Embraces corresponds less to times of revolution. Still, when duress demands undead "boots on the ground," the Giovanni have little trouble managing to conscript enough grunts from the more brutish branches of the family tree, and if one survives the tumult and matures into a promising neonate, more's the better.

Tangentially, the supernatural power of the Giovanni often waxes during times of revolution, especially revolutions that yield violence. The passionate dead are a unique currency for the Necromancers, and a battlefield or riot site where lives suddenly ended is a well of power that the Giovanni, via their unwholesome Disciplines, are uniquely suited to tap. Supernatural power garnered in these tragic revolutions usually yields results suited to the physical world rather than any deep connection to the Underworld because of the "fresh" nature of the souls harvested, but no advantage is so narrow that the Necromancers can't exploit it.

Lasombra

As is ever the way, those who wield power are loath to share it, and this adage is certainly true when the Lasombra are involved. The Keepers have a long and aristocratic history, and very few mortal movements culminate in the restoration of aristocracies to power, especially in these preposterously democratic modern nights. Thus, when a Lasombra aligns himself with a rebellious movement, he does so with much to gain. When a Lasombra Embraces a childer during a time of tumult, she does so in order to fortify her own position. Case in point: The Sabbat. Who would have guessed that the Keepers would be one of two nominal leaders of such a movement? But when the fire in the Kindred blood rose, the Lasombra saw their opportunity and, striking down their own leader, placed themselves at the forefront of revolutionary thought and action...

...into which they promptly installed themselves as an aristocracy.

The Lasombra character is one of individuality and sufficiency, however, and the revolutions that call to them are much less of the bomb-tossing and beheading ilk, and much more of the kind that subtly but significantly change behavior. During the Age of Exploration, much Lasombra money and influence, and many Lasombra childer poured into the New

World. (Even tonight, the “privateer spirit” still holds sway among certain Keepers — see Esperanza Lucifer on p. 116.) When the Sabbat was on the ropes in the New World, Lasombra interests found a home for it in Mexico. Lasombra clergymen leveraged the weight of their prayers in numerous wars and schisms during the Dark Ages, and among certain Kindred historians, no small activity during the Burning Times did so as a result of Lasombra “suggestion.” Although the Keepers have no great facility with Eastern culture or philosophy, the Chinese principle of *weiji* has its adherents among many Lasombra seeking to sire: that crisis or instability often carries opportunity in its wake. In a clan that reveres lineage and accomplishment as much as the Lasombra do, a Cainite’s legacy may be greatly augmented by an equally meritorious childe.

And if that childe must spill blood to realize her potential, well, the Lasombra see no reason to apologize for being vampires.

Malkavian

While many think of revolution in its own terms, the fractured wisdom of the Malkavians posits that revolution is not a single act or moment, but rather a Möbius band, traveling forward and ultimately turning in on itself before returning to the exact point at which it began. When the Clan of the Moon imagines revolution, it does so in the horrific context of the French Revolution, which radicalized ever more greatly until it ultimately installed the imperial monarchy of Napoleon, or the workers’ Bolshevik Revolution that resulted in the foundation of the USSR, in which crucible the depravities of Stalin became the norm. The Malkavians know very well that revolution all too often consumes its adherents, as the titan Cronus devoured his own children.

It is with these understandings that Malkavians sometimes Embrace in their greatest moments of clarity during times of mortal or Cainite upheaval. Surely no one would expect that the same revolutionary fervor motivates them all, but no few ulterior motives have driven the Lunatics to choose the height of rebellion to sire new progeny. Some do so hoping to realize Cronus’ fears, that their childer might one night grow so bold as to strike them down and thus earn redemption for their sins. Others do so out of the challenge to boundaries that exists during times of tumult. If a lonely Lunatic creates a childe when the whole domain is going to hell in a handbasket, well, that’s the least likely of personal transgressions to be prosecuted when the inevitable

Thermidorian reaction clubs the revolt into docility. Still others see the opportunity in overthrow to seize the power that they have long craved — much like any opportunistic Kindred would — but do so looking two steps ahead, anticipating the return swing of the pendulum into the revolution’s subsequent radical or reactionary phase.

Malkavian childer Embraced in times of paradigm shift are often icons of the zeitgeist. The arch morality of the Victorian era, the psychedelic boundary-pushing of the late 1960s, the angry nihilism of the punk movement, and the distant humanism of the Renaissance — all of these times and their periods of recalibration all represent the broad spectrums in which Malkavian minds oscillate. Their highs and lows echo the manic movements of the Lunatics’ influences, and when the dust of the revolution has settled, the Malkavians often find that they’ve gravitated toward the dark sides of the events into which they were Embraced.

Nosferatu

For the Sewer Rats, revolution is often a moot point, because no revolution ever turns out in their favor. Even if, in the short term, something happens to benefit the Nosferatu, eventually things will correct themselves and they’ll end up on the bottom of the Kindred’s collective boots again. Whether it’s a mortal uprising that deposes a hated tyrant or a coup among the Damned that declares a new one, the Nosferatu know to take advantage while they can, because before long, they’ll be sneered at, spat upon, and abused again. From the Sewer Rat perspective, though, that actually works out okay. When a chaotic interlude occurs, it’s every Sewer Rat for himself in a race to do whatever the fuck he wants while everyone else is distracted with whatever overwrought upheaval demands their attention at the moment.

For these reasons, times of rebellion and revolution provide the backdrop to many Nosferatu Embraces. In times of open Jihad, the Nosferatu bolster their ranks, for even the *Book of Nod* suggests that the “first to die in any conflict are the Nosferatu.” In times of underground subversion, the Nosferatu spawning pits teem with blasphemous unlife, calling forth the sorts of hellish, fractured monstrosities best able to weather the coming storms. Tumult among mortals often draws the kine’s attention away from the more immediate horrors of the Nosferatu warrens that yawn beneath them, and the Sewer Rats often find unrest in kine circles to be a boon — for no one expects anything

other than political intrigue when agents of sedition disappear. The clan is often drawn to these idealists, as they represent childer with the ability to think critically and withstand adversity. They don't always make for the best Nosferatu, who must eventually, as thousands of years of Kindred history have shown, knuckle under to the primacy of almost any other clan, but little by little, they may well be able to improve the clan's lot.

Ravnos

It's not that the Ravnos Embrace in patterns counter to this of other clans, it's more of a question of the Deceivers not really caring one way or the other about an Embrace outside the sire and childe. Greater concerns for the potential Ravnos sire are whether the childe is being removed from her cycle of *samsara*. If the Ravnos childe is an auspicious Embrace, that's far more of a motivating factor for Ravnos siring ideal than if the Peshawar Lancers lay dying on the palace steps or if the Sepoys refuse to load their rifles.

For many Ravnos, the entirety of unlife is an insurgency, and dire times may call for dire action when it comes to the question of progeny. What Prince would grant a Deceiver the right to sire another? What Bishop? Even domains of arguably greater personal liberty, such as Anarch territories, see an increasing number of Kindred as a threat rather than a cause for celebration, and itinerants often tax the already-strained resources of such domains when they visit. Indeed, for many Ravnos, the act of Embracing itself is a form of rebellion. Those few great and terrible Ravnos who establish themselves as the demon kings of the eastern domains are rarely better disposed toward the lesser Kindred of their ancestral lands, whether of the same lineage or not. So it goes that many Ravnos Embraces are performed while moving from territory to territory, without heed of the Traditions of any one domain. Their nomadic nature is somewhat of a boon to Ravnos sires and their get in this regard, for who knows exactly where a Deceiver was when she sired her brood's latest member? Who's to say that the Prince — assuming the Ravnos was in a claimed domain — denied her the petition? The fact that she sired without anyone's permission merely shows her commitment to her own purpose.

This certainly isn't to say that the Deceivers are hapless victims in the ugly Jyhad. They're vampires, as much as any other clan of Kindred, and despite (or perhaps because of) their diminished status in the Kindred's more formal courts, Ravnos Embraces may

well be performed as an ultimate act of defiance or even a declaration of war, and to hell with whatever inflated Lick thinks the domain belongs to him. More than one Prince or Priest has been ruined by one of the "low" *kshatriyas* over whom he would presume to act as authority, and more than one hunter has stood over the bloody corpse of his companion, having incontrovertibly believed that she looked like the very creature they hunted.

Tremere

The Tremere have had quite enough of revolution, thank you, since the last two revolutions in which they participated yielded such favorable results for them. History is written by the victors, as the saying goes, and the Tremere managed to somehow vilify the Salubri for having the temerity to be hunted and diablerized in the Tremere pogrom of their fallen clan, and have also quietly assumed a guiding role in the Camarilla. Why tempt fate now?

The pragmatism of the Tremere sometimes wins out over their comfort, though, and no one would ever accuse the Warlocks of being complacent. If the indications in interesting times show that a prospective new childe might be in the offing, or, worse, the Tremere detect another clan's interest in a potential fledgling, they may well seize the opportunity to create progeny that will disappear into the hierarchy of the Pyramid rather than proving to be a paragon of another clan's ideals. Some accuse the Warlocks of "playing dirty" in this regard, but has anyone ever heard of a Tremere with hurt feelings? It's far better to write the rules than to follow someone else's, in the outlook of most Tremere.

From a completely different perspective, many modern Tremere (and forward-looking Tremere of previous eras' Embrace) cite the disruptive nature of Thaumaturgy as a revolution in the function of Disciplines, or at least a breakthrough. According to blood magic's practitioners, given enough time for study and development, Thaumaturgy can emulate or even improve upon any of the other existing Disciplines. "There's a Path for that," as some of the more modern and technically savvy Usurpers joke. If the assertion is true, if Thaumaturgy can replicate or supersede the function of other Disciplines, and if the Tremere are willing to abandon some of their lingering medieval practices of hoarding their arcane research to themselves, the Information Age may see a rapid increase in Tremere power and prominence.

With enough “revolutionaries” of a modern outlook and research techniques, Thaumaturgy may increase in potency and versatility at an exponential rate. And at some point the Tremere will question whether they need the Camarilla at all. Some among the pyramid have already looked at the realities of secession and the associated benefits of becoming an independent house, clan, and sect. Who wants to be fettered by lesser vampires who are little more than remnants of the past? And if even the limitations of the undead state can be set aside, a revolution in what it means to be Kindred may loom on the horizon. Again, all of this takes effort, and a new generation of Tremere acolytes may help develop these God-challenging advancements.

Toreador

In general, the Toreador respect the traditions of the domain when it comes to siring progeny, for what is the Camarilla that they have so graciously helped to build if anyone can simply flout its order? That said, Toreador also likely lead the other clans – perhaps cumulatively – in claiming mitigating circumstances that surrounded an Embrace during the horrors or heights of a revolt. For a Toreador, it’s easier to ask forgiveness than permission, and with a deft enough tongue, asking forgiveness itself can be performed with such grace that the authority may be embarrassed to receive the redress.

Unsurprisingly, passion plays a great role in the Toreador Embrace, and it’s undeniable that revolution signifies a time of great passion for its participants. Perhaps more than any other clan, the Clan of the Rose sees its ranks swell with new issue during times of tumult. It has been lamented at the Degenerates’ expense that the Toreador Embrace during “interesting times” like mortals conceive in winter; it’s what they do to express the moment.

Consider the Toreador state of mind during a revolution: Passions run high, times are uncertain, and the next night might be the world’s last. The revolution may well have come paired with an artistic movement or philosophical shift that the Toreador themselves sponsored. Quick-witted *philosophes* trade insightful epigrams with salt-of-the-earth proletariat as the Degenerate herself luxuriates on a velvet chaise in the salon where this particularly brilliant flame of cultural wonder first flared into genesis, the world outside burning with the flames of inspiration, shining redeeming light upon the superstitious shadows of a barbaric age. Under such heady influence, who *wouldn’t* take a lover and Embrace him in the moment’s throes? What if tomorrow never came?

Tzimisce

To the eldest Fiends, revolution is nonsense. What does it matter which mortal pretends to hold the reins? The only power that matters is the Master of the Dom, the lord in the castle on the craggy mount. The lives and governments of mortal pass in such ephemeral periods as to merit little attention, and the things that motivate them – where they commit their repulsive acts replete with their most noxious fluids and excretions – are of no interest to one seeking transcendence from such base muck.

Should a Tzimisce lord want a tool particularly suited to a time of rebellion, he may stir himself from his eldritch lair to foist the Curse of Caine upon some unfortunate, then shove the fledgling back among his former fellows with an indelicate purpose to perform. (See Jaromir Cerny, p. 104.) Alternatively, should the Fiend find himself irked by the cattle’s outsized ambitions at shaping their fates, he may simply send a brood or a vicious ghoul to hammer down the ragged lot of them.

Among younger Tzimisce, the distance of the Cainite mind from that of mortals becomes most evident during a period of revolution. The politics and philosophies of the Damned take on a gravity to which, in comparison, the ambitions of mortals are the dreams of swine. The realization of what they have become often manifests itself at an accelerated rate during mortal rebellions or Kindred upheaval. For a clan already so far removed from its once-living origins, the separation grows more quickly when the clan’s critical priorities are so evidently on display. A Tzimisce who once suffered the physical cruelties of a totalitarian regime as a man would find those times foolish and squalid, even as he hurls himself through a wall of fire in order to sink his fangs into the bleeding throat of a faltering Kindred elder. Times change – until they no longer do.

Ventrue

Few observers of Kindred society are surprised to find that Ventrue Embraces during times of dissidence often take on a distinctly counter-revolutionary cast. Given the Ventrue penchant for holding power, what possible cause could a Blue Blood have for rebellion? The Ventrue rule because they have always been the clan of rulership, which is as close to a syllogistic mandate as the Kindred care to observe. And as such, Ventrue don’t Embrace to foment revolution, they Embrace to *crush* revolution. The emperor must have his guards and chamberlains, after all.

That stereotype rings true in a surprising percentage of Ventrue domains, but it doesn't tell the whole truth. As often as not, the power behind the throne is greater than that which sits the throne, and the kingmaker faces fewer foes than the king. The Kindred historian Critias even cites this phenomenon as Clan Ventrue's "colonial revolution." The Ventrue are kings, Critias reasons, but the modern world has little use for kings. Instead of letting themselves fade into impotent anachronism, the Ventrue have simply redefined the world's perception of kings, making them mere "colonies" of the true power. From boardrooms to presidential mansions, Ventrue still rule. A mortal prime minister or CEO may be the face of a government or organization, but every mortal institution, the Ventrue claim, may feel the influence of a scepter from the shadows. And when revolution does occur, the scepter remains as powerful as it always has been (if not more so, because the perception of power has changed), despite the unaltered presence of the true monarch calling the shots. In this, the Ventrue cleave disturbingly close to the Tzimisce outlook (though they would certainly hate the comparison).

Those Ventrue tied less traditionally to long-institutionalized power structures don't have these luxuries, of course. It's one thing to talk about presidents, prime ministers, and CEOs, but for those Blue Bloods without access to the highest echelons of mortal power, revolution has other colonial characteristics. When a mortal or Kindred upheaval removes a tenured power,

the Ventrue often know about it first and have the most capital or chattel to take advantage. The quick-witted Ventrue, then, promotes a childe or Embraces a new one to install into the new vacuum, reporting to her sire or mentor, naturally. With their directorial history and array of supernatural gifts, the Blue Bloods are well suited to installing a stabilizing "imperial colony" in the form of a childe or protégé in the gap left by the erstwhile rival's death. Whether the "empire" is governmental, corporate, criminal, military, or technological is immaterial to the Ventrue.

Furthermore, young Kindred are quickly coming to understand the power inherent to social constructs, and to stage their own revolutionary coups. Influence exists in various Internet communities and services, and the Kindred who can turn it to his advantage wields a tremendous advantage over those that are geographically bound to the physical world. A centuries-old Ventrue lord may count a multinational corporation as his domain, but when the Internet finds out that the multinational corporation provides weapons to a totalitarian regime in the Middle East, it becomes a tarnished asset. And what is this other than the Jyhad played out in a digital arena? Thus, younger Ventrue are poised to turn the Information Age against the time-honored traditions of the clan... unless the cagey elders of the Kingship Clan can bring them to heel before their own internal revolution occurs.





LADOS

The Lion of Bactria

Lados surveyed the battlefield. Hundreds—thousands—of his brothers and countrymen lay broken and bloody, brought low by the ambitions of his fellow generals. After the death of Alexander, the outlying empire had plunged into kinslaying anarchy, with each of the *diadochi* trying to claim for himself a place where he might best reap the rewards of Alexander's ambition. The roll of the vying competitors read like a veritable who's who of the empire: Antipater, Perdiccas, Ptolemy, Leonnatus. Among them stood an ambitious but lowborn *peltast* who had a mind for fighting and a tongue for praise. With both these charms, Lados climbed the ranks of the Greek military and seized a position among the jackal-princes surrounding the carcass of Alexander.

Kindred society at this time was as factionalized as the world of mortal cultures. Greece belonged very much to the Brujah at their zenith, with the backing of a few enlightened Ventrue. Persia was the domain of the Toreador, interspersed with both Ravnos *gháls* (noble and common) and the indigenous Tzimisce of the paynim domains. The shattered remains of Samiel's brood held their territories against the barbarians further east and the fierce Gangrel of the northeastern steppes. Amid these clashing bloodlines and warring cultures, the landless and unwelcome Clan of the Moon had to make what it could of a world united under the banner of a fair-faced mortal son of a conquering Macedonian horse-king.

Thus, under a moonless sky, a philosopher crept into the fortress of Lamia and brought the soldier Lados into a world of eternal night. This philosopher, a Malkavian of unremembered name, sought to make the Regent of Athens a catspaw by Embracing his trusted advisors. Lados, he whispered into the fear-blanching face of his progeny, belonged to the night. It was then that Lados first knew fear. His was a fearful death away from the known violence of the battlefield, and a vile rebirth amid the blood and shit of his mortal corpse. The

depth of his isolation gripped him in that long, terrible first night of being a vampire, and his sire probed this wound with malice and Dementation. Over a year passed, in which the mad prophet tormented his child with extended bouts of abandonment that resulted in Lados being paralyzed by fear when left on his own.

So it was that Lados returned to Lamia by way of Athens, there finding the remains of his army out of shape and dwindling in ability and number. His lieutenants had all but exhausted the once-considerable war chest, preferring idle pleasures over the peril of the battlefield. What choice did Lados have? If he admonished his soldiers, they would leave. Reconnecting himself with Antipater's court, the Malkavian set himself up as a dependable but uninspired shadow of himself, the better that the Regent might overlook him while still giving him access to the wealth and influence of the Empire.

Politics can be ugly, however, and the Hellenistic Brujah resented the intrusion of "outsiders" into their domains. A league of Brujah nobles and generals took notice of Lados and planned to make an example of him. And though Lados had been fractured by the Malkavian Embrace, he was certainly no fool. The new retinue with which he had surrounded himself included not only Brujah spies, but also included a number of loyal thralls and lovers. When word of the planned action against him reached his ears, Lados turned the intrigues of the Greek Kindred against their architects.

Pledging a boon to one of the Kali-venerating Tzimisce of Bactria, Lados had one of his slaves fleshcrafted into an icon of himself. Through an extended regimen of both Dominate personality subjugation and the sensory sensitivity of Auspex, Lados convinced his slave that he was the body and true Lados the mind, a dualistic creature destined for divinity. Where Lados the Kindred traveled in thought, Lados the thrall followed in body. Hiding himself beneath a cenotaph to Alexander, the Malkavian used his slave to expose his rival Kindred

as demon-worshippers and Persian spies, orchestrators of a blood-cult bent on the subjugation of the empire and the regicide of Antipater. The Regent himself, no stranger to the subtle treacheries of the wars of the *diadochi* believed his “faithful general” — especially when the slumbering forms of the betrayers were dragged into the sunlight and burst into flame — and made a place for Lados in the vacuum left by the sudden paucity of the Brujah and their agents at court.

The Kindred Lados far outlasted Antipater, and reinvented his ghoul in the image of a descendant of the great family of Lados every several decades, to keep the suspicions of the courts allayed. Under the Seleucids, Lados and his slave brought a number of satraps under their sway, both through pledges of military support and through the damning power of the Blood. Indeed, Bactria was almost more Greek than Persian under Seleucid rule, which suited Lados admirably. For over two centuries the family of Lados — just himself and his identical ghoul with the occasional mortal lover who served as wife and later matron to the family before the Malkavian began the cycle anew — enjoyed power and prestige in the presence of kings. Cainite Princes rose and fell, and other Kindred looked to Lados as a model of how to dwell in the shadows, taking what one wanted without risking one’s unlife.

With so much time and comfort, Lados lost interest in the arts of war, and his armies transitioned from elites of the philosopher-kings to mercenary phalangites who raised their pikes only for pay to foul-tempered Yavanas who lived only to bully their pay from petty lords and drink their wages in wine.

Every general eventually faces his downfall, and Lados’ came in the form of invasion. The armies of Rajuvula marauded into what was by then the Punjab. Lados had grown lazy and complacent, embracing the decadence of the Indo-Greek Kingdom, unwilling to concern himself with the discipline of his soldiers or the tactics of the menacing Scythians. As the armies of Stratos took the field against those of Rajuvula, Lados found his forces in the unenviable tactical position of the fore. Scythian arrows perforated his lines and panic set in among his slovenly troops. He bellowed a desperate and wrathful advance — but found himself spitted on a spear wielded by Jaxartes, a river-folk hoplite from the times of Alexander and one of the scheming Brujah Lados thought he had ruined in his purge of Antipater’s courts. Indeed, Lados *had* ruined Jaxartes, who fled eastward and hid among the debased Toreador of Persia. With Rose Clan patronage, Jaxartes was one of the instruments of vengeance of

the Parthian Kindred, who resented the legacy of Alexander and the fall of the Achaemenids, and who spared no opportunity to strike back at the crumbling Greek domains. Staked on his slayer’s *assegai*, the world went dark for Lados, who was stomped, torpid, into the bloody mud outside Sagala. There, he spent almost two thousand years in a dreamless sleep, stirring beneath the earth only when the madness in his blood forced a defiant twitch.

A titan’s roar awakened the slumbering Malkavian, who had by then spent centuries tumbling through the nightmares of starvation made all the more harrowing by the curse of his clan. The titan — a smoke-belching metal monstrosity birthed from the loins of the gorgon herself — gouged Lados from the ground and spat him down, where her foul minions prodded him and gibbered in some corrupt form of an enemy tongue. The savagery of the fire in his deathless Blood ignited and, freshly torn from torpor, Lados entered a frenzy as much from fear as from rage. When the low men who had woken him lay in tatters and the titan slumped lifelessly in the shadow cast by the moon, Lados calmed, gathered his wits, and walked back into the city once held by his patron-king.

No stranger to the depredations of the Malkavian mind, Lados thought himself in the throes of a fit, but the insanity refused to relent. The stone castles and metal spires surrounding him, and the million-plus desperate, filthy, beating mortal hearts surrounding him would not disperse. This was no dream. The titan had woken Lados from his troubled torpor only to throw him into the jaws of the Ancients. The madness of the earth and sky assailed him. These must be the End Times.

And yet... they weren’t. This madness that surrounded him, that must have leached from his mind into the domains of untold years before, teetered on the brink of world-ruin without plunging over. Bit by bit, in the two decades since his emergence from torpor, Lados has gathered and synthesized what fragments he can of this reality. Its veneration of metal and speed, its hypocrisies, its wealth and licentiousness, and its thinking machines — these all elude Lados *just enough* to keep him forever on edge and occasionally beyond it. Oddly, he finds himself most comfortable with other Kindred, even when he knows they may oppose or betray him. At least, in his mind, their evil and frailties are understandable. The world-machine of the hateful demiurges, however, truly vexes him. Only in the unchanging culture of these Damned, whether they call it a “Camarilla” or “Sabbat,” does Lados find consistency.

How long can the world balance on the scales of Themis before it collapses into Typhon's gorge? How long until the blood-gods erupt from Haidou and drag their progeny, burning, into Tartarus? And how much of his own private empire can Lados rebuild before then? Enough to make the scorched husk of the world his final, solitudinous tomb?

Sire: Lykia (unconfirmed)

Clan: Malkavian

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Conformist

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 322 BC

Apparent Age: late 30s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 2, Melee 4, Survival 3

Knowledges: Academics 3, Finance 2, Investigation 3

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Dementation 4, Dominate 4

Background: Allies (mortal family) 2, Resources 3 (non-renewing remains of the war chest)

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 4, Courage 4

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 6

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 15/3

Image: Lados has the classical build and striking features of antiquity. He is short by modern standards, with remarkably bronzed skin that looks almost stony with the pallor of the Embrace. Lados still doesn't have a solid grasp of modern style, and his clothing seems anachronistic if not outright bizarre as he finds the pulse of the modern world.

Roleplaying Hints: Lados moves with the efficiency and authority of a military leader. He is accustomed to being heeded, and doesn't understand how so many of the common folk seem to be so willful, so his interactions with modern people tend to be terse or even hostile. With Kindred society having forgotten him, Lados often oversteps himself, not realizing that the Status he enjoyed in the courts of the Indo-Greek kings has left him. He is used to being granted an audience with Princes upon demand... which, with no current Status to speak of, isn't how it works anymore.

Haven: The types of havens Lados seeks lie close to the territories where esteemed Kindred of power reside. Although he has fallen from favor, he seeks to introduce himself back into the society of the august undead, in whichever domain he may currently reside. Wherever he finds himself, he establishes a haven with a collection of artifacts from antiquity that will soon be a darling of the Harpies in any domain that considers itself refined.

Influence: Over the millennia, Lados' influence has waned and vanished, leaving him almost wholly alone, with the exception of a handful of his mortal descendants, whose connection to him is tenuous but reinforced by Dominate and frequent exposure to vitae. It has not always been thus, however, and Lados seeks to make powerful contacts in any domain where he settles, starting at the low end of the Status ladder, if need be, and clawing his way to the top. Despite his shattered mind, Lados recognizes that he is a stranger in a strange time, and unlike many modern Kindred, he doesn't cast aside those who aid him as soon as they have no immediate use to him. He greatly fears once again succumbing to the cold nightmare of torpor, so he tries to stay on good terms with as many of the Kindred who have shown him favor as possible, in the interests of making as few enemies as possible.

Derangement: With his recent emergence from torpor, Lados is obsessed with the unknown number of Kindred he worries may have met a fate similar to his. In his mind, every stretch of land is the tomb of a ravenous Kindred, and on the fast-approaching night of Gehenna, the earth-sea will roil with the Damned, boiling up bloodthirsty vampires who will consume the world before being consumed by their hellish progenitors. Indeed, the (comparatively) trusting nature Lados displays toward other Kindred he meets is justified by the fact that they're lucid and at least a known quantity, unlike the monsters who will pry themselves up from their unmarked tombs and devour the land and everything upon it. In most cases, Lados is actually remarkably calm for a Malkavian, displaying only a mild paranoia that isn't actually out of place in the world of the undead. When the true gravity of his fear grasps him, however, he is inconsolable – racked by fear and the agony of knowing that he walks upon a landscape made of millions of fallen men and vampires who await only the End Times to become the pave-stones on the road to Hell itself. Lados is nearly fearless in the face of threats he can understand, a soldier tempered by war and savagery, but the horrors of his imagination reduce him to little more than a quivering invalid when confronted with the terrifying loneliness of the final night.



LIZETTE CORDOBA

The Poet of the People's Occupation

Everyone warned her, of course. “What are you going to do with a degree in poetry?” they’d asked, as though they were the first to try and break the news to her that her dreams weren’t worth shit. Her answer had always been a smug “Teach, of course,” followed with a change of topic.

She did go into teaching: high school English Literature, while she worked on the graduate degree that would let her teach at the local university as she continued her own education. Poetry was her passion, and it showed in everything she did at that overpopulated inner-city New York school.

Her dreams of living out a real-life version of *Dangerous Minds* never quite manifested, of course. No one showed up to any of the Poetry Club events she sponsored, and the administration had to ask her several times to please stick to the lesson plans given by the school district.

It wasn’t the lack of interest that really did it in for her, though. It was the violence. Students from across the borough attended the school she taught, students who were often part of rival gangs. The administration worked full-time to keep those enmities from exploding into open violence, but fights still happened. Conflict was inevitable in environments that couldn’t really be controlled: the front of the school after the last bell of the day, or in the middle of a busy hall between classes.

After a year, Lizette developed trouble sleeping, and used up her sick time and vacation days hiding in her bed, traumatized by the thought of walking those halls again. But she went back nonetheless. She took a year off from her night schooling, just to allow her to focus on rising to meet the challenge of teaching.

Much good it did her. A half-year after she began to think of herself as capable of handling the rigors of teaching in the school long-term, her contract was terminated. Budget cuts, they said, the recession. They apologized because other, tenured teachers were

going to be kept on, you see, whose class sizes had just increased by half again, but everyone had to make sacrifices, right?

For a week, Lizette raged, writing angry letters to the district, the teacher’s union, local newspapers, the mayor’s office, and the governor. Ultimately, none of it did any good. Her anger collapsed in on itself, became grief, and then numb depression. She meekly collected unemployment and had trouble getting out of bed on many days.

It was during this time that she turned to the one thing that had helped her through such episodes in the past: writing. She filled one black-and-white composition book after another with her couplets, stanzas, and whole poems. The first week was catharsis. The second week was expression. On the third, she had her muse available on command. The words flowed from her the way they never did when she was happy, and she lost whole days to the scratching of ballpoint on cheap lined paper.

In time, she transferred her writing – edited, polished, and sharpened – to her laptop, and from there to a blog. She worked day and night on it, transferring her innermost feelings to something freely available on the web. It was a litany of her anger, her frustration, her helplessness, her grief. She railed against individuals, against the school district and useless unions, against the recession itself.

Two months later, she realized that she had come out the other side of all of that. She was still writing, but wasn’t doing so as a lifeline, no longer producing just desperate scribbles beneath a musty duvet that hid her from the world. Her blog had a small but loyal following, with a whole pantheon of commentors and friends who were nothing more than usernames and clever little icons. Eventually, Lizette realized she wanted a bit more from the world. She took walks and visited friends she’d neglected.

On one of those walks, she saw them, a small body of protestors, gathered out in front of Wall Street's tall churches to money. She stopped, listening to one of them who was standing and shouting something to them. Shouting something that sounded very familiar.

With a start, she realized that it was *Burden of Scars*. One of her poems.

She walked over to listen, and to speak with him after he was done. His name was Elliot Kemp and they spent the rest of the day together, talking. The next morning she showed up bright and early to join the Occupy movement.

Lizette's life changed, dramatically and quickly. She found that her passion suddenly had an outlet. Not for apathetic adolescents or cynical administrators, but for people who shared what she had experienced: the stained gift-wrapping of the American Dream, as she said in one of her poems. The people roared their empathy.

The nature of her blog changed. There was still poetry, but it became fiery, inspiring poetry intended to goad her readers into action, and it worked in many cases. She volunteered for group-action committees and organized media responses, collected bail money for protestors thrown in jail and even got arrested a time or three herself. She self-published her poetry as an ebook that never made much money, but did earn the attention of both the publishing and academic world.

Lizette routinely performed spoken word renditions of her work at the Occupy gatherings, when she wasn't working the food table, organizing the medical tent or writing furious e-mails to the alternative news sites. These events began to attract interested individuals, among them the handsome redhead she couldn't help but notice. He showed up for a week to her performances before he introduced himself as Avery – just Avery – and told her how much he loved her work.

He was wealthy, it seemed, and he spoke not of her convictions and goals, but of the fire behind them. They discussed poetry while seated on the Wall Street sidewalk at midnight, and he made substantial contributions to the movement's food, clothing, shelter and legal needs. When she was arrested after one particularly ugly confrontation with the NYPD, he showed up first thing that evening with a lawyer in tow who bore an order from the DA to not only release Lizette, but everyone else taken that evening.

She thought she was falling in love, and hoped that he was, too. He asked her one evening to come and

perform a reading of her work to some of his friends. He was sure hearing her passion firsthand would convince them to support the work she was doing. Dressing in a new evening gown she bought for the occasion, she showed up to a salon that was all dark hardwoods, leather, and brass finishing. She shrank when she met them, though. They all seemed so cold and aloof, slightly amused at her expense. Even hostile. And one didn't even *feel* like a person.

Lizette started by reading to them, and when the sable-headed beauty with the long neck that made her look like European nobility snickered at her, something snapped in her.

Fuck them. These were the people who were responsible for everything she'd been railing against for months. She stopped reading to them, and read *at* them. Something shifted in the room, a presence like incipient violence and sexual tension consuming one another.

As she stood there, on their rich carpet, she blamed them for the ills she'd faced, for what was wrong in the world. She called them villains to their faces, in perfect flowing meter and cadence. They sat awestruck, faces indignant and horrified – but wholly unmoving. When she finished, Avery was beaming, his hands clasped in front of his mouth as though he were trying to contain his joy. The black-haired, swan-necked woman dabbed a rich lace kerchief to her left eye, and then simply said: "Out."

The others practically leapt to their feet, already snarling excitedly among themselves. She turned to Avery, who remained, and simply nodded. She stood then and crossed to Lizette, resting a single elegant finger on her chin and smiled. "Welcome," she said, and left the room.

Avery and Lizette made love on the rich leather divan that night. After her orgasm, he chuckled and said "One for the road." Then her world was sharp white fangs, sudden pain, dark blood and hunger.

Avery taught her about what it meant to be a vampire, what it meant to be a Toreador and what it meant to belong to the Camarilla. As she expected, his ardor for her cooled once she was his child, but that didn't really matter to her by then. She pursued her old goals with a new fervor, happy to use her newfound power to the benefit of the Occupy movement.

At least, until she ran afoul of the Ventrue. In short order, she found out who her enemies were, or at least who the hidden masters of the forces the movement

railed against were. The short conflict nearly resulted in her Final Death. Worse, it nearly broke the ever-important Masquerade, which resulted in herself and the dangerous Caitiff named Xavier Gonne being dragged in front of the Prince by the Sheriff. Both were warned against such recklessness in the future, and forced to drink of the Prince's vitae. Gonne had secretly warded himself against the foundation of the blood bond with a ritual, but Lizette had no such sorcerous aid.

Gonne was ordered to leave the Occupy movement alone entirely, no matter the trouble it caused him or his interests. In contrast, Lizette was given the Occupy movement as her domain in the city, with one condition: She must ensure that its efforts did not negatively impact the private domains of any of New York's Kindred.

In the time since, Lizette has carried on her work. Sometimes, she fears that she's stuck herself in a place of perpetual discontent, working openly to throw down the fat cats and make better lives for everyone, while working from behind the scenes to sabotage their efforts. The passion of the Occupiers is addictive, and continues to fuel her writing. To that end, the strength and significance of the Occupy movement as her domain has grown, giving her a degree of influence that the Prince likely hadn't anticipated. Making things worse, her anger sometimes yields to the will of the horror inside her, the Beast, resulting in depravities that make plundering the public treasure pale by comparison. Lizette has lied, stolen, taken blood by force, killed... and at the "coming out" party Avery threw for her, worse, at the behest of a truly awful Malkavian. Despite her passion, or perhaps because of it, she can feel her Humanity becoming brittle as she keeps the Beast on a taut leash.

Lizette continues to act as an unofficial leader for the Occupy movement, inspiring those around her to greater efforts and organizing its resources and recruitment. She frequently travels to other cities to help organize Occupy movements there, as well. During such travels, she is very careful to approach the Prince of that city and explain her purpose there. She does nothing involving the Kindred in such situations, if it can be helped, and even tries to avoid the use of her vampiric powers while she is there. Her focus is the movement, and nothing else.

But somewhere inside, she knows that there is a clock ticking. Fiery rebellions do not enter stasis. They overflow and succeed in their efforts, or they eventually

stagnate and boil away to nothingness in their failure. Furthermore, she asks herself, given her vampiric condition, how much does she truly want to see a more equitable balance of power? When she, or any Kindred, needs to feed, isn't it better to have a movement or an untouchable second class available, so that the search for sustenance isn't an ordeal? Does Kindred convenience trump the dignity of the human spirit? Or are the mortals, as some of the Damned contend, nothing more than kine for the consummate predators? Lizette plays a delicate game, keeping the movement boiling away steadily, neither succeeding nor failing, and asking herself questions that make her sleepless once again... but for how long?

Sire: Avery

Clan: Toreador

Nature: Dabbler

Demeanor: Architect

Generation: 10th

Embrace: 2011

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Empathy 2, Expression 3, Leadership 1, Streetwise 1

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 2, Performance 3, Survival 1

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 1, Investigation 1, Law 1, Politics 3

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Celerity 1, Fortitude 1, Presence 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 4, Fame 1, Herd 2, Influence 3, Resources 2, Retainers 2, Status 1

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

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 6

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 13/1

Image: Lizette presents the camera-perfect image of the modern Occupier. She wears slogan-emblazoned t-shirts over jeans or track pants, sometimes with a hoodie over that. She wears her fair brown hair choppy, and often in a ponytail as though she hadn't had time to see to it properly or because she's been out in the elements. She alternates between an over-stuffed messenger bag and a backpack, always with a laptop and an HD palm camera in them.

Roleplaying Hints: Lizette is somewhat awkward in social situations that don't involve the topic she's most passionate about. In these cases, her speech comes haltingly, giving the impression that she's afraid to say something stupid, and perfectly content to remain beneath everyone else's notice. If she can, she'll turn conversations back to the things with which she's most comfortable: socio-economic reform and early 20th century poetry.

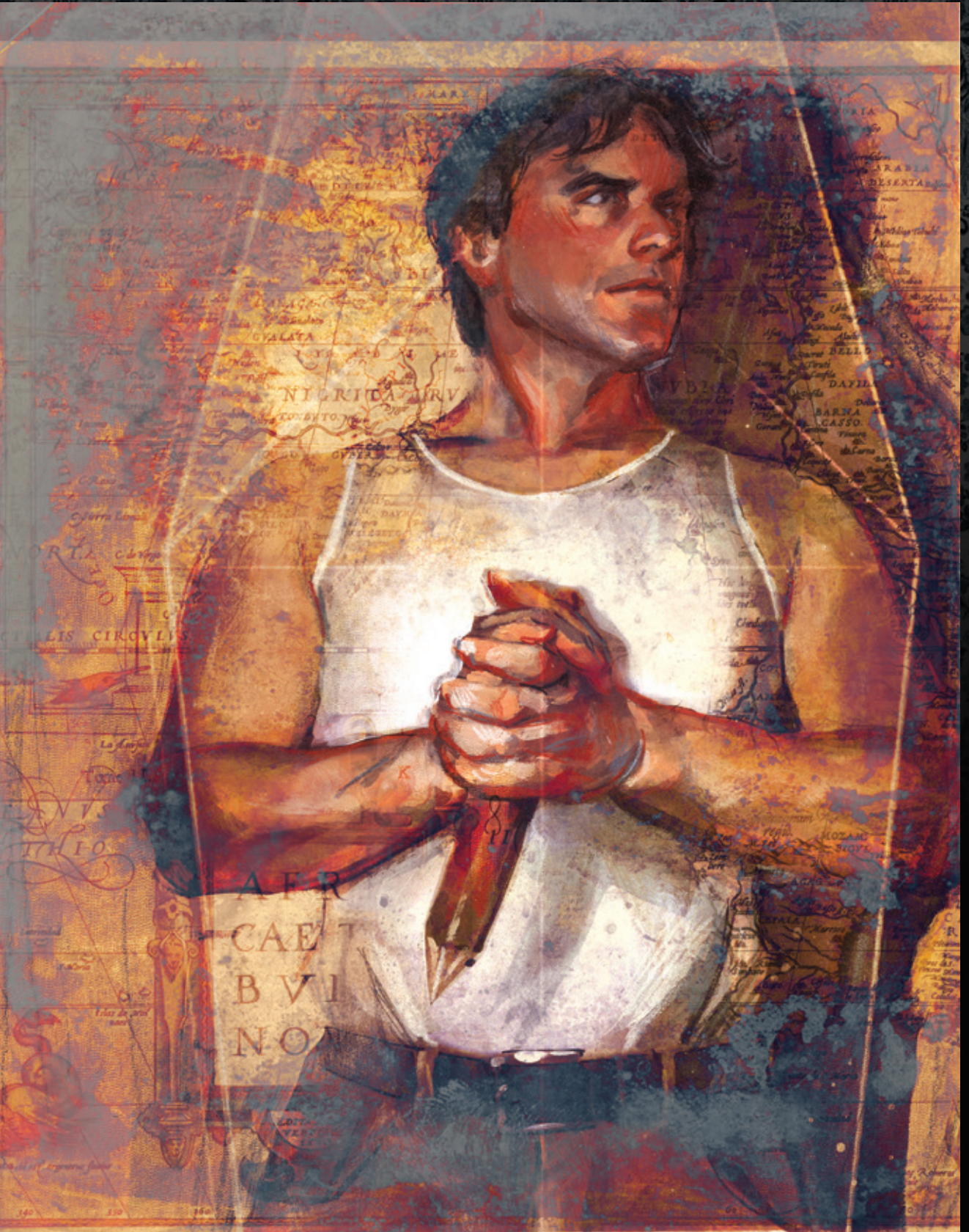
Allies & Contacts: Lizette's Allies are the people she's met working the Occupy protests. These include a very influential local political blogger, a police precinct captain who was a bit of a protesting firebrand in his youth, and a mid-level functionary in the city government. Her Contacts are primarily among the Occupiers, academia, the publishing world, and the local police.

Herd: Lizette's Herd consists of a small handful of people who tend to congregate around the Occupy protest sites. They're mostly other protestors, but also a

pot dealer or two and even a couple of street teens from the homeless population that flocks to these sites.

Influence: Although her kingdom is a tiny one, Lizette is definitely a queen of the Occupy movement in her city. Protesters look to her frequently for her input and approval, and though minute, she has access to the various resources the movement tends to gather for itself, such as donated food, clothing, and money, as well as volunteers from all walks of life, including lawyers and journalists.

Retainers: Lizette has a pair of ghouls, who serve her in different ways. Elliot Kemp is a fellow Occupier with solid people skills and a head for organization whom everyone recognizes as Lizette's right hand. He frequently tends to the Occupy movement during the day while Lizette is in slumber. Her other ghoul is Amanda Cortez, a beat cop who specializes in "crowd control" tactics, and so is at the forefront of any police presence at the Occupy sites.



ARABIA
DESERTA
NIGRITA ARVA
CASSO
BVI
NO

THE NABATAEAN

Pawn of Ancients

One by one, we fall from Heaven into the depths of the past. This, our world, is ever upturned, so that yet some time we'll last. Who are we?

— Riddle of the Sheik

In the 363rd year of the Common Era, the hidden city of Petra (the biblical “Sela,” in what is now the nation of Jordan) was in the midst of its second bloom. The first came centuries before, when it blossomed into the premier stop along the trade routes between the East and Gaza, the most important port in the Levant, and the gateway to the markets of Greece, Egypt, Rome, and Syria. This important trade route was the family business and life’s blood of Petra’s inhabitants and civil overseers: the Nabataeans.

The intervening winter that allowed for this second spring came with the winds of change, blown from the west when Rome, which had been receiving tribute from Petra since the 1st century BC, invaded and claimed much of the surrounding territory, including several precious trade routes. Petra’s decline was swift and sharp in the wake of Rome’s avarice, but though drained of vitality, the mountain city remained. When Emperor Trajan annexed and established it as the capitol of what he called the Arabia Petraea, Petra slowly began to see a new revival — one that would, in part, erase its cultural identity, but an architectural and economic revival all the same.

By the year 363, Petra was the center of a diocese under the auspices of Constantine’s dream, the eastern Roman Empire. It had lost some of its luster from the glory days of the Nabataean kings, but the addition of Byzantine colonnades, finely carved chancels, and arrays of *opus sectile* mosaics certainly beautified the aging city....

...until the earthquake.

Records of the time indicate that the quake was felt as far away as Aqaba, and the devastation it leveled

on Petra certainly reflected such magnitude. Like most earthquakes, it began at a tumultuous locus and concluded with an aftershock some hours later. It toppled temples, sent broken columns into the walls of the Royal Palace, and utterly demolished the city’s only theater. Over half the residents took the quake, which killed hundreds, as a sign from above and chose to abandon Petra, bringing her short-lived Renaissance to an end, forever.

Shaking Heaven and Earth

The quake that rocked Palestine remains an oft-discussed event. So great was its power that diviners and oracles, including some from as far back as the reign of Emperor Trajan, claimed to have foreseen the event. None of these prognosticators spoke in specifics, naturally, but the timing is certainly curious.

Just before the earthquake, in late 362, the Emperor Julian the Apostate had outlawed the teaching of Christianity (which had been the state religion for almost 30 years by then) throughout the breadth of the empire. Then, a month after the earthquake, Julian died at the Battle of Ctesiphon. Shortly after that, Julian’s successor Valentinian made his brother Valens the ruler in the east, and in so doing, created at last a permanent separation of the Roman and Byzantine Empires — an act that would ultimately precipitate the fall of both empires, according to some scholars.

Not every inhabitant of Petra felt so defeated. One man lived through the quake just the same as the others, but where they saw only ill-omen, he saw a need to pick up the pieces and soldier on. Like his father, and his father before him, the man worked the hydraulic engineering innovations that were the wonder of their place and time: conservation systems and dams to control the rush of winter waters that caused dangerous flash floods. He was a Nabataean, and his ties to the land and to Petra ran deeper than any Roman fear or

Byzantine superstition. Knowing what a mass exodus would mean for Petra's fortunes, he spoke out against her abandonment.

By that time, though, the word "Nabataean" had taken on pejorative connotations, such as "peasant," "boor," or even "bastard" in the very lands that had once comprised the Nabataean kingdom, a sad degradation of a people who had once been among the most tolerant and gifted of the ancient world. Although the man had done everything he could do to fit in and to be of use, including even converting to Christianity (as some Nabataeans had done, once Roman-occupied), to the ruling elite his word, was that of his people. And his people were "peasants."

One powerful individual did take note of the man's ardor and loyalty, however naïve it was; he just didn't do anything about it. This individual, one of the long-dead begotten of Cain, watched as the caravans filed along the city's Colonnade Street, past her nymphaeum and her fallen Temple of the Winged Lions, down her famous *siq*, and out her front gates. The city's structure never lent itself to prolonged Kindred habitation, but it was as perfect a way station for them as it was for the kine, and it was in this capacity that the vampire was in Petra at the time.

This dead visitor, a scion of the King of Shadows, did not bring the Nabataean into the endless night. He merely took note of the mortal's name, family line, and behavior before vanishing once more into darkness. In fact, one might say that his presence in Petra had been rooted in the same darkness.

The Nabataean's sorrow ignored, his city's star would fade slowly over the next 300 years, as trade routes shifted away from Petra and support from the eastern empire waned. By the year 747, it was a backwater municipality in the growing Islamic Caliphate, its population having dwindled from almost 40,000 during its heyday to fewer than 2,000 residents. But among those who yet remained was the last descendant of the Nabataean, who insured his line would keep faith with their land. This descendant, a humble laborer, eked out a living as best he could in Petra's decline.

And then it happened again.

If the events of the year 363 were the beginning of the end for Petra, the earthquake of 747 was the final nail in her coffin. The city had been reusing materials for centuries by then, and what little foundation they provided was sorely outmatched by the power of the quake's fury. It tore through not only what remained

of Petra, but all the cities of the once-Nabataean Negev, leveling temples, collapsing homes, and swallowing tomb and soul alike.

And this time, the Nabataean was caught in the middle of it. When the quake started, he was working on the temple of Qasr el-Bint ("the daughter's castle"), amending some of its masonry. Before he could even take a breath, the world was falling in all around him. In a last-ditch effort to find safety, he ran to the nearest aperture, and in a daze he thought brought on by the stress of the moment, he saw through the opening a beautiful white camel, smiling serenely beyond. Upon hearing a section of sandstone break loose overhead, he closed his eyes in preparation for death... but it took an unexpected aspect.

His eyes fluttered open and beheld a figure of nightmare, surely a djinn or one of the *ghūl*. Yet it stood with arms outstretched, an inscrutable look upon its weathered face, as if welcoming him back home. Looking up, the Nabataean saw the block of sandstone, suspended in mid-air... by *shadows*. At this, the mortal's fragile consciousness gave out and he collapsed in a heap on the temple floor. When he awoke, he was no longer among the living, but the Damned.

Like his ancestors before him, the Nabataean had adopted the religion of his place and time; in this case, Islam. The Nabataean people, like other tribal Arabs, started out as fully polytheistic, offering their prayers to the likes of Al-Uzza and Al-Qaum, Dushares and Manawet. When the Israelites conquered them, Alexander of Judea forced mass conversions to Judaism, and so Nabataeans born in that place and time accepted that faith. Under the Romans, the Nabataeans converted first to the Hellenized incarnation of their former pantheon, with Venus and Mars in place of Al-Uzza and Al-Qaum, and later, under the Eastern Empire, to Christianity – until, of course, the coming of Islam. Indeed, adapting to survive in peace seemed to be the Nabataean way.

When the Nabataean discovered that his undying savior had not adapted as his ancestors did – had adopted neither the faith of his place and time, nor those faiths that had come before it – he was dumbfounded at his sire's deed. He hadn't been especially religious in life, but on finding out that beings such as this existed, his mind couldn't help but frame the discussion in religious terms. After many nights, he mustered the courage to finally ask his sire why he had come to Petra in her decline, why he had saved a humble Muslim Nabataean only to damn him immediately thereafter.

"I have not slain you," came the response. "I have preserved you."

"But why? Why me?" said the Nabataean.

"Because one night, you might be the last of your kind."

Two Worlds

On his subsequent travels around the Levant, the Holy Land, and the Fertile Crescent, the Nabataean learned a great deal about not just one world, but two: the world of the living, and the secret world of the accursed dead who walked in its shadow. As sire and childe, the pair toured the courts of the Ashirra, the Islamic brotherhood of undead, and conversed with caliphs, supped with sultans, and interviewed with imams. The known world took them in, and they in turn took in the world. And through it all, the bond between the two Kindred grew.

As is often the case with the Damned, this very engagement was the very thing that spelled the end of their time together. In the early 11th Century, following the emergence of the so-called Taifa kingdoms in Al-Andalus, the pair ended up the honored guests of a fellow Lasombra named Bakr ibn Safwan al-Qushari, the self-proclaimed Sultan of Málaga. When the sultan asked them to pray with him, the Nabataean's sire politely refused. The sultan, thinking him a fellow "person of the book" (i.e., a Christian or a Jew), offered him access to a local church or synagogue, instead. When he was again refused, the sultan realized that his guest was neither Muslim nor *dhimmi* (a non-Muslim freeman), but true infidel, and thus in need of some counsel.

So it was that the Cainite Sultan of Málaga challenged his clanmate and guest to a contest. Should the sultan lose, he would give up half his sultanate to form a new domain for his guest (who had, to that point, established no earthly domain of his own). If he won, his guest would agree to convert, if not to Islam than at least to another religion of the book. Thinking the contest a jest at worst and an evening's entertainment at best, the sire agreed. The Nabataean no longer recalls the manner of the contest, only that his sire lost and that they both suspected deception. Both Kindred foolishly believed their aged host to be above cheating on such a trivial dalliance.

When called to make good on his loss, the Nabataean's sire again politely declined, but made no mention of his host's own bad faith in the process. When a Cainite guest breaks faith with a Cainite host,

the results can be explosive, and this instance was no exception. Incensed, and feeling the honor of both clan and tradition slighted, the sultan brought the matter before the Amici Noctis, the quasi-secret internal tribunal of the Lasombra clan. Al-Qushari had been careful to cultivate alliances with both Muslim and Christian clanmates over the years, and his influence was heard and felt among those who sat in judgment of their nomadic clanmate. As such, their verdict was as clear as it was swiftly delivered. If the Nabataean's sire would not make good and convert, then he would face the Final Death.

Knowing his sire would never convert to a faith he did not love, the Nabataean, who had stayed silent through the matter, made a bold and decisive move. He offered his own unlife in exchange. To his surprise, neither his sire nor the sultan objected, nor even reacted with especial dismay. The sultan accepted at once, and sent word to the tribunal that the sire's verdict was to be voided, provided his Nabataean childe remained true to his word. After almost three centuries years together, sire and childe parted ways with nothing more than a lone knowing nod and a somber valediction.

Again the Nabataean prepared himself to meet death, as he had the night of his Embrace, and again was Death denied. The sultan, moved by the guileless integrity of his Muslim clanmate, though not moved enough to forgive the sire's trespass entirely, opted to spare him the Final Death... in exchange for an eternity of nothingness. Al-Qushari drove a wooden stake through the Nabataean's heart, boxed up his corpse, and kept it as the prize of his collection of treasures.

Before long, the sultan's penchant for contest again had the better of him, and he was forced to forfeit the Nabataean as the culmination of a very heated exchange with a rival Christian Lasombra. Word of the "Nabataean trophy" spread like wildfire thereafter, and his body found itself passed from one undead curator to another, ever at the whim of vampires more seasoned and cruel than he. For a time, he was bound to the crypt of a qliphothic sage, who unboxed him every few years to ask the same question: "What is your name?" When the Nabataean could no longer answer with certainty, his host sold him to yet another Kindred eager to possess the undying curio. The only constant in his indentured unlife was the ruling that bound him to coffin and clan, but it was that same ruling that prevented his soul from falling prey to the Amaranth or to the Final Death. After a few centuries, the Nabataean no longer knew whether he felt this to be a blessing or a curse.

When the *Reconquista* returned much of Al-Andalus to Christian (and more importantly, non-Lasombra) hands, the Nabataean returned once more to the Middle East, where he found himself the idle plaything of one Sheik al-Khali, called the Empty Prince. A man of infinite tales and riddles, the sheik's favored form of interaction with his prize was to remove the stake and play tribal host, pretending that the Nabataean was an honored guest from afar. At the end of a long evening of heady drink and discussion, the Empty Prince set a riddle before his captive audience. Should the Nabataean guess correctly in time, he would win his freedom. If not, back to the box. Knowing his guest's worldly experience had stopped abruptly at the turn of the millennium, the sheik's riddles could be chosen accordingly, and thus, their outcome was never really in doubt.

By the end of World War II, the Nabataean had fallen into the possession of one Mirri al-Lam'a, childe of King Sharif and blood sister to the monarch of the Lasombra in North Africa. The Nabataean still doesn't know how or why he ended up in her care, for she never unboxed and interacted with him the way the others had, but simply kept him stored in her cool cellar. None of that mattered, anyway, since she was the last vampire to ever play host to his body.

Mirri al-Lam'a was the sole Lasombra resident (and de facto Prince) of the town of Sirte, Libya. Yet even as Sirte grew under the auspices of its prodigal son, Colonel Mu'ammarr al-Qaddafi, the city's Kindred activity remained constrained, as though its most tenured resident sought actively to avoid others of her kind. When the Arab Spring finally arrived at Qaddafi's doorstep in October of 2011, the resulting hostilities made a wet, smoking ruin of Sirte, as well as Qaddafi.

What no one knows is that the Arab Spring accomplished an important Cainite event at the same time: the release of the Nabataean, after 1,000 long years of nightmares both real and imagined.

He awoke to find himself submerged. The siege of Sirte was accompanied by not only shelling and gun battles in the streets, but also flooding. And while the sub-basement that was his resting place had been secured against intrusion and sunlight, it hadn't been entirely waterproof. With his stake dislodged and his host nowhere to be found, the Nabataean was on his own for the first time in a millennium. Were it not for the water everywhere and his ability to take his rest where he may, he almost certainly would have either met the sun or lost himself to frenzy.



Since his rude awakening, the Nabataean finds the world a stark and disorientating place. His unspeakably long torpor didn't drive him mad, but it did strip him of many of his memories, much compassion, and even his identity, including his own mortal name. His first act of volition was to leave Sirte, which was still a ruin by the time he escaped the tomb that had been his most recent home. As if by instinct, he followed his memory east, heading back to the ruins of Petra.

Along the way, he stopped in Egypt and watched the fallout of the Arab Spring take hold there. He'd been to Egypt before, with his sire, but the place was of course unrecognizable to him now. After a run-in with a nomadic Sabbat pack (of whom he made dizzyingly short work), he followed the political *ghibli* once more, crossing the border first into Sinai and thence into Palestine, where he gazed in grim understanding at the familiar face of oppression and the loss of self-determination. When he arrived in Petra, his fear that it would be nothing more than historical curio was confirmed.

As of tonight, only one purpose drives the Nabataean. He seeks to reconnect with his lost sire. Centuries of fitful sleep have robbed him of his certitude, but something tells him that his sire is yet undead, and if he can find him, maybe he can assemble the pieces of his past and move forward. With no contacts and nowhere concrete to start, he is reduced to wandering lands he once knew, now unfamiliar to him, alone and bereft of the guidance of even his own god. He wanders now, as in nights of old – wanders and wonders if he is indeed the last of his kind.

Sire: Antipater of the Hoof

Clan: Lasombra

Nature: Idealist

Demeanor: Martyr

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 747 CE

Apparent Age: late teens/early 20s

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Etiquette 4, Melee 3, Stealth 2, Survival 5

Knowledges: Academics 1, Craft 4, Investigation 3, Occult 3

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Fortitude 3, Obtenebration 4, Potence 4, Protean 3

Backgrounds: Mentor 4 (though the Nabataean cannot call upon this mentorship, yet), Status 1 (Lasombra)

Merits/Flaws: Code of Honor, Iron Will, Language (Arabic, Aramaic) / Amnesia

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 5, Courage 5

Morality: Humanity 7 (treat as Humanity 5 until the Nabataean has an epiphany that returns his forgotten Humanity to him)

Willpower: 8

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 20/4

Image: The Nabataean is handsome but unremarkable at first glance, an Arab of indeterminable extraction, standing just under 5'10" and possessed of a mason's hands and upper body build. He does claim one physical curiosity among his kind, however. Like a mortal who went for decades without exposing his body to very much weather, pressure, or sun, the Nabataean's skin is incredibly life-like for a vampire of his advanced age. This absence of the Cainite's trademark pallid cast has already proven fatal to younger, cocksure vampires who thought him an easy mark. While he's acquired enough contemporary clothing to get by without drawing undue attention, it's clear to any discerning eye that the Nabataean is quite literally a man out of time.

Roleplaying Hints: The Nabataean can't quite relate to the people around him, yet, and he's still in the process of rediscovering the state of modern humanity, so that he can rediscover his *own* humanity. It's all coming back – slowly – but until he gets his bearings, the Nabataean will have to walk a fine line between the poles of his own being, between way too little and way too much. And when one is an ancient nocturnal predator, those kinds of growing pains can be quite painful, especially to those who would think to prey upon him.

Haven: The Nabataean learned from his sire the Gangrel trick of taking one's rest in the cold ground,

and like a feral animal, he retreats into this mindset with the dawn of each new day. While he's certainly capable of finding and establishing a true haven of his own, the concept simply isn't on his mind for the time being. All he wants is to move, as he did in the old nights, and until he finds either his sire or a suitable source of answers, that's unlikely to change.

Influence: If his sire is indeed still undead, he would be quite an influential figure in his own right come

the modern nights, but the Nabataean can't access any such influence, of course. Given his age and physical capabilities, he could easily become an influential member of either the Camarilla or the Sabbat, but thus far his understanding of both sects is greatly limited, and such aspirations aren't even a concern to him for the time being. Once he acclimates, he'll be a force to be reckoned with, but until that time his main concern is finding his sire – and his place.





SVEIN FORTINBRAS

Azrael

The easy definition of “black metal” is a genre of heavy metal popularized by a fast tempo, screaming vocals, distorted guitar, and a strong DIY aesthetic. But the roots of the movement are much more ideological – sincere Satanism, neo-Nazi ideology, and outright aggression against organized Christianity. Black metal is angry at anything and everything, and Norway in the early 1990s was the center of this passionate revolution against the trappings of “morality.” And Azrael was right in the middle of it all.

He was born in 1970 as Svein Fortinbras, to poor Norwegian parents in Bergen. An exceptionally intelligent child, Svein grew up watching his family work hard to earn whatever money they could to get by. Day after day his mother and father would come home, bone-weary after another day of back-breaking work, only to have a small dinner of cheap, easily prepared food. Every night they prayed to God, thanking them for what little they had. It was a subsistence life, Svein realized as an early teenager – an unexamined state little more than animal instinct.

Svein’s disgust with the situation he and his family were endured grew year after year. He hated the government that allowed poverty, hated the world that created such a situation, and hated the God who got all the credit for the things his parents labored to earn. School offered him only more of the same, so he became quiet and insular, losing himself in his love of heavy metal and reading book after book on paganism, particularly those about the old Norse pantheon. He taught himself how to play the guitar, frequently trying new sounds and structures that better reflected the fury trapped within him, a fury so intense he couldn’t even articulate it.

When he was 20 he left Bergen for Oslo, hoping to find others who understood and shared his anger. For a year he ended up holding the same kinds of shit jobs his parents meekly performed, and he was barely able to

make do. A co-worker and fellow metalhead introduced him to black metal bands like Mayhem and Burzum, and the music’s aggressive individuality, anti-authoritarian stance, and burning hatred for Christianity spoke to him. He bought every album, demo, and single he could with what little money he could scrape together, and made copies of whatever tapes he couldn’t afford.

Then he heard about a new record shop called Helvete, which was backed by the guitarist of Mayhem, Euronymous. He started hanging out there, calling himself “Azrael,” and quickly earned the attention of the other black metal musicians who hung out there. He became part of the “Black Circle” that met in Helvete’s basement, surrounded by black walls, medieval weapons, cheaply produced posters, and plastic tombstones. They screamed, fought, drank, laughed, intensely worshipped Satan (not like those LaVeyan pussies), and plotted the destruction of everything and everyone, while Azrael listened and learned.

His sincere passion, sharp wit, and strangely quiet nature drew the attention of Brynjar, a Setite of the Old Norse strain and a bitter enemy of the Oslo Camarilla. Brynjar was part of a defunct Norwegian punk band in the 70s before his Embrace, and he had been slumming in the black metal scene because it reminded him a little of his mortal days. He paid attention to Azrael, surprised and attracted to his honest and intelligent charisma. Brynjar gave Azrael the Embrace after one of the Black Circle meetings, and Azrael became an enthusiastic member of the Cult of Jormungand temple of Setites.

As the neonate was learning about his transition into the ranks of the Damned, things in Helvete were getting out of control. One member of the Black Circle committed suicide, and a second took pictures of the corpse and used it for an album cover. A third had been bragging about murdering a gay man for propositioning him in a forest just outside Lillehammer. Unlike the

rest of the community, who tried to act like it was cool but were secretly shocked by it all, Azrael found himself unfazed by it all, and he was more moved by his apathy than by the grisliness of the scene. He was a vampire now, and suicide and murder were pedestrian compared to the unholy thing he had become.

What really got his attention were the plans that some of the more extreme musicians made to burn down various churches in Norway as a statement. He quickly got involved, excited at the prospect of doing something tangible against a God he hated so much. It wasn't until the arsons were national news before Brynjar even realized Azrael was involved, but word quickly spread to the rest of Kindred society. Before Brynjar could even get a chance to talk to Azrael, the Malkavian Primogen demanded that Azrael be brought before a Camarilla Conclave to answer for the arsons. Brynjar, unwilling to suffer a staking for his reckless child's zeal, tricked Azrael into heeding the Prince's demand for satisfaction, claiming that he was to receive the Cult of Jormungand's foulest rites of initiation.

Azrael arrived painted in his stage makeup and dressed like a Satanic Viking right off of an album cover, and it was that look that was etched into the minds of the assembled Kindred of the Ivory Tower as the Malkavian Primogen congratulated him for his good work. It turned out that one of the old churches that was torched was the safe house for the Oslo Society of Leopold, ridding the local Camarilla of a number of nascent hunters in their midst. Azrael was quick to accept credit for the deed, and despite being a fledgling and a Setite, he was given a position of minor power as a Hound of the Sheriff. Brynjar tried to convince Azrael that this was a trap, that he was just working for another authoritarian figure like the ones he always rebelled against, but the fledgling was wickedly giddy with power. He felt like he had a mandate to take the war against Christianity in the name of the Camarilla and the Setite temple, that he had achieved what others of his clan had failed to accomplish, and that he was naturally superior to the lowly sire who had made him. Azrael scoffed at Brynjar's advice, and Brynjar told his child to go fuck himself before leaving Oslo to its war with the hunters.

However, the "war" was short-lived. The Society of Leopold was not destroyed by the arson, merely wounded – and now convinced of its righteousness. They rallied their hallowed slayers and struck back against the Damned. A week of strategic strikes rocked the Camarilla as Kindred after Kindred was staked and put to the torch, including the Prince. The surviving

Kindred blamed their newly promoted fledgling, cursing him for the very thing they rewarded him for weeks earlier. He was banished from Oslo. Azrael finally saw the Malkavian Primogen's Jihad ruse that Brynjar tried to warn him about, and with his middle finger firmly in the air, he left Norway under exile and threat of Lextalionis.

His brief career in Kindred politics in shambles, Azrael decided to return to his first love and form a band. Abandoning the Satanic trappings of the Black Circle, he focused on Norway's pagan past. His band Ynglinga kept the black metal sound and stage theatrics of his former inspirations as well as an indelible enmity toward organized Christianity, but as he moved further and further away from Scandinavia, his style became more and more distinct. After a couple of years, he eventually ended up on the outs with his former idols, who regularly threatened his life in letters and interviews over his perceived abandonment of the Dark Lord Satan. A spate of murders and suicides among their ranks has never been officially tied to Azrael, but he has gleefully claimed credit and threatened more of the same. As the millennium drew to a close, Ynglinga earned the attention of a record label in New York looking for a band that could provide the black metal sound without all the negative publicity of being Satanists. Realizing that Scandinavia was becoming too tense for him, Azrael agreed, and Ynglinga made the trans-Atlantic trip to North America.

Since then, Azrael has supplemented his music career with the occasional bit of mercenary work and vice procurement among Kindred society, though he refuses to knuckle under to any sect. The Setites of New York find him alienating and disgusting, far from the more traditional Serpent backgrounds and Egyptian-influenced temples of the main branch of the clan. Azrael has been known to work for the Camarilla and the Anarchs, and even a short term of prestation with the New York Giovanni, though the two ended up on hostile terms. All the while wearing his stylized makeup and "gothic Viking" outfit, he has rapidly gained a name among the Damned and the black metal subculture. The only sect he won't work for is the Sword of Caine, but he refuses to explain why. Some Kindred gadflies speculate that the Sabbat's Caine-revering form of Christianity is too repulsive to him. Further, Azrael's role in the murder of members of the Society of Leopold has made him an enemy to the rest of the Inquisition, and more than once, he's used his band's touring schedule as an excuse to skip town before the hunters catch up to him.

In recent nights, Azrael has disappeared. Rumors run rampant as to what happened to him. Some theorize that the Inquisition finally got back at him, while others claim the Sabbat have hunted him for some crime against them. Still others believe that he has returned to Norway and subverted the Cult of Jormungand. A few suggest that he's just tired of all of the bullshit within the Jyhad and he's lying low to work on his next album. Whatever the reason, Azrael has captured the imagination (and paranoia) of the Kindred populace, and the most curious won't be comfortable until know for certain what he's planning.

Sire: Brynjar

Clan: Followers of Set

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Monster

Generation: 12th

Embrace: 1991

Apparent Age: Early 20s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Talents: Brawl 1, Expression 3, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Melee 3, Performance (Black Metal) 4, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Knowledges: Occult 4, Investigation 1

Disciplines: Presence 3, Serpentis 1

Background: Allies (band and groupies) 3, Fame (black metal guitarist) 2, Resources 2, Retainers (road crew, record label) 2

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 4, Courage 3

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 6

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 11/1

Image: Azrael is larger than life in just about every way. He is close to seven feet tall and he wears thick, bulky boots that make him even taller. His vibrant red hair is regularly died raven black, and hangs over his face like a death-shroud.

Whether on stage or mingling in Kindred society, Azrael looks like an unholy cross between a goth biker and a modern Viking: long, black leather coats, black and silver furs around his shoulders, white shoe-polished logos on the back and sleeves, and lots of morbid silver jewelry. He has polished stainless steel

studs through his ears, eyebrows, nose, and lip. Even his gloves have pointed silver spikes on the knuckles, and his guitars are often solid black with white and silver accents. Every inch of remaining visible skin is painted to make him look (even more) like a walking corpse, but as time goes on, he finds he needs the makeup less and less.

Outside of "the uniform," Azrael looks much less intimidating. He generally keeps to T-shirts and jeans over heavy-duty work boots, and the amount of silver jewelry dwindles to a handful of rings and a necklace, all displaying some element of his Norse faith. Those familiar with his ostentatious appearance are often surprised as how quickly and carefully he moves. He is a big man in a world just a little too small for him, and he has the studied movements of someone who has spent decades making sure he doesn't accidentally run into or break things.

Roleplaying Hints: Azrael is bizarre, opinionated, and divisive. He treats his band and his fans like worshippers, all praying to the altar of Fuck Authority. While he is still very young for a Kindred, his fanaticism and lack of fear of Final Death propel him into actions that other Kindred find incomprehensible. His actions make perfect sense to him, but between his self-constructed belief system and his Embrace in an extremely violent and chaotic subculture (as well as a dose of paranoia), it's not surprising that his actions seem manic to the more stolid vampires around him.

Those who know of Azrael only by reputation or through his stage persona are often caught off-guard by how soft-spoken he is in person. Far from the stereotype of the loud, profanity-spewing, renegade fledgling, he is quiet and thoughtful, often pausing as if considering each thought. On the other hand, he doesn't see the point in saying anything but what's on his mind, and the opinions he shares are often just a hostile as any vitriol-laden rant.

Despite (or perhaps because of) his revolutionary and borderline sociopathic opinions, he is surprisingly humble. He doesn't think of himself as the leader of Ynglinga but rather the first among peers. In his mind, everyone in the longboat is pulling at the oars — he's just the one counting out the strokes. His natural inclination toward pure democracy makes him particularly attractive to the Anarchs (and dangerous to the other sects), but Azrael doesn't consider it to be any sort of radical governmental structure. It's just how he does things, and he's often disappointed and angry when others don't see it that way.

Haven: Due to his constant touring and escapes, Azrael has a number of small, improvised bolt-holes throughout North America. Many motel rooms and truck stops that end up “destroyed” by the band are actually hastily secured havens used to keep sunlight and hunters at bay. Azrael does have a few safe houses scattered across the country that he uses for storage or a more secure place to hide when necessary. Overall, though, he tries to stay as mobile as possible. He has a contact on the American West Coast, a fellow Setite named Liliane Chastain, who occasionally provides him with information and a temporary haven, but only when he visits the Century City domain. She has offered to put him in contact with other Setites in the Anarch Free State, an offer he would be wise to accept.

Influence: As his fame continues to become more and more cultic, various elders are forced to decide if Azrael is a pawn to court or an enemy to crush. They would find either option difficult: So far, Azrael hasn’t found much need for sects, and whether due to beginner’s luck or divine providence, he’s managed to come out unscarred by much of the Jyhad. With the adoration of the Anarchs, the concern of the more orderly sects, and the pragmatic manipulations of the independent clans, though, someone is going to take a swing at Azrael, and soon.

Assuming the Society of Leopold doesn’t get to him first, of course.





LADY MARGARET WILLOUGHBY

Keeper of the Lost Secret

On a wicked night in Scotland, five self-styled witches gathered in a guestroom in the eastern wing of Balmoral Castle. Their coven had convened to ensorcel their hostess, the Queen Victoria, who had become morose after the death of her husband the Prince Consort Albert. Led by the traitor Lady Lise Paulmann, the witches convened in the library, drawing forbidden sigils on the floor and lighting candles so that they might call forth the ghost of Albert and compel him to beg her to join him, driving the queen to despair. Even if the queen didn't try to cross the Veil into the ghostly prince's arms, the moment she spoke in public about a visitation from her lover's ghost, she'd no longer be suitable to lead the empire in the eyes of her subjects, despite the Romantic mysticism of the time.

For her part, Lady Paulmann sought to place the queen in thrall so that the newly unified Germany, growing in power, might keep its European neighbor in check. For the rest of the witches, such treachery was unimaginable, but they were seduced by the idea of having the queen in their debt. Paulmann herself lived in Victoria's United Kingdom and had no desire to invite the bellicose Germans to sack her adopted home, as she too greatly enjoyed the affluence and comfort to which she had grown accustomed. Without a doubt, she was a spy for her homeland... but she had no desire to aid the fatherland *too* much.

In truth, Lady Paulmann was a ghoul working at the behest of a coterie of German Ventrue, waging their secret Jyhad against London's Prince Mithras. Acting directly against Queen Victoria was a bold and desperate move on their part, and the ruse unraveled only because of the timely arrival of the agents of Scotland's Tremere Lord, Hargau.

Scotland had long been a territory of primarily Toreador fiefdom domains, owing to a connection

between the Caledonian Degenerates and the House of Valois, which had attached the Scottish domains during the rule of Mary Stuart and her marriage to Francis II of France. Dispossessed French Toreador traveled to Scotland, claiming domains there from independent lesser Ventrue, Brujah, and Gangrel Princes, backing their praxis seizures with the power of the French throne before the ascension of Elizabeth in England and the complicity of many English Ventrue.

Amid this centuries-old political and Kindred quagmire, Lady Paulmann's plot against Victoria formed. And the night her séance began, it was interrupted by the arrival of Hargau, who then held the Lordship of the assembled domains. Hargau's arrival was purest coincidence, but the guilty looks of the Queen's other guests when he made his introductions queered the entire ritual and roused his suspicions. Under his withering presence, one of the assembled "witches," Lady Margaret Willoughby, admitted the entire plot, and with a hasty session of Dominated probing, Hargau confirmed the conspiracy and its betrayers.

In most cases, this would have spelled the end for both the holdout traitors and the one who gave them away, for Tremere justice is an unyielding thing. A greater tumult in the House of Tremere changed the outcome this night, however, and the plot against Queen Victoria became the catalyst for a greater scheme that would span continents. The crisis had yielded an opportunity.

The opportunity wasn't a pleasant one, however, as might be expected of the treacheries of the Damned. Of the five witches, Hargau killed three, to protect the secret of the conspiracy – and to slake his thirst on their blood. Thereafter, the Tremere Lord sequestered himself at an ancillary Tremere chantry in Glasgow

with Ladies Paulmann and Willoughby as his “guests,” where they were attended by obsequious ghouls and bizarre Thaumaturgical constructs that placated their needs. The ladies responded differently to their host’s hospitality, and Hargau made plain that he had plans for them that involved a greater degree of the sorcerous arts than their limited attempts at Balmoral had provided.

For a month, Hargau courted the two ersatz witches with temptations to power, exacting from them tithes of blood that he used to initiate them into the mysteries of Clan Tremere. On the most auspicious night, when a cloudless sky yielded a long, raw solstice, the Tremere Lord brought his apprentice into the chantry vault to Embrace Lady Paulmann. Incensed, Lady Paulmann protested, for if the secret of true witchcraft traveled in the blood, why should she have to settle for the Embrace of a low and common apprentice? Hargau slapped her, stunning her into silence, warning her that the structure of the pyramid must needs have its foundation, and that there were... ways to rise the potency of the Blood. Lady Paulmann then churlishly submitted to the apprentice’s Embrace, while Lady Willoughby looked on in horror and watched her die.

When the undead creature that Lise Paulmann had become rose from the death-chrysalis, the Tremere Lord ordered her to feed on the blood of a ghoul. And as if to demonstrate the sanguine hierarchy of the clan, he compelled Lady Paulmann to perform the same act upon Lady Willoughby, to pluck the thread of her life and replace it with the midnight blood of Damnation. The look in Lady Paulmann’s eyes as she approached Lady Willoughby paralyzed the still-mortal woman with despair. She had always been docile, and had joined the witches’ coven largely out of obligation to the others, and to see the monstrosity that awaited her under the curse that this Hargau fiend had explained – but the time for such terrors vanished as her life poured from her body in a thrilling rush that bloomed within her voracious accomplice.

Hargau then gave a practical lesson in those “ways to rise the potency of the Blood.” He explained to the fledglings that by drinking another Kindred’s blood and beyond, by consuming her very soul, one could focus the power in vitae, distilling it, alchemically reducing it to a more potent humour and gleaning from its puissance a more acute power over the Kindred condition. And then, as the viselike grip of a Thaumaturgical servitor rendered Lady Paulmann immobile, he instructed Margaret Willoughby to perform that very act.

The Amaranth scarred Lady Willoughby with its violence, with its carnal pleasure, and with the unwholesome blasphemy of its function. As the blood of her sire of a few moments streaked from Lady Willoughby’s mouth and nose, Lise Paulmann’s body crumbled to ash.

“This is for your protection and mine,” Hargau spoke cryptically, and only later did Lady Willoughby come to understand the value of the remove from her grandsire’s lineage. At the cost of her own humanity, she gained the power of her grandsire’s Embrace, but also a distance between them – a progenitive gap that suggested an autonomy from Hargau’s will accomplished only by the illusory pretense of ancestry. “Besides,” the Tremere Lord disclosed, “a sense of entitlement like your departed sire’s makes for a dubious foundation in the pyramid.”

Alas, the newly Embraced aristocrat showed little skill with Thaumaturgy, finding its practice repulsive and medieval. At Hargau’s urging, she gravitated toward the political theater of the clan, but here she similarly had little success. The political weight of a Tremere who was a minor lord’s wife in Toreador-dominated Scotland was negligible, and she proved as much a liability to the Warlocks as she did an asset. About this time, Hargau’s own career with the Tremere was in decline, and the two parted ways.

In an effort to leave the United Kingdom behind, Lady Willoughby took her own monies, left to her after the unfortunate consumptive death of her husband, and invested in the Transandine Railway. Shipping off the entirety of her estate to Argentina, Lady Willoughby looked very much the part of the expatriate investor, and despite the difficulties the Ferrocarril Trasandino Clark company had in breaking ground, the endeavor eventually not only launched but prospered. With a modest investment quietly accumulating resources for her, Lady Willoughby’s interests turned inward. With a humble haven in Mendoza, she learned the language and enough of the Argentine culture to play up her role as an urbane émigré.

Such quiet resolutions rarely occupy the Kindred for long, though, and such proved to be the case for Lady Willoughby. One evening, when she had held a dinner party for several of the city’s elite at her *californiano* home, she received a visitor: her grandsire, Hargau. His star hadn’t faded by chance, he had simply constructed a quiet exit from the Lordship of Scotland with the aid of a silent patron placed elsewhere in the Pyramid. This had all been part of his long-term plan, he confessed,

because he and his patron had discovered a secret that might have sparked a war in Europe, and with tensions rising in Austria-Hungary at the time, the last thing the Kindred needed was high conflict on top of the worsening mortal political climate.

Hargau disclosed his situation: that he had found an unlikely ally in a thread of Thaumaturgical research during time spent in the late 1700s in Vienna. In various studies of Kindred blood, the composition of the Gargoyle bloodline, and the curse-haunted soil of Eastern European domains, Hargau and a small cabal of fellow Tremere of House Goratrix had discovered a curiosity that seemed to have flourished, if such could be said, in the vitae of Clan Tzimisce. And, if the experiments conducted by the chantry proved true, Hargau and his cabal would have the ability to render the “anomaly” inert. Lady Willoughby didn’t understand, so Hargau explained – if the blood magic could be developed, the Tremere would have the ability to terminate the Curse of Caine in the Tzimisce, sending the ritual traveling up the mystic lineage of the Fiends like a virus, reducing them to ash where they stood.

The details still eluded Margaret Willoughby, but that was why Hargau had chosen her. She lacked the ability to effect the ritual herself, so he had no worries that she’d abuse it without his knowledge, and her lack of effectiveness in larger Kindred politics had meant that no one had taken undue notice of her. She was an excellent candidate to protect the secret that he was now poised on the verge of discovering.

The problem, of course, was that House Goratrix had chosen to ally with the Sabbat, which had been formed after the Anarch Revolt as a union of Lasombra and... Tzimisce. With the power of the Sabbat on the rise in the New World, Goratrix saw an opportunity to place his rogue chantry of Tremere *antitribu* in a position of advantage among them. This didn’t quench any of House Goratrix’s enthusiasm for finding the ritual. Rather, Hargau confided, his old coven seemed highly motivated to do so – it simply made their motives somewhat different from those of the Tremere still faithful to Vienna and the Council of Seven. The Spellbinder’s priorities belonged first to himself and then his House, with loyalty to the Sword of Caine falling to a distant third on the Usurper’s agenda. To Goratrix, the Sabbat represented a useful tool and a powerful patron sect rather than an ideology to venerate in and of itself.

Since Hargau’s arrival in South America, the Sabbat had its eyes on him, and despite his expert use of Thaumaturgy to hide his trail, the rebels of House Goratrix had greater sorceries at their command. With his movements known to those Sabbat agents that Goratrix’s faction had deemed appropriate to tell, Hargau knew that his time was running out, but that someone outside the rogue faction must possess the secret. He stayed at Lady Willoughby’s haven for several months, though he vanished for weeks at a time, intentionally keeping her ignorant of his movements so that anyone who questioned her wouldn’t be able to pry his whereabouts from her, regardless of what they might inflict on her.

During these months, Margaret Willoughby considered her fate. Her sire had abused her since her first night among the Damned, treating her as a pawn and a patsy, pushing first his condition and then his agenda upon her. By the autumn of 1912, Lady Willoughby decided she’d had enough of Hargau’s ill treatment. When the Viboras de Dios pack came calling, with murder on their minds and fire at hand, she offered them a deal. She’d present them with a staked Hargau and they’d leave her alone while she fled their domain. Disappointed at the lack of need to force her to yield her guest, the Viboras de Dios left Lady Willoughby with a grim warning. If she planned to renege on the agreement, they’d hunt her too the ends of the earth and splay her innards in a blood eagle for the sun to devour. Margaret had no intention of backing out of the deal, but she had played the shrinking violet long enough. Having steeled herself to her course of action, she planned a betrayal that to her bore the gravity of justice.

The next night, Lady Willoughby rummaged through Hargau’s rooms, looking for through his meager belongings for anything that might have looked like it might bear Thaumaturgical value. Hargau was no fool, however, and had both hidden his journals that contained the ritual and warded his makeshift haven from tampering. When he returned to Margaret’s haven, filthy with the grime of obviously desperate travel he demanded that she show him her hands. There, beneath the lace of her evening gloves, glistened his weeping sigil, opened raw upon the flesh of her hand.

Lady Willoughby confessed to the arrival and fierce threats of the Sabbat pack that had come to demand that she deliver him to them, but that she had no idea where he was. From there, however, she concocted a lie that suited her meek demeanor, that they demanded

some personal trinket of his and that she relented, rifling his belonging in a desperate attempt to give them something of value.

Hargau bought the ruse, prideful of his own anticipation that someone might have been tailing him and the wisdom in hiding his ritual journal. He forgave Lady Willoughby the transgression and questioned her as to the identities of the interlopers. She described the *Víboras de Dios*, whom he recognized as Sabbat, but without any known connection to the Tremere *antitribu*.

The Argentine domains had no formal sect allegiance, being a confederation of territories in which Princes and Bishops of both the Camarilla and Sabbat held sway. Between the most populous areas stretched vast, unknown domains, where Autarkis might be the only power, or where packs of Sabbat or Anarchs might claim praxis of their own. As such, Hargau explained, the only authorities to be found were of the very local variety, and should the Prince of Mendoza not have any personal grievance against the Sabbat, she might not have any issue with turning a troublemaker over to an eager pack if it meant the Sword of Caine would move on from her domain back to its own. That meant that their safety was in their own hands, and that flight was their best recourse.

Weeping tears of blood that Hargau assumed to be borne of fear, Lady Willoughby agreed. They would abandon the *californiano* the next night, and she would go where he instructed her, waiting until he contacted her again to make her next move. She even suggested that he not tell her his destination, again that his secrecy might be protected. Hargau smiled. His grand-childe knew her role. He had chosen well. He next night, when they once again left each other's company, he would travel to the *macondo* where the local Chulupi fearfully revered him as Desmodus. There, he could practice his rites, "Embracing" the victims the Chulupi provided with his sorcerous approximation of the Tzimisce condition and the tie it developed between the fledgling and the land. He collected his things, including the oilskin satchel that contained his encoded diaries, which contained the location of his secret Thaumaturgical cache near the Chulupi village.

His plan was never to come to fruition.

While Hargau retired into a smug day-sleep, Lady Willoughby roused herself from slumber and crept to his room in an agonizing lethargy. In her mind, she fought the urge to rouse her grandsire in the moment before she condemned him, letting him know that his hapless subordinate had finally suffered enough, but

too much was at stake. Without the satisfaction of his understanding, Margaret plunged a carob stake into Hargau's heart and hammered it home with a silver mallet purloined from among the ex-Lord's meager travel belongings. Sodden with his spurting blood, hoping that he recognized her in the moment when his eyes bulged at the attack, Lady Willoughby crawled back to the comfort of her own chambers and slept a fitful sleep for the remainder of the day.

When next she woke, Margaret contacted the *Víboras de Dios* and let their pack leader know that she was ready to fulfill her half of their agreement. When the pack arrived, she allowed them to plunder his sleeping quarters. It was in a ruin, she explained, because she and Hargau had planned to flee that very night, but she misled him to allay his suspicions, and they had struggled briefly when she had staked him in his surprise. She had no use for his half-packed things, she said, and the pack could take what they wanted. The pack sought information about the Tremere's Thaumaturgical breakthrough for its patron Dominion, but they had no reason to think that Lady Willoughby would know what they desired. And she continued to play her part as the timid victim, convincing the *Víboras* as wholly as she had Hargau.

In truth, Lady Willoughby had taken Hargau's satchel before she arranged for the pack to collect its gory prize. She knew the satchel didn't contain the precious secret, but she knew that it contained clues to where it had been hidden. She then asked for the protection of the *Víboras de Dios*, begging asylum within the Sabbat for, when word of her betrayal reached Vienna, she would be a marked Kindred.

Lady Willoughby's request was beyond the authority the *Víboras de Dios* had, especially in the contested domains of Argentina and in a domain claimed at least nominally by a Camarilla Prince. They were savvy enough to realize that they weren't dealing with a sniveling neophyte who would end up impaled on a spit during the Sword of Caine's next Fire Dance, however — they knew Hargau's background and the fact that a powerful rival faction in the Sabbat afforded him some degree of protection. Rather than take a chance at offending that unknown entity, they referred her to Néstor Lavagna, then a Bishop of Clan Lasombra, who maintained a civil discourse with the Prince of Mendoza.

The audience with the Bishop went as well as it could have. For her part, Lady Willoughby was mostly forthright. Bishop Lavagna plucked several illuminating

thoughts from Margaret's mind, as well, smoothing over the ripples in her memory afterward so that she wouldn't recall the inquiry — and he was intrigued by what Lady Willoughby's confessions suggested. The question was, how could he turn this best to his advantage? If the mystical knowledge she possessed was true, the Tzimisce rivals of Clan Lasombra in the Sabbat would cease to be a political threat to the Keepers' rightful dominance. But the weapon was a dangerous one, for without the Tzimisce, the Sabbat stood little chance of holding its already tenuous domains against the Camarilla, and without adequate soldiery, the Sword of Caine certainly could pose no threat to the hated Antediluvians. And Bishop Lavagna had to acknowledge the truth — that he was a remote Bishop in a contested territory who had little grasp of the global status of the Camarilla-Sabbat conflict. So he did what the Kindred do best. He traded his information for favor.

The Lasombra curry favor with one another like no other clan can, and Lady Willoughby soon found herself invited to the domain of São Paulo by none other than the Archbishop. The last anyone saw of her was under the protection of a cadre of Caine's Chosen in the spring of 1917, and there her trail vanishes from the consciousness of the Damned.

It would seem that Lady Willoughby's tale ends thus, with her becoming a captive of the Sword of Caine, likely in some wretched hell beneath the streets of Sampa, where she either lies staked or shackled to a scrivener's desk, scratching out possible permutations of the ritual Hargau thieved from under the collective noses of House Goratrix. That is not the case, however. Or, rather, it was, but it no longer is. The Tremere of the Sabbat did indeed have Lady Willoughby indentured and ensorcelled, bound to the subterranean library of the apostate Pontifex of Brazil. There she remained a prisoner, poring over not the ritual itself, but Hargau's journals, which held the secret of the ritual that could cripple the Tzimisce.

One night, the ritual binding Margaret into the *biblioteca* simply... lapsed. She felt the ward cease suddenly, like manacles falling from the wrists of a slave. That was over a decade ago. She still hasn't left the library — how can she? She's in an unknown city where she doesn't speak the language, in a domain claimed by an Archbishop she may or may not know anymore, who may or may not be among the Damned, and the arguable chattel of a clan that has vanished, which is a fact she doesn't possess. For all of her efforts to free herself from the yoke of Hargau, she's ended

up in an even worse situation, and lacks the temerity to make her own go of it again. Instead, she confines herself to the vast underground library of the absent Pontifex, feeding from a dwindling retinue of still-living servitors (shouldn't they all be dead by now?), wearing the immaculately kept remainder of a century-old wardrobe and guarding a secret she doesn't actually possess.

Little by little, though, Lady Willoughby has been mustering the boldness to test the confines of her prison. On the night of the new moon, he says, a Spanish-speaking Malkavian envoy of the Black Hand visits her to check on her ongoing progress with Hargau's journal. She doesn't trust him, and he knows she lies to him when she tells him that she's been diligent with the effort but that it hasn't yielded anything, and so the two play their own private Jyhad. This Black Hand contact does permit her contact with the outside world, though, and faithfully brings her handwritten letters to be posted, collecting what few responses she may receive. It's a strange code of honor this Freak of Caine's Chosen possesses, for he doesn't read her mail, believing that some night he'll find out whatever it is that keeps him coming back to Margaret's side.

So who exactly corresponds with Lady Margaret Willoughby? Valkar de la Rosa, a Spanish Tremere Embraced perhaps a decade before the Pontifex's ritual wavered. When Margaret's Black Hand attendant first visited her, she had sent a letter to Valkar's sire, but it ended up in the hands of the childe. From there, de la Rosa continued the communication out of a sense of duty, and has since learned what Lady Willoughby thinks she hides, as well as collecting an incomplete copy of the journals of Hargau, which Margaret encodes with her own cipher, trickling it to him one page at a time. Why did Lady Willoughby choose Valkar's sire with whom to initiate correspondence? And why does she continue it despite knowing that it's not her first choice of Kindred who returns her letters? Only she knows, but she plans to soon try again, hoping to reach a different Kindred whose last known whereabouts she hopes to discern from the arcane library beneath São Paulo. With little attention to how much time has passed, she'll probably reach another descendent of any named Kindred, or even a childe of a childe, assuming the receiving address still exists at all.

The disintegration of what remains of Margaret Willoughby's unlife isn't the worst of the situation, however. Hargau, in the hands of the Viboras de Dios, never made it to the Chulupi *macondo*. Whether his

ritual would or wouldn't have succeeded never became known, but whatever he buried there in the heights of the Andes did something to the village near where it lay buried. Tonight, none of the Chulupi survive as the mortals they once were. They have long since become the *desmodus*, the *nag looper*; what remains of the village itself is little more than a desiccated necropolis... and its dwellers are hungry.

Sire: Lady Lise Paulmann (deceased)

Clan: Tremere (possibly *antitribu*)

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Caregiver

Generation: 9th

Embrace: 1864

Apparent Age: Late 30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 4, Awareness 1, Empathy 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 3, Performance 1, Stealth 3

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation (research) 2, Medicine 1, Occult 1, Science (outdated eugenics theory) 2

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 2, Thaumaturgy (Path of Blood) 1

Thaumaturgical Rituals: Communicate with Kindred Sire, Deflection of Wooden Doom, Engaging the Vessel of Transference, Wake with Evening's Freshness

Backgrounds: Contacts 1, Herd 2, Retainers 2

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 2, Courage 2

Morality: Humanity 4

Willpower: 2

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 14/2

Image: Lady Willoughby has been denied the opportunity to assimilate into modern society. She exhibits the stasis of the undead in her clothing in particular, wearing full Victorian dress when she expects to feed or when she expects to entertain her Black Hand Malkavian rival and confidant. In fact, she has little choice, as the only clothes she has are those with which she was entombed in the *biblioteca*

of the Sabbat Pontifex. Her Embrace came in the cold of December, and she has a winter countenance that stands out significantly among the tropical complexions of the residents – and Kindred – of Brazil. Her hands are small and dainty, almost always sheathed in damask gloves, and she wears her long hair in a proper Marcel wave.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a tempest at sea, slow to rouse, but when the full weight of your wrath has arrived, it is terrible to behold, so long have you been shuttered away from any but simpering thralls and the fractured agent of some killer's cult. Woe to the Kindred, especially the rapacious Sabbat, who consider your reserve to be timidity or complacency. Confined to this dank and horrid den, you have become its lioness. Were you ever to escape, you would likely be overwhelmed by the immense changes wrought upon the world since your removal from it. Everything would seem familiar enough to unsettle your long-atrophied mind, but sinister enough in its difference to plunge you into fear-frenzy or worse.

Haven: The library of the lost apostate of São Paulo is a wonder, but an incomplete one, and Lady Willoughby's lack of practical skill with Thaumaturgy makes it a gilded prison. Or it would, if she had any ambition for blood magic. Instead, she haunts its vast shelves like a revenant, bound to it now by the twisted sense of safety she finds in its contemptible familiarity. She has a perfect memory of what books and scrolls reside where, but not their contents. Since the mortal servants who attend the library have slowly begun to die off, she maintains a shrine to their memory in a previously unused alcove of the vault, where she displays their severed heads and occasionally conducts one-sided conversations with them, remembered verbatim from the last time they spoke.

Derangement: With her contact limited and few substantial outlets for conversation, Lady Margaret Willoughby finds herself prone to vicious bouts of hysteria, and it is in these states that she removes the heads from her beloved? – no, that's not the word – mortal minions when they finally succumb to age and she grieves. In reality, Lady Willoughby obviously suffers some horrific aggravation of something akin to Stockholm syndrome. Under the combination of this, her hysterics, and the unending sameness of dwelling in a candlelit tomb of the written word, she is dangerous and unwholesome company.



MEIXIU

The Black Dragon Princess

The Kindred have long sought to better understand their “cousins” in the Far East, the so-called Cathayans. These inscrutable vampires pose both a threat and an obstacle to the Kindred, some of whom seek to gain a foothold in Asia while others aim to forestall any similar gains by the Cathayans in Western domains. To this end, the Camarilla in particular has sought to create diplomatic ties to its *kuei-jin* kin, most often by cautiously welcoming certain of the Eastern Kindred to their domains as emissaries of sorts, from whom they can glean information and possibly even cultivate influence in a meaningful way.

Much less frequently, a Western Kindred will actually travel to China, Japan, or another Cathayan domain to directly engage the local undead, either in some diplomatic capacity or for more personal reasons. Rare is the Kindred who remains in the East for any length of time, however. As vigilant as the Kindred are about outsiders, they are nothing as compared to the watchful Cathayans who are xenophobically protective of their own territories. Even Kindred who are welcomed as guests usually have a deadline by which time they must leave, so as not to “distract” the Eastern vampires. During their stay they often endure the close scrutiny of their hosts and they are strictly forbidden to engage in any behavior that might upset the intricate customs that govern *kuei-jin* society. This is especially the case with regards to creating ghouls among Asian mortals. However, nothing is so proscribed as the practice of Embracing one of the native kine. The stories that recount the punishments for such a crime are as gruesome as they are instructive. Consequently, few recognized Western Kindred have been sired in the domains of the Cathayans.

One of these rarities makes her haven in Washington, DC. What is most remarkable is that she is entirely unaware of the uniqueness of her Embrace. Since the night she was stolen from the ranks of the living, she

has been wholly convinced that she is unlike the other creatures of the night who prowl the nation’s capital in search of blood. For more than two decades, she has believed that she is one of the Cathayans, one of the Ten Thousand Immortals, and that it is her duty or karma to overthrow those Cathayans who have become possessed by the demons of Diyu, the Chinese Hell. She strives to become powerful enough both personally and through those she can command to topple the Communist Party of China (CPC), which she believes is a tool of these possessed immortals, and thereby unlock the gate of Heaven that will otherwise remain forever closed to her.

Meixiu was in her last year of study at the China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing in 1989. Her father was a mid-level salary man with an automotive manufacturer, a figure she admired even though he was rarely present, preferring to spend much of his time with a mistress and a bottle rather than at home with his sickly wife and bright child. Meixiu had an unremarkable childhood, though her academic achievements marked her as a girl who would likely have successful future. As she blossomed into womanhood, though, her parents felt that her newfound beauty was a gift that should not be wasted, and they sought to marry her to the nephew of her father’s boss. She refused the arrangement, furious that even her mother would allow her to be used in this way, and looked for a way to avoid this fate.

Chen Zhaoxing was a professor of Law at CUPL whom Meixiu had known from attending a few university seminars open to the public. She admired his charm even if she did not agree with his political views. Zhaoxing was a strong supporter of Hu Yaobang, the retired former Communist Party General Secretary famous for a lifetime of pro-reform policies that ultimately led to his removal and ill treatment by the regime. Ironically, it was her beauty that won her his

attention, which soon become full patronage. Zhaoxing, smitten by the girl, used his influence to have her admitted to the university. Given the poor economic climate and the lack of prospects for student graduates, her father allowed her the opportunity, sure that when she had finished her studies she would make an even more valuable bride.

She proved an adequate student, but her studies took a backseat to other, far more pressing matters. Meixiu became embroiled in the increasingly strident student movement that demanded an end to government cronyism and corruption and a solution to the stagnant economy, spurred on by her mentor and lover, Zhaoxing. She joined various student organizations, signed petitions, and carried a demonstration sign at a number of gatherings, caught up in the emotion of the times.

When Hu Yaobang died of a heart attack on April 15, 1989, Meixiu camped on the campus lawn with many thousands of other students eulogizing Hu and demanding that the CPC officially renounce its criticism of his political legacy. She marched with the crowd to Tiananmen Square alongside throngs from Peking University and Tsinghua University and helped lay the impromptu wreath two days later to commemorate Hu's contributions to reform and liberalization. After being pushed out of the plaza by police, Meixiu and thousands others marched back later that night and drafted a series of demands that required the government to publicly acknowledge the need for reform.

What began as a simple protest against the dishonoring of a much-loved liberal politician grew over the next seven weeks to become an international tragedy that forever changed a nation, with the tides of the revolutionary movement changing many times before it was finally snuffed out. The student gatherings announced boycotts and strikes and, enflamed by passion and a feeling that they might be ignored, erupted in open looting and mayhem. The government sought to open dialogue with the students, even if they had no intent to give in to the demands of the youth.

A notorious editorial in the April 26th edition of the Communist-controlled *People's Daily* newspaper that painted the students as traitors plotting the overthrow of the government pushed the chaos even further. More than 100,000 student protestors responded, joined by factory workers and others who saw them as true patriots, and together they marched through Beijing. Even when the government sought to appease

at least some of the protestors' demands, the situation grew worse. Hunger strikes were staged in Tiananmen Square with the aim of embarrassing the Communist Party leadership on the eve of an historic visit by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

On May 20th, the Chinese government declared martial law and in the first days of June, the military finally moved in with tanks and soldiers to forcibly clear Tiananmen Square of the tens of thousands of encamped protesters who had made it their home for more than a month. Even after the clearing, terrible violence emerged in the surrounding neighborhoods and thousands on both sides were killed or injured in the battle. When it was over, the world was aghast at the atrocities and responded with heavy condemnation and sanctions. The Communist leadership sought to downplay the events and to distance itself from the worst violence, but mostly they sought to silence or arrest anyone who might dare revive such protests.

For Meixiu, the seven weeks were personally even more transformative.

Some months prior to the Tiananmen Square Massacre, a Malkavian named Colin McAllister had arrived in Beijing from Hong Kong, where he had cultivated a network of influence for over a year as a representative of his sire's financial interests. In February, he had felt an overpowering urge to visit the Forbidden City in Beijing, convinced that there was something or someone there that he needed to find, though he was unsure of the purpose. Upon arriving, he was brought before a representative of the Imperial City's Cathayans and was formally welcomed, though he was assigned a chaperone for the duration of his stay. When the protests first broke out in April, Colin's escort restricted his movements so that Tiananmen Square and the universities were off-limits, ensuring that the Malkavian could not bear personal witness to what had the potential to become a cultural embarrassment.

But Colin's curiosity and assurance that he was supposed to be in the Forbidden City persuaded him to ignore the warnings and elude his chaperone's accompaniment. With violent protests a fortuitous distraction, he was able to slip into the imperial palace and find the thing he was meant to find: a relic of ancient bone carved with inscriptions that had an almost hypnotic power over the delighted Kindred. He absconded with the artifact and fled with the other looters into the night, avoiding capture from his desperate escort by hiding among the students. When he was struck by machine gun fire, the Beast erupted

and he lapsed into a frenzy of bloodlust and rage that didn't end until just before sunrise, when he found the crimson rage finally subsiding.

In his arms was the beautiful young Meixiu, injured by gunfire herself and easy prey for the rampaging Malkavian amid the nightmarish chaos along the blood-soaked Chang'an Avenue. As some semblance of control returned to him, Colin felt himself overcome by emotions of horror for what he had done, as well as fear of what would happen to him if the Cathayans found him. Without thinking further, he Embraced the girl in the ever-doomed hope of saving her, then he dragged her to safety inside the ruin of a destroyed shop while he found more secure refuge further from the scene of the crime.

Meixiu awakened to her new existence completely unaware of how it had happened. The only evidence she possessed that linked her to her sire was the artifact he had stolen from the Forbidden City, for he left it to her out of a sense of guilt that possessed him at the last moment before he left her. For more than a month she acclimated to – what was she? A predator? A parasite? – though it took every ounce of cunning, willpower, and spiritual effort to adapt. When finally captured by the Cathayans and dragged before the eldest, Cha'ang-

Li, Meixiu was first thoroughly questioned about her origins, and then subjected to a series of gruesome interrogations both physical and supernatural. As she was unable to reveal anything, she was proclaimed a by-blow of some *laowai* interloper and sentenced to destruction.

More for political reasons than out of any concern for the terrified Malkavian, that sentence was “mitigated by purchase” and she was delivered instead into the hands of Martino della Passaglia of Clan Giovanni. He was aware that she knew the location of an Oracle Bone, the artifact her sire left with her, and it was of great importance to the necromancer. Once under his protection, he had her retrieve it from its hiding place. No longer interested in her and unwilling to be held responsible for her, especially given the severe mood swings that plagued her and posed a regular threat to the stability of his domain, he sent her to America in 1993 to pay off a debt to Chas Voyager, a powerful Toreador in Washington, DC, with whom he maintained substantial financial dealings.

Chas was a member of the Primogen and one of the most influential Harpies in the domain of Washington, DC. He was ecstatic when he received his “gift” from della Passaglia, especially because he



could not determine Meixiu's true nature. What little the young creature knew of her own kind only made it harder to discern any truth, for she had filled many of the tremendous gaps in her Kindred origin with her own fanciful and rather egocentric explanations for her condition, something her Giovanni ward had not discouraged. Her answers to the many questions posed by the Kindred of the domain made her a favorite among the well-heeled Damned, even if she was viewed far more as a *divertissement* than a peer.

As it always does, Elysium's fascination with Meixiu waned, and just as quickly, so did the Toreador Primogen's. She was formally released and Prince Marcus Vitel even recognized her small domain near the George Washington University campus in the hope that one night he might find some use for her. Given the demographics of the city, he hoped it might even lead to some arrangement with an influential Cathayan diplomat.

Once released, Meixiu constructed a personal cosmology that explained her condition to her, based on the legend she had already patched together in her deranged mind. First and foremost, she was sure that she was not one of the Western Kindred, especially one of the ruinous Malkavians. No, she was a Cathayan, at least as she imagined them to be, and she was not just any Cathayan, either. She began to identify herself as Hēi Lóng Gōngzhǔ or the Black Dragon Princess, a title to which she aspired based on her fractured memories of Chinese legend. She believed it was her destiny to one day defeat the "Demon Princes," those Cathayans who currently ruled her homeland and were possessed by demons from the most foul realm of Diyu.

She understood her vampiric state, and that of all other Cathayans, to be a just suffering for failings of morality while alive. Only by repaying karma could she return to her original form, and to do this should would have to become a paragon of ascetic morality. However, her own salvation would have to wait until she first destroyed the Demon Princes, for only as one of the Ten Thousand Immortals would she have a chance at defeating such mighty enemies. And to do this she would first need to greatly increase her own power.

Meixiu's misdirected research had led her to conclude that the way she was going to do this was by obtaining the *Bái Zé Tu*, a legendary grimoire authored by none other than the god-like Yellow Emperor that contained the secrets of all 11,520 types of supernatural creatures.

With this tome in her hands she would know her foes' every strength and weakness, and with that wisdom would be unstoppable. Of course, she would first have to find this sacred scroll, but again she was sure that she had discovered the means to accomplish this task, too.

The Oracle Bone that her sire had left her and that had been confiscated by the Giovanni was not the only one of its kind, she learned. While very rare, a number of similar artifacts had been discovered by archaeologists over the years. Experts claim that the script on these desiccated bones and tortoise shells is the oldest record of the language spoken during the Shang Dynasty. Her studies had led her to the conviction that the location of the *Bái Zé Tu* was recorded on one or more of the Oracle Bones. Therefore, she turned her attentions to obtaining and deciphering as many of them as she could until she unlocked the hidden resting place of the eldritch *Bái Zé Tu*.

In a relatively short time, the Black Dragon Princess has gained a notable degree of influence in her adopted city, most of which she uses to directly aid her in acquiring more Oracle Bones and deciphering them. As might be expected, she first sought the support of the local Chinese community, primarily cajoling the aid of students and others who would believe her to be a peer. A number of the Tiananmen Square protesters managed to escape China in the aftermath of the uprising, and more than a handful found their way to the Washington, DC area, and to its universities. The GW campus boasted some of these and Meixiu queried them first to aid her quest. She also extended her influence beyond the student population and into the larger Chinese community, even into the diplomatic corps, using her attractive physicality as well as her supernatural gifts to convert Communists to her way of thinking.

Her greatest asset came from her involvement in the growing Falun Gong movement that had been founded by Li Hongzhi in Changchun in 1992. This physical, moral, and spiritual teaching has its roots in *qigong* and became popular in the mid-1990s, but has been increasingly viewed by the Chinese Communist Party as a threat to society and government. A harsh campaign to paint the Falun Gong as a heresy aimed at taking down the government paved the way for massive protests in 1999 that were nearly as impressive as those that had ended with the Tiananmen Square massacre. With Li Hongzhi in New York, the protests crushed, and many of those involved jailed or worse, the activist wing of the movement relocated outside China.

Meixiu helps the Falun Gong in Washington, DC by funneling resources to the movement's local organization, the Falun Dafa Association. A select group of members belong to the Tears of the Black Dragon, a ghoulish cult created by Meixiu whose fundamental purpose is to serve as her herd. Its members believe that she is indeed the Black Dragon Princess and, while not granted complete understanding of her nature or purposes, they have been conditioned with enough of her delusion to both motivate them and make them useful tools. Every day this group and the larger organization have their agents on the National Mall and in front of the White House handing out pamphlets and staging small rallies in the hope of ultimately winning American support for their cause, even while some among them seek more vessels to sate the unending hunger of the Black Dragon Princess.

Cha'ang-Li and his Blood Court paid no heed to the rumors of one of their kind in the United States capital at first. However, in the past decade they have learned more that has convinced them that some vampire in Washington, DC actively supports the Falun Gong and thus must be working against their broader interests. They have heard the name Hēi Lóng Gōngzhu and, while they can't definitively determine whether this is someone they should fear or not, they are worried. Their greatest fear is the influence this Black Dragon Princess might have over their minions in Washington and elsewhere in the West. To uncover the truth, they have sent mortal agents to infiltrate Washington's Chinese community in search of information about the mysterious vampire. The Blood Court has made a particular effort to investigate the Falun Gong and its various associated organizations, including the DC office of the movement's official western newspaper, the New York-based *The Epoch Times*. Very recently the Quincunx has sent its own kind to investigate, concerned that so far they have made no real progress, especially in an age when censorship has become more and more difficult.

Some of the Kindred of DC regard Meixiu with continued interest, though most, by and large, do not view her as a particular threat. While her status as a curiosity is long gone, she still commands a degree of admiration and respect due to her mysterious identity, especially among the domain's political outsiders. A few of the city's Kindred have attempted to call her out regarding her origins, with one remarkable performance by a trio of Malkavians a few years back quite literally naming her sire and the circumstances

of her Embrace, but the nature of the demonstration as well as the reputation of the participants achieved nothing more substantial than making the matter seem all the more incomprehensible.

Tonight, Meixiu appears in Elysium less frequently, in particular because she has become aware that there seem to be Cathayan forces moving against her and her interests. By taking her search for the Oracle Bones further and further beyond the traditional boundaries of the DC domain, she hopes that she can build real alliances with other domains' Kindred and thus call upon more allies to protect her from such threats should they become serious. However, her bipolar condition makes these inter-domain forays difficult and more than once they have actually hampered her goals, worrying Princes and Bishops of her stability and further suggesting to some that whatever she's actually up to might rouse the ire of some mysterious nemesis. Still, her personal network of contacts extends much further than her Kindred or Cathayan adversaries understand, including a Tremere nexus in New Orleans named Éléonore Labonte, whose expertise she enlists in matters of supernatural esoterica.

To her credit, Meixiu feels she is making real progress with the Oracle Bones. She keeps five of these artifacts in a special chamber in her DC haven and has another two within her sights. One currently occupies a public museum and another belongs to the private collection of a famed mortal plutocrat. Her attempts to translate the millennia-old engravings, however, have been less than triumphant. Three times she paid heavily for consultations with dubious "experts" whom she believed would uncover her prize based on her translator's best work, and four times she failed to locate the mythical *Bái Zé Tu*. These failures do not deter her, however. On the contrary, with each passing night Meixiu's delusions grow stronger and she is further empowered to follow her destiny as the Black Dragon Princess, scion of the Yellow Emperor.

Sire: Colin McAllister

Clan: Malkavian

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Enigma

Generation: 10th

Embrace: 1989

Apparent Age: Early 20s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Talents: Awareness 1, Intimidation 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 1, Stealth 3

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 1, Law 1, Occult 2, Politics 2, Expert Knowledge (Chinese Mythology) 4

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Dementation 4, Obfuscate 3

Necromantic Rituals: Insight, Knowing Stone. Meixiu has no formal knowledge of the Discipline of Necromancy, having gleaned what little she knows from furtive observation of her della Passaglia “patron.” Her difficulty for these rituals is always 10 and requires the expenditure of a Willpower point to have any chance of working. Still, *something* occasionally gives her necromantic feedback, despite her not understanding the principles of the Black Art....

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Domain 3, Fame 1, Herd 3, Resources 3, Retainers 1, Status 1

Derangements: Bipolar Disorder (Clan Weakness), Delusions

Virtues: Conscience 5, Self-Control 3, Courage 2

Morality: Humanity 6

Willpower: 5

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 13/1

Image: Meixiu appears as a pretty Chinese graduate student and typically dresses in a fashion that suits the assumption. She usually keeps her black hair in a long ponytail and wears glasses to give additional weight to her words. She is of medium height, but high heels and her commanding bearing give the impression that

she is taller than she is. When among the Kindred she often affects the distasteful stereotype of the mysterious Asian vampire, with long, patterned-silk garments and elaborately styled hair.

Roleplaying Hints: As the Black Dragon Princess, you uphold a special code of honor that values truth, justice, and strict morality above all else. At the same time, you will stop at almost nothing to obtain the things you need to fulfill your destiny. You play up your mysterious nature and undying youthful beauty to gain what influence you can, but you wield them as weapons whenever prudent. The Kindred are beneath you, but you will suffer them until the time is right for you to show your true nature to them and your true foes.

Haven: Meixiu’s haven is a four-story townhouse in the heart of Foggy Bottom, near the campus of the George Washington University. The interior is decorated like a small, private museum, with vases, artifacts, artwork, and furnishings throughout, some of which are replicas. The top floor is her private chamber and contains a walk-in closet that she has fortified so as to protect her most valuable possessions, including her Oracle Bones.

Influence: Meixiu has done quite well with her Falun Gong and student minions. She continues to make inroads with Chinese diplomats, too; usually via their offspring, who are eager to believe the tales of the Black Dragon Princess. Meixiu knows that her time in DC is probably limited, however, and she seeks to “beat the Kindred at their own game,” building a balance of prestation favors and extending promises she hasn’t yet decided if she’ll honor.



EDGARDO ROBBIA

“The Robber”

It all started with a Sicilian fisherman who decided he was sick of being Austrian.

Sicily had been ruled by various empires for hundreds of years. Prior to 1713, the Spanish Empire controlled it, but the Treaty of Utrecht ceded Sicily to the House of Savoy, and under Savoy rule, Edgardo Robbia was born, the older of two brothers. Edgardo's father was a fisherman, fiercely proud of his Sicilian heritage. In 1720, Edgardo had returned to the wharf with his father, helping him tie up their fishing boat, when a neighbor rushed to them the news: Sicily had been traded to Emperor Charles VI of the Austrian Dynasty. They were all now Austrian.

Edgardo's father was furious. He made snide comments about being a “true Sicilian” and charged higher prices to traders and merchants from Austria. When Edgardo was 14, his father finally snapped, striking an Austrian man who tried to pay him a few *tari* less than the agreed-upon price. The man fell and cracked his head on a nearby stone, dying instantly – and the terrified fisherman ran.

Edgardo never saw his father again. Now he had to provide for the family.

Over the years Edgardo grew more and more bitter. He frequently spat venom about his father being a coward and leaving his family to fend for themselves. He got into fights with anyone who held any kind of nationalist stance, each time unaware of the irony. His mother and younger brother suffered the sharp edge of his tongue and, increasingly, the back of his hand. They became afraid of Edgardo, all while he claimed to be protecting them.

Events took a turn for the worse in 1734, when Sicily was conquered again by Charles III of Spain. The Bourbon king rode to Naples to claim his prize, but Austrians trapped there still tried to fight his forces. Edgardo's brother had been fishing near the islands off the coast of Sicily when he noticed the Duke of

Montemar's forces approaching the island where he had tied his lines. He tried to get away, but the fishing boat was stuck where he had tethered it, and it was too valuable to simply leave behind. The Austrians stationed there engaged Montemar's forces, and Edgardo's brother was killed in the crossfire. Edgardo's mother became inconsolable, and took her own life a few days later, throwing herself from a cliff.

Edgardo had finally had enough. He spoke out against both Austria and Spain, demanding that Sicily be truly free from any foreign power. One night in 1736, he had been shouting in the local square after a long evening of drinking, cursing and slandering Charles III at the top of his lungs. A couple of men from the Bourbon army, tired of listening to the insults to their king, dragged him into a dark alley. One stood watch while the other drew his sword and held it to Edgardo's throat. Edgardo simply spat in his face, defiant in the face of his own murder.

The lookout screamed. Edgardo's assailant turned to see a well-dressed woman with chestnut hair standing over him. A scarf, unseasonably warm for the time of year, had slipped from her face, revealing a twisted jaw and jagged scars on the lower half of her face – and her fangs. Edgardo stared in awe as his attacker died, taken down by the inhuman speed and strength of the scarred woman. Their blood pooled at his feet as she offered her hand to help him up. “I am Katherine,” she said in a strange accent, “and I know what it is like to be powerless.” She gave him a chance to seize power and the time to make real change in the world, and he accepted. That night, Edgardo died.

Over the next few nights, the scarred woman taught Edgardo about vampires, Clan Brujah, and ancient Carthage. She had been watching Edgardo's passionate dismissals of conquering empires, even in the face of immediate prosperity, and it appealed to her inherent hatred of the nobility.

As she trained and educated Edgardo, however, she realized that what she thought was a political hatred of those in power was actually a deep-seated personal rage. She thought she saw a man who was wise, but in reality he was simply angry at himself and his father, and his Brujah blood didn't help. Over the years their relationship became more and more troubled, and by the start of the 19th century, she released him from her patronage and they went their separate ways.

For years Edgardo tried to stay out of politics, both mortal and Kindred. He saw where it all led, and he was just as sick of Ventrue pomposity as he was of mortal nobility, so he kept his head low and did odd jobs as a mercenary for mortals and Kindred alike. By the 1830s, however, he had started paying more and more attention to the "Young Italy" movement led by Giuseppe Mazzini. The group advocated for the liberation and unification of all of Italy. A flame that had guttered in his breast for nearly a century leapt back to life. He tried to convince himself that getting involved with the Young Italy movement was just an easy source of blood, a chance to build a herd of his own, but he found himself more and more enthralled with the promise of not being owned by an outside empire. For the first time in his existence, he could properly be Italian.

He acted as a quiet supporter of the movement, nudging things here and there. He heard about Giuseppe Garibaldi, who was banished from Italy for a failed attempt to overthrow the current government, and kept tabs of his activities in South America. Garibaldi wore the red shirt of the *gauchos* of South America, and his flair for the dramatic appealed to the Italian rebels, and to Edgardo. By 1848, rebellions had broken out all over Italy, and Garibaldi returned to his home to fight.

Edgardo, by now a veteran backer of anti-royalist rebellion, arranged to meet with Garibaldi. He told himself that he wanted to Embrace Garibaldi, to crush his idealism like his own had been crushed, to show the mortal leader that all of his struggle and ferocity would wither and die under the weight of empire. Instead, Edgardo found an honest, passionate man who firmly believed that socialism would help the wounded kingdoms of his home. He was not bitter and angry like Edgardo, but sincere and devoted. Edgardo realized that Garibaldi was the kind of man Katherine thought he had been, and he was ashamed. Instead of Embracing him, Edgardo donned a red shirt and fought alongside Garibaldi for years, taking up arms

under cover of night to help bring about the unity and independence of Italy.

Over the years, however, Garibaldi's socialist ideals evolved into fascist ones. He went so far as to declare himself dictator when he took Naples in 1860. Edgardo saw this change and lost his fervor. His initial instincts were right — all passionate ideals ultimately became enslaved by empires in one way or another. By the time Italy was finally unified, Edgardo didn't care anymore.

The Great War came, and Edgardo courted faction after faction, focusing on how he could profit from each ideology or battle. He refined his nationalist speeches, parroting their hollow words to convince each faction that he firmly believed they were right before draining them of money and supplies, then moving on. He sold experience, tactical knowledge, intelligence, arms — whatever rebels wanted. He became known as Robbia the Robber, a mysterious highwayman among the enlisted men fighting all over Europe.

After the war was over, Edgardo didn't want his business to end. He attached himself to some peacetime militant organizations and molded them into factions that he could bleed dry. Eventually, he returned to his native Italy and fell in with Mussolini's Fascist movement. By then, Mussolini was forming a militia arm, which he called the Voluntary Militia for National Security. Edgardo admired that they wore black shirts, encouraging the same kind of solidarity and showmanship that Garibaldi's red shirts did. The Blackshirts quickly became notorious, and the symbol of the shirts spread to other rebel groups in Britain and India. Edgardo was able to milk the organization for blood and money for years.

He spread his influence further, encouraging the Blueshirts of Ireland and the Brownshirts in Germany. None of the factions were aligned, or even entirely aware of each other, which suited Edgardo just fine as he latched on to each fascist or anarchist group and set them up with weapons and resources before beginning to leech from them. By the time World War II erupted, he was able to smoothly transition back to the wartime profiteering that worked so well for him.

After World War II, global culture didn't have much call for visible fascist groups anymore. He tried to retire, to take what he'd used his blood, sweat, and tears to steal and start building something of his own. As the years wound on, however, he found that he couldn't settle down.

Of late, underground terrorism seems to be the big new thing for war profiteering, but Edgardo finds he's

only interested in groups with revolutionary ideals. He became heavily involved with the Baader-Meinhof Group in the 1970s. Although he told himself that he was just making another profit, bleeding another group dry, he knew had been lying to himself. He doesn't need the money anymore, but there's a little voice in the back of his head or deep within his blood that keeps telling him that he should support just one more cause, poison just one more government. Through much of the late 20th century, he went from terrorist group to terrorist group in Europe, each one more radical than the last, though he always pursued nationalist causes instead of religious ones.

On September 11, 2001, it became very unprofitable to be known as someone who sells weapons to terrorists. Edgardo quickly divested himself of his assets, killed off a few key contacts, and broke his ties with Europe. He decided to move to New York, where he ended up meeting his sire again, now going by the name Katherine Wiese. She pointed out to Edgardo that the war between the Camarilla and the Sabbat was heating up, and tensions with the Anarchs were getting tense as well. It was time to pick a side, to choose a cause.

Edgardo carefully spoke with vampires in each sect, and in the independent clans. He found the Camarilla to be too much like the nobles he hated when he was a mortal. The Sabbat were too like the terrorist organizations he avoided; radical religion isn't good for business. The Anarchs were too weak for him, in that they weren't willing to make their cause militant enough, and many of their concessions looked an awful lot like the same kinds of imperial bullshit the Camarilla encouraged. Each group, though, pressured him into joining, into picking a side when Gehenna came or the war got huge.

Edgardo has decided to do what he does best: take what he can from all of them, and hope that he doesn't find himself once again drawn to one of their ideologies against his better judgment.

Sire: Katherine Wiese

Clan: Brujah

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Capitalist

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1736

Apparent Age: Early 20s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5 (Stand Back Up)

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge (Blending In) 4

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette (Militant Groups) 4, Firearms 4, Larceny 2, Melee 1, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 1, Computer 2, Finance (Laundering) 4, Law 2, Politics (Militant Groups) 4

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Celerity 3, Dominate 2, Potence 3, Presence 5

Backgrounds: Alternate Identity (Edwin Rodgers) 4, Contacts 5, Resources 4, Retainers (bodyguards) 2

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 2, Courage 4

Morality: Humanity 4

Willpower: 6

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 15/3

Image: Edgardo is a short, swarthy man. His fingers are slender but his knuckles are callused from fighting and his palms are scarred from countless hours holding and struggling with fishing poles. He has short, dark hair, cut in a simple style that allows him to comb or gel it into a variety of looks as needed. He speaks in heavily accented English, partially because he hasn't had much practice with English as he has had with the Romance languages, and partially because he has realized that playing the foreigner in the United States works to his advantage, even among Kindred. He works to keep his facial expressions blandly appealing, but his dark eyes often blaze with intensity.

When he's not actively infiltrating a group, he dresses in dark button-down shirts and slacks. He is careful to choose clothes that look tasteful but not elaborately expensive. He tries to cultivate a look of casual professionalism, something that looks good anywhere from an expensive hotel lobby to a raucous nightclub. His one weakness is boats: He will often splurge on the latest and more technologically advanced pleasure crafts he can afford, and uses any opportunity he can to show them off.

Once he's chosen a group to "support," however, he changes. He slowly changes his looks to match the ideals of the group with which he's aligned himself. He uses idioms and catchphrases that his targets identify with, and he consciously mirrors their body language. He carefully disagrees with just enough that he can be "convinced," but not so much that he's not worth trying to convert. A little application of Presence and Dominate usually helps complete his integration into

the group. He's still recognizably Edgardo, but his new comrades feel like he's a passionate believer in their cause.

Roleplaying Hints: Edgardo is a master at lying to himself. He has managed to convince himself over the centuries that he isn't like other Brujah. He views both the idealists and iconoclasts of his clan as gullible, all while involving himself in the latest nationalist cause.

Before infiltrating a group, he tries to present himself as calm and collected. His Brujah nature often gets the best of him, though, and he sometimes becomes irascible during tense discussions. He continually chides himself for his angry outbursts, not realizing completely that these passionate displays often encourage the kinds of people he's trying to infiltrate. Once he's involved, the self-deception goes the other way: He tells himself that he's pretending to be heavily invested in a cause, but the reason why he's so good about faking fanaticism is that a part of him isn't faking it. Dangerous militants are good at detecting infiltrators, and it's that small spark of sincerity that gets him by, more than all the carefully constructed lies and vampiric Disciplines.

As a result, Edgardo is a spontaneous manipulator who has convinced himself that he's actually a mastermind. When things go his way, he's able to look back and put together the pieces in his head to make it look like he planned it that way, when in reality he's often going on instinct and passion. This is all relative, however. What another elder like Edgardo would consider to be a plan put together on the fly could still involve months of planning and preparation from a neonate's perspective. That said, despite his age and savvy, Edgardo is still relatively new to the deep end of the Jihad.

Once in a while, when Edgardo is depressed, has had a bad turn, or just needs to get away for a while, he takes one of his boats out and goes night fishing. He hardly ever keeps his catches, but he finds the calm of the act soothing. If a prospective client or fellow Kindred ever gets on the subject of fishing, Edgardo becomes quite passionate on the topic, discussing the latest techniques and technological innovations of the sport at length.

Haven: Edgardo maintains his primary haven and business operations in New York. However, he has a few secondary havens in key North American cities, as he travels among them conducting business between various mortal and Kindred factions. He also has a few converted pleasure boats all around the United States that can act as emergency havens in a pinch. All of his havens are purchased and owned through his false identity, Edwin Rodgers.

Each of his havens is designed to be comfortable but not opulent. He doesn't make money just to spend it on his own vices (fishing notwithstanding). Instead, he invests in haven security: weapons, reinforced window shutters, fire suppression systems, and mortal bodyguards. As a man who regularly deals with fanatics, he understands how important it is to protect himself.

Influence: Edgardo's influence is difficult for many vampires to understand. From a Kindred perspective, Edgardo is a study in contrasts. He is too fast-paced to be an elder, too detached from politics to be an ancilla, and too contemplative to be a neonate. He hasn't chosen any sect to fully support, but he is actively involved in Kindred politics, unlike most Autarkis. And yet, he's more than just a simple mercenary or arms dealer. He is keenly aware of the modern mortal political landscape, but he is stuck in a nationalist mindset while the world evolves into a global one. He claims to be above causes, but knows the latest updates on the Occupy Wall Street movement, for example. Edgardo, quite simply, doesn't easily fit into many Kindred's cultural categories.

Despite his relative lack of impact in the Jihad, Edgardo is not an *unknown* Kindred. He has done business with a number of other the Damned in Europe, and some of the Kindred he works with now in North America are other European expatriates who have made the jump to the New World. However, he hasn't used his sire as a political connection. He's kept his relationship with Katherine quiet, and for the moment it appears she's willing to do the same. The relationship between the two is cool at best, and all that many outsiders can discern is that they are two Brujah elders who occasionally have common interests.



DASTUR ANOSH

The Seraph Dying and Reborn

The origin of the martyred Dastur Anosh is a subject of interest to the fanatics of the Sabbat's Black Hand. His contribution was archetypal within the Hand: the Cainite so important to the assassin cult that when he suffered the Final Death the order felt it necessary to encode his duties into the identity of the Hand as the title of Seraph. Sabbat historians solemnly note that the Black Hand appoints four Cainites to the Seraph's title, a recognition of Anosh's importance.

Life and Embrace

The Black Hand's apocrypha claims Anosh was born in ancient Persia, of humble origins. He only ever spoke to his followers of his time in the company of the Golden One, the wise man clad in white that history would later know as Zarathustra. Some modern Sabbat historians doubt the veracity of this tale, but most of the Black Hand accept it as practically an article of faith in their cultic history.

While there, Anosh was one among many of the magi who gathered around the Golden One. Although he was not so learned as some of the astrologers and magicians there, he was born with visions. The noble and learned magi paid little heed to his strange dreams, but a scribe and scholar who frequented their gatherings showed interest, asking the young man about his visions and what he thought they meant.

The two struck up an abiding friendship. Every dream the young man had, the older scribe recorded, and they often passed the hours of the night discussing their meanings. When Anosh spoke of seeing a strange stone that wept blood, and the sounds of a woman sobbing on the desert winds of the night, the scribe grew very interested. He diligently recorded all of the young seer's recollections of the stone. Again and again the young man dreamt of the weeping stone, each time with greater and greater clarity and recollection.

Eventually, at the scholar's urging, the two departed the company of Zarathustra's faithful. At first, Anosh assumed they were simply wandering, but an off-hand remark of the scholar's brought understanding: They sought the stone. Afraid but excited, he searched with the scribe for more than a year. The closer they came to finding it, the more intense his dreams became. They traveled during the night, sleeping during the day according to the needs of the scholar, which Anosh did not understand, though he did not comment on them in any way.

Finally, the pilgrims found the stone, in a strange, desolate valley with iron-reddened sands that looked like a field of blood under the wan desert moon. The stone itself was tall, lushly curved, and planted deep in the earth. The coppery smell of blood wafted from it on the wind and the scholar trembled as they neared it. A thin trickle of liquid coursed slowly down the stone's surface, its path over the centuries having worn a rivulet in the basalt.

The scholar licked the stone, tasting of the blood before Anosh knew what he was doing. When the scholar turned to regard him once more, his face was bestial, all fangs and rage and grief. The Cainite scholar fell on him in frenzy, and killed the young seer. As dawn neared, however, he raised the young man in the Embrace and brought him across the threshold into damnation.

Flight from Alamut

They fled, then, bound for the secret citadel of Alamut, his sire's home. In that journey, Anosh found that his dreams had left him. Instead, the scholar woke from his daily slumber shrieking of his terrifying dreams. The two agreed that somehow he'd drunk the boy's visions along with his blood; his sire insisted that the "blood of Zillah" had something to do with it. He would answer no further questions, however, until they arrived.

At the citadel of the Eagle's Nest, Anosh found a cold welcome. Sequestered in a black cell deep within the fortress, Anosh lost all track of time. Those who brought him his draughts of blood intimated that his master sinned in Embracing him, and that he must answer for those sins.

Finally, they called for Anosh, and he came to them. He answered their questions truthfully, fearful for his existence. In the end, they granted him their leave to exist, but made it very clear that it was by his sire's virtue, not his own. He and his master left quickly.

As they traveled, Anosh's sire wept his own tears of blood, and often woke from his daily slumber with screams. Eventually, Anosh discovered that his master was dreaming, experiencing visions of the destruction of Enoch, Irad, and Zillah. As they traveled at night, his master spoke with hatred of the Third Generation and their terrible sins.

When Dastur asked why they did not travel directly to the Stone, his master smiled and replied that it was because they were being followed. The Kindred of Alamut desired the knowledge of where the Stone might lie, and he refused to tell them. In the hours before they returned to slumber, and in the hours after they woke at night, Anosh's sire trained him in the arts of battle, the use of his Blood and the legacy not only of the progeny of Haqim, but of Khayyin and the Second Generation.

They traveled away from the lands controlled by Alamut, until the night when the three dark-skinned Kindred appeared at the edge of their encampment as the sun set in the west. These three emissaries of Alamut ordered them to return to the Eagle's Nest, but Anosh's master refused. The only reply the emissaries gave were drawn blades, and Anosh hid. The battle was hideous, the kind of carnage that only Kindred of many years can unleash, but in the end only Anosh's master stood.

Anosh and his sire traveled into Africa where they met many strange Kindred. There Anosh's master was called the Weeping Master for his oft-bloodied eyes and his terrible power. The African Kindred soon learned to leave the ebon-skinned scholar and his apprentice in peace as they traveled.

As time passed, however, Anosh couldn't help but notice his master's degeneration. He often spent entire evenings in thrall to his visions, weeping uncontrollably. The Weeping Master forgot his name entirely, and nearly slew his child when Anosh called him by it.

He was falling into his visions and finding it harder and harder to find a way back out. More than once, he emerged from his trances in a frenzy, and Embraced no few of his victims afterward, forcing Anosh to take his new siblings under his wing.

The Lost Tribe

Although he considered it, Anosh knew better than to risk a trip to Alamut again to introduce them to the rest of the clan. In one of his rare moments of lucidity, the Weeping Master sorrowfully referred to himself and his childer as the "Lost Tribe of Alamut," never daring to risk returning to that vaunted citadel.

In time, the small company returned to the site of the Weeping Stone. Anosh was the last of the Master's childer to taste the blood of the Stone. The others tasted the strangeness in the bloody trickle and experienced odd dreams, but Anosh fell into his own blood-dream trance, wracked by visions for the first time since being mortal, dreaming the horror and bitterness and grief of Zillah's psychodrama.

He emerged from these visions a changed man. Where his Master's gibbering and glossolalia once only terrified him, he understood more of what he said. He saw his Master's burden not as madness, but a gift from the First. He took to recording the ravings of the Weeping Master and organizing them into something of a cogent whole.

Over the next few centuries, the Lost Tribe grew and attracted a small handful of others. As time passed, the Tribe assumed a cultic reverence, with the Weeping Master as their prophet and Anosh as his high priest and interpreter. They built a haven near the Weeping Stone, and members of the Lost Tribe guarded the site from others.

The years turned him introspective, and Anosh found himself sympathetic to a body of principles similar to the Path of Blood that his master tried unsuccessfully to teach him. Taking the canon of that Path and combining it with the tenets of the beliefs they were developing, Anosh developed one of the first portions of what would later come to be known in the Sabbat as the Path of Caine. Even tonight, Noddists the world over hold Anosh to be one of the founders of that Path.

All such things come to an end, however, and in time the Lost Tribe discovered that the agents of Alamut sought them once more. They fled the site of the Weeping Stone, hoping to protect its location through obscurity and diversion.



The Lost Tribe established a hold in the bustling young metropolis of Alexandria. The resources of the city proved useful in the development of the Tribe's strange philosophy. They sought evidence of the Third Generation, first as proof of their existence, and then with a fanatic's zeal and desire to destroy them. Anosh counseled slow progress in such things – the sheer power of the Antediluvians was inspiration toward diligent planning and study.

It was here that the Lost Tribe found fragments of the *Book of Nod*. Its words further galvanized their philosophy and spurred their research. But even before they were able to formulate any plans for discovering and destroying any of the Antediluvians, the hawks of Alamut found them and attacked their hold. Vicious fighting brought about the Final Death of many of the Lost Tribe. Anosh managed to smuggle a number of his brethren to safety, but Alamut's agents captured the Weeping Master, spiriting him back to Alamut.

Anosh believed that the Followers of Set in Alexandria sold them out, and maintained a foul regard of Setites from that night on, so much so that his dislike became partially encoded in the Black Hand's operations, making it very difficult for Serpents of the Light –

“still too close to the dead god's breast” – to become members.

In his grief, Anosh scattered his followers to the winds, sending them far away for their own safety. He would call upon them in the future, he assured them. In the meantime, they should keep secret their goals and spend their efforts to gather more information on their great enemies, the Third Generation.

Then, in the year 139 BCE, Anosh returned to the site of the Weeping Stone, fortifying himself on a taste of its bloody rivulets, and returned to the bosom of the earth, surrendering to grief and torpor.

The Return of Anosh

Several centuries passed before Anosh made his presence known again, in a spectacular fashion. Footnotes in the annals of Alamut's history record the troubled times when the clan rooted out the assimilation of Islam among its childer. They note that the renegade Dastur Anosh, childe of the Weeping Heretic, was caught in the citadel's archives.

Disguised as a recently-embraced neonate, he claimed to be seeking his sire, managing to escape before his captors took him before the masters of Alamut. His

powers of deceit and command were impressive; it was later discovered that he'd been in their midst for almost a full year before anyone discovered him.

Shortly thereafter, he appeared to all of his old followers, scattered across Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and North Africa, placing in their minds the desire to journey to undertake a pilgrimage. Following inexpressible subconscious directions, these Cainites made their way slowly to the site of the Weeping Stone.

There, they found a much-changed Dastur Anosh.

Where once he was a quiet, scholarly man, driven by his devotion to his master and teacher, they found a firebrand apocryphist. It was clear had emerged from torpor for many years at that time, and he'd spent his time searching for the Weeping Master and seeking fragments of Cainite history. He roused his followers to a religious frenzy, drinking from the Weeping Stone to Dionysian excess, falling into states of spiritual rapture and drunken trance, relating their visions to one another.

Then, at the end of ten nights of this, when the moon was but a sliver in the sky, he slaughtered a third of them as they lay in near torpid blood-glut. When the others regained their senses sufficiently, he called on them as the faithful, calling them his Lost Tribe.

Those who met the Final Death were traitors, he said, who did not keep his commandments to be silent. They failed to seek the knowledge of the Third Generation in his absence, or had doused their hatred of Zillah's killers in their blackened hearts. They had given up their knowledge of Dastur Anosh to petty Princes and to the agents of Alamut in exchange for wealth or favor.

To acknowledge themselves as the worthy survivors of Anosh's killing floor, the survivors took the blood of the Weeping Stone and mixed it with clays, tattooing themselves with the blackened crescent moon of that night sky, the sign that eventually came to denote membership in the Black Hand of the Sword of Caine.

His apostles were no more than a dozen or so Cainites, and they went their separate ways once more, after copying down one another's gathered lore. For hundreds of years, they met on the anniversary of the Cleansing of the Tribe, as it came to be known. Some years, one of the apostles did not return. In other years, one or two brought childer or acolytes who were true believers, to be inducted into the Tribe.

The Lost Tribe continued in this way for generations, until the assault upon the Lasombra Antediluvian. Word quickly reached the Lost Tribe from its agents

in Malta. Some of them counseled caution, suggesting watching these angry childer from the shadows, aiding them where they might. Others suggested that they subvert this movement and use it as their own weapon.

But Anosh chose the middle path: The Lost Tribe retained its secrecy, but joined with this vestigial Sabbat movement. The vampires of the Blackened Crescent infiltrated these movements, feigning ignorance of one another. Members of the Lost Tribe participated in the attack on Lasombra, and again later aided the Amaranth of the Tzimisce Antediluvian.

The Black Hand

As the Sabbat established its identity through sheerest chaos, overthrow of the vampiric social order and consuming the heart's blood of members of the Thirteen, the Lost Tribe likewise set its own plans into motion. They christened this shadow faction the Black Hand, claiming to have found kinship with one another in the Sabbat's holy crusade, and dedicating themselves to acting as the foremost weapon of the Sabbat. Their insular activity and crescent marks gained them quick notoriety within the young sect, and soon brought recruits to their doors.

Although Anosh maintained a position of leadership in the Black Hand, it soon became clear he was not the only force within its membership. Powerful Sabbat Cainites – many well known for their martial prowess and thirst for violence – were inducted into its membership, and their charisma soon stole some of the influence and control of the assassins' cult away from Anosh.

By the time the colonization of the New World had begun, Anosh realized that the Lost Tribe was no more. What had been conceived as a disguise for the Tribe had supplanted it. No more were Cainites swearing to uphold the rigors of the Lost Tribe. In fact, those who had even known of its existence made up a smaller and smaller portion of the Black Hand's population.

With this in mind, Anosh did what was unthinkable to his brethren of the Lost Tribe. He revealed their existence. In a gathering of the leadership of the Black Hand – including those who would one night be called its Seraphs – Anosh revealed the origins of the black crescent, his contributions to the Path of Caine, his personal history and even the location of the Weeping Stone, all in his notably passionate style of address.

Once again his fiery rhetoric served him and his brood well, and the Black Hand rejoiced at its ancient lineage, older even than the Sabbat. Its gathered elders

begged to be taken to the Weeping Stone, to taste the coppery tears of nighted Zillah, and to be given the chance to know she whom they would avenge in the coming nights. A pilgrimage to the Weeping Stone became part of the Black Hand's rites, and the history of the Lost Tribe became a part of the Black Hand's identity.

The elders of the Sabbat, however, discovered these pieces of information for themselves as it slowly trickled out of the Black Hand's membership and came to the awareness of the sect as a whole. Appalled to learn of such a full infiltration, they resented being made fools of, though Anosh made earnest attempts to soothe pride frayed at the discovery.

Nonetheless, he found his loyalty questioned ever more frequently, with Priest after Bishop after Priscus citing his great betrayal when his actions crossed their ambitions. A creature of patience and aplomb, even Anosh's tolerance for these importunities had its limits. One particularly onerous Bishop, the Tzimisce called Altzay, cast aspersions on Anosh's motives and zeal before the leadership of the sect as a whole, and he answered the accusations calmly, the whole night through.

Then, at the end of the night, he challenged Altzay to the Rite of Monomacy and ripped the much-larger Cainite apart.

Anosh's demeanor had always been one of such unwavering composure that it was easy to forget what a devastating purveyor of violence he could be. In fact, few among the Sabbat had ever seen him truly fight. To their horror, as it turned out, few of the assembled Brothers and Sisters were aware of just how old he was.

Anosh, of course, was aware of all of these factors, and chose to use the sudden eruption of ultra-violence to make his point, calmly announcing that anyone else who challenged his loyalty would be met reasonably, and he would submit himself to questioning. But anyone who proved to be incapable of proving his perfidy would find themselves met with a similar challenge. Then he left the gathering, and never returned to another.

Other Hands at Work

From that time forward, Anosh was no less resented, but other Sabbat became much more circumspect with their accusations. For their part, individual members of the Black Hand were often fiercely loyal to their high priest, particularly younger members who admired to his devotion, iconoclasm, and fiery words, so full of passionate hope and hatred for the Antediluvians.

For many years, he retreated to the site of the Weeping Stone, entering a period of seclusion, seen only by those Black Hand elders with the authority to visit the site. The once-a-year initiation of new Black Hand members continued, in which they received their taste of Zillah's vitae and their black crescent tattoos.

From his perspective, however, Anosh watched strange traditions take root in the Black Hand. An old hand at infiltration, he was canny enough to recognize the signs, though he'd been far too close to see it. Young members showed up at the Weeping Stone, bragging of the *ritae* they'd mastered and the patrons they'd won, and Anosh saw other influences where his own had once held sway.

He turned the pastoral duties of care for the Weeping Stone to one of his childer and disappeared. In time, word trickled back through the Black Hand that Anosh had revealed himself among the Sabbat who'd traveled to the New World. It was clear that he was not eager to lay claim to the new lands on behalf of the Sword of Caine, as so many of them were, however. He simply showed up in newly claimed Sabbat diocese occasionally, frequently in need of safe harbor from Lupines he'd run afoul of in his wanderings.

No one really is sure what it is he sought during those times, or why his obsession with finding his old master would bring him to the New World. An old journal written by a Lasombra neonate – noteworthy for being one of the first *mestizos* to be given the blood of the Clan of Shadows – notes a long conversation its author had with the wandering Anosh in which he claimed that he had again experienced visions.

After a decade away, Anosh returned to the Old World and spoke with admiration of some of the warrior cultures of the native peoples of the Americas, who had introduced some of their ways into the Black Hand's ever-evolving culture. While the Hand was distracted with the new customs he'd introduced, he swore in three *kamuts* led by those who'd once been members of the Lost Tribe themselves, and took them to a new sanctuary on the upper reaches of Mt. Washington, in New England.

From here, he watched carefully. He took command of the Black Hand in the New World himself, carefully watching its members and drawing more from those Cainites newly Embraced from among the natives and settlers of the young domain over those with ties to Europe. Years passed in this way, and the Black Hand came to speak of his increasing eccentricity, wondering

if madness was far behind for the high priest of the Black Hand.

After making his presence so visible in the New World, Anosh returned to his old habits. He claimed to be entering torpor in a hidden location in the countryside around Mt. Washington and promptly disappeared. He reappeared in Mexico City, disguised as a neonate among a recent mass Embrace. There, he attracted the attention of the Black Hand, and was inducted into their ranks, which granted him a fascinating perspective.

The rites that he'd established for his followers were being subverted, subtly altered at the lowest level of interaction: pack priests and individual agents. He slowly traced these lines of influence, following them back to a source. Then, one evening while this mid-level agent and instructor within the Hand trained him, Anosh sprung his trap. Despite the power of the Nosferatu *antitribu*, Anosh overwhelmed her easily.

For the next week, he kept the staked vampire available to answer questions, compelled by both commands and the occult thought-reading Anosh had mastered centuries before his prisoner had been Embraced. The answers he found in the vampire's mind and records were unsettling: A death cult of some kind, tied to ancient stories of the city of Enoch, pulled her strings.

Finally, he gained a name: the Tal'Mahe'Ra. The very next night, an unholy host of ghosts and shrouded Cainites attacked the Nosferatu's haven, destroying her and attempting to lay waste to Anosh at the same time. They had underestimated his power, however, and he nearly destroyed them.

Anosh disappeared once more, fleeing into the isolation of the deserts of Mexico, a territory now familiar to him. There he wandered and thought. After a many months of this, he reappeared in the Black Hand citadel in the mountains of New Hampshire. Already, the rumblings of conflict among branches of the Sabbat had begun.

In 1766, Dastur Anosh died. His death came as a shock both to the sect and his followers in the Black Hand. His rivals in the Sabbat were quick to accuse one another, or to lay the blame at theoretical enemies of the Lost Tribe. Shortly thereafter, the first Sabbat Civil War broke out, pitting the Sword of Caine against itself.

The Seraph Dying and Reborn

Anosh, of course, did not die. The attack on him was real enough, however, arranged by agents of the

so-called "True" Black Hand seeking to terminate his influence. He destroyed their agents and rid the area of all evidence, save for one set of ashes, into which he dropped some of his own regalia, first scourging the remains of their true identity so that the able death-sorcerers of the Tal'Mahe'Ra might have no incontrovertible proof one way or the other.

Anosh gave up his original identity and the leadership of the Black Hand – two things that weighed him down with responsibility and limited his ability to search effectively for the answers he demanded from the world. He grew concerned that the would-be leaders of the Black Hand would break out into open warfare with one another, so soon after the end of the Sabbat Civil War. Fortunately, they settled on the idea of four Seraphs, leaders in his image.

In the time since, he has taken on the mantle of multiple Sabbat neonates, often showing up as recent Embraces from various crusades, or claiming a recently destroyed Sabbat vampire as a sire. About half the time, he arranges to find a place in the Black Hand, going through the induction rites thereof and drinking once more from the Weeping Stone. He even occasionally implants in younger Sabbat a memory of having recently Embraced him, giving him an easy introduction into the sect when he wishes it. He does what he is there to do, and then stages his own death once more.

The time in solitude has not been without its effects on him. Sometimes, he forgets what he's looking for – the Antediluvians. His sire. The Tal'Mahe'Ra. Sometimes, he conflates them, sure that the False Hand is in service to the Antediluvians, or that his sire was consumed by an Antediluvian he seeks vengeance against that progenitor. Perhaps the Weeping Master was taken by the Tal'Mahe'Ra?

Over the years, the Seraphs have collated information about the appearance of strange Cainites in the midst of the Black Hand. Jalan-Aajav acquired sufficient information to deduce that the ancient Anosh – the original Seraph of the Black Hand, the high priest of the Lost Tribe – endures.

Jalan-Aajav and the others have heard of what amounts to a shadow war between this figure and seemingly disparate factions and individuals within the Black Hand, which flares up occasionally, as swift as a sudden desert sand storm, and is gone as quickly.

Sire: The Weeping Master

Clan: Assamite *antitribu*

Caste: Vizier

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Enigma

Generation: 5th

Embrace: Unknown; sect apocrypha indicates he was Embraced around the time of Zoroaster

Apparent Age: early 30s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 6, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 6, Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Brawl 3, Empathy 3, Expression 7, Intimidation 3, Leadership 5, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Etiquette 3, Larceny 2, Melee 6, Stealth 6, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 4, Investigation 5, Law 2, Medicine 2, Occult 6, Politics 3

Disciplines: Auspex 7, Celerity 5, Dominate 6, Fortitude 4, Obfuscate 7, Potence 3, Presence 5, Protean 3, Quietus 6

Backgrounds: Alternate Identity 3, Black Hand Membership 2 (5*), Contacts 8, Resources 4, Rituals 5, Status (Sabbat) 4* (Anosh has access to the Backgrounds marked with an asterisk if he reveals his true identity.)

Virtues: Conviction 5, Instinct 3, Courage 3

Morality: Path of Caine 9

Willpower: 8

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 40/8

Image: Anosh is a small man, standing just over five and one-half feet. He dresses in clothing appropriate to his current façade, or goes unseen most of the time. His eyes are deep-set, and his flesh has become the deep, almost-reflective obsidian of truly ancient Assamites. He usually hides his identity through a combination of cosmetics and potent Obfuscate, avoiding the presence of elder Cainites of the sect unless holding them accountable for some transgression.

Roleplaying Hints: Anosh is quietly intense, with a veneer of unsettling calm. He chooses his words carefully for maximum effect, except when he's speaking on some subject he is passionate about. Then his words are a torrent of pathos, sweeping up those around him in their spell even without the use of Disciplines. Most troubling of all, and truly part of the horror and danger he represents, is his dwindling ability to recall certain specifics of his solitary crusade. Even when he becomes confused as to the end he desires, his passion for it never ceases. In his most lucid moments, he suspects that he is becoming something other than the consciousness he once held in iron thrall to his cause. Despite the bulwark of the Path of Caine, Anosh is terrified that the Beast owns him more than the Man, and his long unlife has a fearsome number of lacunae in its history.

Contacts: Anosh has carefully cultivated a variety of contacts worldwide who aid him in his various searches and travels. Each knows him as someone different.



LAURETTE MOREL

The Coquette of Cannes

The French Riviera, or more properly, the Côte d'Azur, is more fantasy than reality for most. It is a stretch of stunningly pristine coastline where the ultrarich and famous truly live life to the fullest. They dine on thousand-dollar meals, shop for ten-thousand-dollar outfits, place hundred-thousand-dollar bets, party on million-dollar yachts, and when the day is done they retire to their ten-million-dollar seaside villas where they dream of tomorrow's next hundred-million-dollar deal. The people here pretend this is all normal, that money is not important and that celebrity is just a silly notion that means nothing to them. From the casinos of Monte Carlo to the art galleries of Saint-Tropez, this playground for the rich and beautiful is a place of brilliant sunshine that made the suntan fashionable, courtesy of Coco Chanel. Its nights may be splendid, but it is the perfect combination of Mediterranean climate and dazzling sunlight that infuses its postcard-perfect public image and makes the French Riviera what it is.

Strange wonder, then, that one of its most powerful, albeit uncelebrated, residents shrinks from the light even as she has relied upon it to promote the region and her many interests in it since long before its sleepy fishing villages became enclaves for billionaires, movie stars, princes, and presidents. It is not humility that keeps her name from the lips of those who gambol in the streets, shops, restaurants, marinas, racetracks, casinos and, of course, on the beaches, however. Rather, it is the fact that she is a creature of darkness, one of the Damned, and that despite its sun-splashed reputation, there really are things in the Côte d'Azur that are more important than fame and wealth – things that reek of chaos and violence and death, things that cannot be dispelled by the light of another day in paradise.

Laurette Morel was just a slip of a girl when her father put aside his fishing nets and joined the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Through a combination of charisma and luck, he established a successful shipping business in

nearby Nice, though he maintained his small home in Beaulieu-sur-Mer for the sake of his wife, whose dusky beauty was attributed to Moorish ancestry. Young Laurette, who inherited her mother's striking looks, spent her youth playing on the beach and listening to the stories of the fishermen and the sailors who had seen wonders unlike any she had experienced. She was a dreamer and, spellbound by the natural beauty of her home, her imagination was filled with an endless tableau of magical characters and places.

As Laurette matured and her girlish prettiness transformed into the features and curves of womanhood, she increasingly found joy in music, dance, and especially art. Her heart was ensnared by a young painter and poet named Charles Belrose. The pair imagined worlds far removed from the reality of the one they knew, sublime realms where Beauty was queen and Truth and Love her lieutenants. They were happy and wanted nothing more from life than each other and their dreams. On account of her father's clear dislike for Charles, when Laurette was seventeen, she and her lover fled the coast for Paris, where they were sure their dreams would be made real.

The bright flame of love and hope that had fueled their flight did not prove to be as lasting as they had imagined. Things were particularly difficult in 1787 for the Third Estate, those French *citoyens* who did not belong to the clergy or nobility. This was especially true for those on the lowest rung of the common class; with no real money, connections, or practical skills, this is where Laurette and Charles found themselves.

Married almost as soon as they arrived in the city, Charles struggled to make money as a portraitist and a scrivener, but begging and theft truly kept the roof over their heads. Laurette earned some coin as an artist's model, but mostly did menial work in exchange for food and other necessities. It was not even a year before the wondrous dreams they shared were crushed

by the harsh reality of life in Paris. Romance bled away, painfully, and the two all but surrendered to the misery of their station.

Largely oblivious to the crass realities of politics around her, Laurette could no longer afford to bury her head in the sand. France's economy was a shambles, and making ends meet had become agonizingly difficult. Prices soared as food and other necessities grew scarce. King Louis XVI, seen by the common people as too far removed from their plight and drudgery, desperately sought ways to appease the growing chorus of opposition that demanded solutions. The obscene debt accumulated by the French as a result of many long years of war along with the heavy burden of that debt being placed unfairly upon the Third Estate had brought France to a breaking point.

In May of 1789, the King convened the first Estates-General since 1614, a conclave of representatives from each of the three Estates that was tasked with finding a solution to the nation's financial problems. However, the more the Third Estate pushed for meaningful reform, the more their clerical and noble counterparts moved to quell any real change. Laurette, like most of her contemporaries, became caught up in the fervor, at first for practical reasons, but soon because it struck a chord within her. The idea of real revolutionary change, the idea that the hopes of ordinary people might trump the traditional powers of the *Ancien Régime* that had simply been "how it was" for so, so long, was fantastical – enough that she found herself possessed of a new lust for life. The dreamer reawakened and the romantic hope and aspirations that had been so much a part of her returned with a strength that surprised, yet delighted her.

Charles cautioned her, even as he supported the same cause, but as she did in all regards now, Laurette paid him no heed. When the National Assembly was announced that summer, she felt herself swell with pride. She engaged in passionate marketplace discussion of the proposed new constitution and she even attended meetings organized in her *arrondissement*, where she found camaraderie with others who shared her hope for a better tomorrow. Her natural charms made it easy to gain attentive listeners and she found her vivid imagination enabled her to communicate her vision of the future.

Laurette celebrated the infamous storming of the Bastille in July and the subsequent Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, events which signaled the end of feudalism and the much-detested

Ancien Régime. The king was severely handicapped in his power by the National Constituent Assembly that now effectively wielded the bulk of French political clout and he retreated to Versailles and the protective insularity of his court. This did not satisfy everyone, however. Instigators seized on and publicized any rumor they could to keep the pot boiling, especially those that showed the king and his much-hated foreign wife Marie Antoinette as uncaring and even treasonous rulers.

Laurette was always more ready to believe the story that best fit her worldview, however fanciful, than the more honest yet uninteresting one. She believed the worst of the gossip spreading through the marketplace and, on October 5, when the now-commonplace complaints about the scarcity and price of bread and other foods spontaneously erupted into an angry mob denouncing the king, she joined their ranks without a second thought. Before long, a full-fledged riot erupted and rapidly spread to similar markets across the city, until the heart of Paris was surging with angry citizens. The throng was so enflamed by the need to do something – anything – that they undertook a march from Paris to Versailles to present their grievances to the king directly, led by one of the rising heroes of the nascent revolution, Stanislaus Maillard.

The mob camped at the palace and demanded an audience, but for a time they were refused. Seeking to remove the threat at his gate as quickly as possible, Louis XVI entertained a small delegation to discuss the concerns of the Parisian citizens. Laurette, hand-picked by the crowd on account of both her beauty and her ability to capture people's emotions, was one of six women who met with the king and presented him with the demands of the Third Estate.

Fully prepared to stand firm, Laurette found herself so captivated by the opulence of the palace and the chance to meet the king himself that she quite literally swooned and fell to the floor. Later, revived, she was convinced that the delegation had been successful and she delivered to the crowd an address aimed at convincing everyone present of the same, praising France's king for his compassionate sympathy and his heartfelt intention to work with the common people. She returned to Paris that night along with Maillard and a small company of others, believing that they had triumphed and that from this night forward things would be different. In an entirely different sense than Laurette believed, she could not have been more right.

Since the previous winter, Émeric de Sauveterre, the Toreador grandchilde of Prince Beatrix, had watched

Laurette, first captivated by her physical appeal, but ultimately won over by her obvious passions and romantic ideals. A staunch supporter of the *Ancien Régime* that had defined not only mortal French society but even more so that of the Kindred for so long, de Sauveterre desired Laurette in a way that roused passions the Damned so often let lapse into dormancy. He swore to himself that she would be his.

While the object of his obsession was in Versailles, de Sauveterre directed his ghoul to murder Charles so that it would appear to be the result of the desperation of the city, thereby leaving Laurette with no one to care for her and nowhere to go. But de Sauveterre was unable to wait for the scenario to play out as he had envisioned, with a long, drawn-out seduction that led to Laurette's voluntary request for the Embrace. Overcome by his own powerful emotions, he instead waited for at her empty apartment and surprised her when she returned. In a notably un-romantic fashion the Toreador ancilla overpowered her and claimed his prize.

With the Parisian courts in tumult in both the mortal and Kindred worlds, Laurette's sire did not have the luxury of taking the customary time to introduce her to the concepts of Kindred society or even much of a fundamental understanding of her condition. Laurette's delegation to King Louis XVI had been a failure, as the crowd had later laid siege to the palace and forced the king and his court to return to Paris, where things grew increasingly unsteady. The French Camarilla, with its cold hand pulling too many strings among the aristocracy and clergy, was on similarly unsure footing. Kindred sought seeking to protect themselves from harm even as they jockeyed for power in the salons and among the *philosophes* – even among the radicalizing Jacobins – and many seized on any perceived advantage, regardless of how audacious or despised.

Clan Toreador controlled most of France and its members had worked not so secretly to place the other Kindred clans at great disadvantage in the realm. This scheme, hatched by the prince's seneschal Francois Villon, had led to significant unrest among the other clans, most notably the Brujah, who maintained a troublesome minority in Paris and other large cities. However, the Toreador had so far managed to keep the Rabble from becoming a real threat by establishing alliances among the Ventrue and Tremere, clans that hoped to use the detente to aid their own aspirations to power in France.

De Sauveterre was a strong supporter of his prince, but he despised Villon. The seneschal had once been an Anarch himself, and de Sauveterre was not one to let that dishonorable past lay forgotten, even if he was favored by Beatrix. In fact, Villon's favor with Beatrix only made de Sauveterre hate him more, and so as the situation in Paris grew more chaotic and the Traditions of the Kindred bent and fractured under the strain of revolution, the spiteful ancilla sought every opportunity to undermine Villon and elevate himself at the seneschal's expense.

Laurette was as much a tool to help de Sauveterre achieve his own ends as she was a subject of his reckless desire. He fully believed he could guide her extraordinary passions away from revolutionary ideals and instead refocus them on a cultural foundation turning her revolutionary zeal into support for the status quo. He was sure that with his coaxing and careful ministrations she would prove to be his greatest asset, akin to a marvelous piece of jewelry that would earn him the envy of the Harpies and the prestige and status in Elysium he sought to edify his position – and to undermine Villon.

The fledgling Toreador took to unlife quickly. Although initially horrified to learn that she had become in reality what the revolutionaries accused the aristocracy of being, she welcomed the Embrace as an escape from what she saw as a failed life. Freed of mortal needs and possessed of a will to power that made her feel as if some of her childhood dreams were indeed coming true, Laurette wasted no time in acclimating herself to the prison of night that was now and forever her gilded cage. The fantasy revealed itself for the horror it truly was, Laurette came to realize, but the fairy tales had always had their dark sides.

She heeded her sire's command, but she also realized that she had a far longer leash than most other Kindred of her station. With Elysium trembling from the drumbeats and cannon of revolution, she made connections with other Kindred that normally would have been impossible. Members of the Estates General believed her to be their mistress, diplomats courted her affections at Louis XVI's doomed *soirees*, and of course the Third Estate still counted her as one of their number. With every vampire desperately seeking some advantage and whatever allies they could, Laurette was well-positioned to exploit those relationships. Even Villon admired her and showed her some attention, which de Sauveterre cautiously encouraged, seeing in

the seneschal's lustful stare a weakness that could be turned against him.

However, Laurette proved to be far more independent than de Sauveterre imagined. She refused to succumb to her sire's antiquated political and cultural views, no matter how much he tried to explain that she was now herself an aristo – under shadow – and Laurette instead cleaved to her youthful dreams, placing idealistic romance and beauty above traditional authority. She used her subversive Kindred alliances to take a direct hand in manipulating certain notable kine, especially those among the Jacobins' club, such as the Liberal politician Victor de Broglie. Because de Sauveterre's attention was fixed so intently upon Villon, he paid little heed to his childe's own activities, no matter how contrary to his own aims they became. Even as Laurette increasingly collaborated with Brujah and other Anarchs to push the revolution further and further, her sire remained willfully blind to her agenda.

In 1791 the Anarchs, led by the Brujah, accomplished their goal of toppling the Camarilla and establishing all of France as an Anarch barony. The Kindred of Paris were stunned at this turn of events and, to save themselves from the bloodthirsty savagery of the suddenly triumphant Brujah, largely fled their *arrondissements* for the safety of London, where the embarrassed Toreador émigrés submitted themselves to Ventrue authority.

Only the most powerful and self-assured French Toreador remained behind, confident in both their own prowess as well as what they anticipated as the eventual collapse of the uprising and their return to rightful rule. The situation was far more serious than these holdouts believed, however. Prince Beatrix was destroyed by Anarchs while fleeing Paris after hearing news of Louis XVI's arrest and incarceration. Villon, surrounded by foes, continued to struggle despite the odds, but in September was himself forced to bid *adieu* to his beloved Paris and seek safe haven across the Channel, in no small part due to de Sauveterre's betrayal of their own clan's elder.

Laurette's sire survived in Paris as long as he did largely because the Brujah recognized how helpful he would be in eliminating Villon. They knew of his antipathy toward the former seneschal and stayed out of his way as he schemed to bring about Villon's downfall. But it was even more their promise to leave him alone so long as Laurette assisted them in their larger goal of taking control of France. However, once Louis XVI,

now simply called Citizen Louis Capet, was sent to the guillotine in early 1793, the pendulum swung the other direction. The Anarchs no longer needed the assistance of de Sauveterre or his neonate. Realizing what this would mean, Laurette convinced her sire that they should quit Paris.

Sire and childe did not follow their peers to London, however. Instead, at Laurette's recommendation, they hired passage out of the country and formally requested the protection of the Camarilla in the then-*Savoia* Italian city of Nice. The Ivory Tower was only too happy to welcome the refugees, for the Sabbat were a rising threat and the Prince of Nice saw the duo as allies who would help bolster the sect's influence. Laurette was also overjoyed to be back on the southern coast and from afar, she spied on her father and secretly helped him to build his business empire, though he remained wholly unaware of his secret benefactor. To her mind, it was repayment for abandoning him and some small atonement for what she had become.

By night, the end of the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon signified the return to Paris of Francois Villon and the authority of the Camarilla. Villon declared himself Prince in 1805 and one of his first formal acts was to summon de Sauveterre to his court to answer for his treasonous actions against him. De Sauveterre was sentenced to Final Death. Laurette was delayed in attending her sire's trial by a surge in Sabbat activity in Nice and was sentenced *in absentia* to submit to a partial blood bond to the Prince to ensure her obedience to her elder. When she arrived, she had no choice but to accept the new Prince's will, and took her draught before the assembled Primogen, noting how many of them had once been members of the *Ancien Régime*, then shifted sympathies to the Anarchs, and were now again among Napoleon's imperialist allies. Laurette also heard whispers that Villon himself might have had something to do with her own Sabbat "delay," but answering her summons and sentence was hardly the place to address that suspicion.

For the next century, Laurette remained in Paris, where her sire's fate proved a heavy weight that made it difficult to gain status in the eyes of the Kindred, though she maintained close ties with her coastal home. When Nice became French following the Second Italian War of Independence and the railroad arrived along the Côte d'Azur in the 1860s, Laurette was able to establish her own recognized domain along the Mediterranean, effectively far enough from Villon and his agents to permit her own independence.

Except for Nice, the rest of the coastline was devoid of Kindred, except for a few itinerant Gangrel and nomadic Sabbat packs, none of which had much interest in establishing a lasting presence. Laurette exploited this absence and, with the full support of the *Savoia*-aligned Giovanni who had moved in during the Camarilla's troubles with the Sabbat, threw her energies and growing resources into turning the sleepy shoreline into something more resembling the idyllic world of her childhood daydreams. But time and reality had scourged those daydreams, and what once might have been a realm of whimsy instead bore the undeniable touch of the Damned. Opulence hid decay, pleasure yielded to depravity, and the tastes of the rich and esteemed placed them in dangerous proximity to the Kindred.

Laurette used her influence in Paris to convince numerous artists to visit the French Riviera, as well as the aristocracy and the wealthy merchant class. So successful was her plan that by the end of the turn of the century the area had become the premier vacation retreat for European royalty and the very wealthy, along with famous painters like Auguste Renoir, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso.

Laurette was busy in Paris, also. Her achievements in the French Riviera provided her some prestige among the Harpies, who sought her out in order to find ways to sway or even dictate the attitudes of the kine. With the financial help of a Ventrue named Georges St. Pierre, she backed the establishment of a film company in the Parisian suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine where she maintained her haven. Via the public face of its eponymous founder, Laurette was able to establish some early influence over the fast-growing French cinematic tradition.

From the very first moment she saw a short film in a darkened theater, she was awestruck and unable to curb her admiration. Nothing she had ever seen came so close to rendering the things she conjured up in her rich imagination. She knew she had to be part of this transcendent phenomenon, and her motion picture company provided her that. Laurette was so captivated by the fantastical world of cinema that she chose as her first childe a remarkably influential female film director, who directly oversaw the company's studios at La Villette.

Laurette's power grew exponentially after the First World War as American industrialists and literati joined their European counterparts on the postcard-perfect beaches of the French Riviera, rubbing shoulders with

the likes of Coco Chanel, whose golden tan became all the rage. Toreador in America learned Laurette's name and, less concerned about the "Old World" smirches on her resume than their French clanmates, toasted her accomplishments, especially after the Second World War when the rising Toreador cinephile patronized the creation of the one of the world's most prestigious film festivals.

As her prestige grew among her fellow Toreador, she also made inroads with the other clans. The Ventrue admired her business acumen when in 1975 she enthralled the entire family of the media tycoon and heir who was already a major stakeholder in her film company. Placing him in charge of the studio, which was struggling with the decline of the European film industry, she turned its fortunes around and thereby made herself a major player behind the curtain of the movie business. She also made some effort in inviting the Malkavians into her circle of conspirators, supporting certain films that the Lunatics felt strongly about having produced.

Laurette's influence continues to grow. She now resides in Cannes where she is the de facto Prince, though she does not make such a claim, as it would raise her profile such that Villon might have a renewed interest in her "wellbeing" and domain. She also pays her continued respects to the *Savoia* Giovanni in Nice, not only in word but also in cash. As it turned out her sire made an agreement with the Giovanni when the two sought the domain of Nice in flight from Paris, as the presence of the Savoy necromancers had been in place longer than she had previously believed, which she continues to honor. She seeks a way out of this bargain, but the few moves she has made to accomplish this were met with a subtle yet firm resistance among the Giovanni's interests in the film trade.

Despite her past, Laurette has become one of the continent's more influential Harpies. Each May she throws an over-the-top salon that coincides with the famous film festival that welcomes only a select list of Kindred hand-picked by herself and her childe, who is her closest confidante. Francois Villon always receives an invitation, but he has yet to attend the soiree, preferring to simply send a pleasant response apologetically declining the gracious offer. Presumption in Elysium is that Villon's acceptance would officially remove the two-centuries-old stain from Mademoiselle Morel's status, a stain of dishonor that ensures she can never rise high enough to pose a real threat to the authority of Villon and the elders of France.

For the kine, the trauma of the French Revolution and its Reign of Terror that left Louis XVI and his Marie headless is practically ancient history, but for the Prince of Paris and his contemporaries, it remains a powerful reminder of just how precarious the survival of the Camarilla and its Traditions is, especially in the face of concerted Anarch and Sabbat threats from all corners. The specter looms large now, in particular, as the debt crisis that afflicts Europe threatens the comfortable lives of French citizens and the Kindred who rely on their vitae to survive. For all Laurette's accomplishments and prestige within the bounds of the Camarilla, Villon knows that first and foremost, like himself, the Coquette of Cannes, as she is sometimes called in Paris, will always be a creature of passion and that she will always be ready to pursue those passions no matter where they lead her. Villon sees his former Anarch self in her and, even as he privately admires it, nothing gives him more worry.

Sire: Émeric de Sauveterre

Clan: Toreador

Nature: Idealist

Demeanor: Gallant

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1790

Apparent Age: 20s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 5

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Empathy 4, Expression (Speeches) 4

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 5

Knowledges: Finance 2, Politics 4, Expert Knowledge (Film Industry and Production) 5

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Celerity 4, Necromancy (Sepulchre Path) 1, Presence 4

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 4, Domain 5, Fame 1, Herd 2, Influence 3, Resources 5, Retainers 3, Status (Camarilla) 3

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 2

Morality: Humanity 6

Willpower: 7

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 15/3

Image: Laurette is physically beautiful, with a dark cast to her fine features that enhances her appeal. Her long dark hair cascades over top-designer outfits and she always looks as if she's about to step onto the red carpet. She often wears sunglasses and is usually attended by an entourage that includes her childe, who helps to keep the paparazzi at bay.

Roleplaying Hints: The Côte d'Azur is yours, the dream world that you made a reality, and here none shine as brightly as you. You detest crude political and financial discussion and surround yourself only with those who similarly exult beauty, creativity, and romantic truth. Of course, you have greater aspirations, but they will come in their own due time, for on the moonlit paradise that is yours, there is no shortage of this commodity. Over the years, you have managed to stave off the attentions of a subculture hungry for tabloid gossip, but in a world of always-available information and ever-present media, you wonder how long you'll be able to hide your secret, given your comparatively high profile, and it's come to occupy much of your waking attention, to the degree that you actually resent your unavoidable Fame.

Haven: The Coquette of Cannes maintains a palatial villa in the festival resort that rivals those owned by her neighbors, the Hollywood, financial, and political elite. Modern security features protect her from most dangers, but she also relies on her supernatural abilities to ensure her safety. She routinely has guests, who are often other Kindred, for glamorous parties, which provide her a forum to promote her interests and expand her mortal and unliving influence.

Influence: Technology has enabled Laurette to gain a significant foothold in the American film industry, though she currently struggles to understand how to best navigate the rapid changes that same technology brings with it. Her vast financial resources have also given her extensive freedom in gaining control over smaller businesses and individuals, both in Europe and overseas, always towards the goal of indebting other Kindred that might one night pave the way for her return to Paris as a liberator from the stodgy strictures of the Traditions. Film itself can be used for many means, for the communication of utopian fairy tales to brute propaganda, and Laurette is experienced in producing the spectrum, for which no few Kindred both owe her favors and admire her vision.



PK 12

MARYANN FLETCHER

The Hangman's Bride

The Kindred known tonight as the Hangman's Bride, once Maryann Fletcher, began her life in a small hamlet in the English countryside. She grew up a devout Roman Catholic, part of a hard-working family of wool merchants. Although her prospects in life were as humble as one might expect for a pre-Restoration provincial – she was the youngest of eight children and could hope for neither inheritance nor dowry – she led a serene and joyful existence. She loved her home and her family and didn't need any more than providence offered. Life was good.

When the Gunpowder Plot to assassinate King James I and members of parliament failed, the Popish Recusants Act of 1605 was passed into law. This document effectively made Catholics in England second-class citizens, deprived them of many rights, and made any professed or suspected allegiance to the Pope high treason, punishable by hanging, drawing and quartering. The resultant atmosphere of paranoia and persecution swept across England like a sickness. Neighbors who had spent years living next to each other suddenly turned into bitter enemies, their latent sectarian hatred fostered by the avarice and corruption of the Stuart court.

Maryann's family had never been part of any political activity, clandestine or otherwise, but a rival merchant house seized the opportunity to usurp their business, denouncing the Fletchers to the local magistrates as papist conspirators. While much of her family was arrested and executed, Maryann avoided sharing their fate because she had been in a different town buying wool that day. Hidden by distant relatives living in Portsmouth, Maryann was deeply affected by the ruin of her parents and siblings. Tormented by nightmares and panic, she developed a speech impediment so profound she could hardly communicate with others.

Finding the girl an easily bullied mark, a foul Nosferatu named Stanford Warwick took notice of the girl when seeking informants he could add to his cadre of ghoulish spies. Because she appeared absent-minded and couldn't speak coherently, most people thought she was simple and didn't watch what they were saying when she was around, which the Nosferatu appreciated. Working as a maid at her relatives' tavern, Maryann did hear many of the subtle secrets people whispered among each other. Warwick considered her an ideal candidate and revealed himself to her after a few months of observation.

Although she was shocked to be confronted by what could only be witch's fetch, Maryann had no choice but to accept the gruesome Nosferatu at his word. Compared to the petty inhumanities by which the people around her everyday betrayed one another, this devil could at least be taken for what he appeared to be. Instead of running or trying to fight the monster, Maryann sat down and listened to what he had to say.

Warwick was impressed. An understanding and unassuming pawn suited him perfectly. He explained that he expected her to act as his spy and courier and he promised her guaranteed protection from the corrupt vessel of the Anglican Church in return. That night was the first of many times Maryann drank Warwick's vitae.

The young woman served the Nosferatu's cause unflinchingly for many years and Warwick kept his promises. Maryann and her relatives never once came under the shadow of suspicion or had to fear persecution. This changed almost a decade later, when a Ventrue rival of her domitor intercepted vital Nosferatu correspondence that included a list of all ghouls that Warwick had enthralled. In one fateful swoop, the Ventrue's mortal agents sacked the Nosferatu ghouls' homes in daytime raids under the appearances of a

government action. Maryann and her relatives were brutally bludgeoned and tied up in their tavern, which was then set ablaze.

When night fell, Warwick learned of what had befallen his servants and searched their houses, finding only smoldering ash-heaps of atrocity. When he came to the ruin of the tavern, however, he discovered that Maryann was still alive. She was horribly burned, her blackened skin stretched taut over seared flesh, scorch marks running down her cheeks, where her tears had been boiled in the heat of the fire. No life should have still flickered within this forsaken carcass, but the Nosferatu's potent vitae had sustained Maryann through her suffering, denying her the mercy of death. Seeking to preserve what he might in the wake of the Ventrue's purge, Warwick decided not to grant her release but damn her with the Embrace.

In the weeks after Maryann's transformation, Warwick learned that his whelp had lost or repressed many memories of her former life and the manner of her death. Although painful and traumatic flashbacks occurred on her worst nights, Maryann perceived her past as a bad dream or fit of madness. The wily Nosferatu decided to take advantage of his progeny's mental lacunae and set about indoctrinating her in the ways of the clan. Maryann adapted quickly to her new condition and became as capable a Nosferatu as she had been a ghoul.

Over the 17th and 18th centuries, Maryann served as Warwick's trusted lieutenant, accompanying him on his rapid rise in clan status and power. During this time she became a mentor to numerous young Sewer Rats, cultivating a cabal of informants among the Catholic underground that dwelled in the shadow of Anglicanism. She became a symbol of Nosferatu disenfranchisement, a religious minority among the privileged majority just as she was a despised Nosferatu among the genteel Ivory Tower. Her sire was cunning and opportunistic, while she was understanding and compassionate. Although he was her Elder, she was the one who inspired loyalty among the neonates of the clan.

Maryann was loath to openly participate in the courts of the Camarilla, but she felt no remorse for spying on its proceedings from hidden alcoves in the halls of power. The constant bickering and backstabbing that served as the coin of the realm among the Elysium crowd reminded her of the ways of the Stuart monarchy

that had caused her such grief. In the end, Warwick decided it was time for her to make her debut, when he was called away by the Nosferatu Trajan to coordinate the clan interests in New England. By this time an Elder herself, she felt an indelible bond to her sire and obeyed. Upon her first visit to a salon in Warwick's retinue, a Toreador Harpy, seeing the close relationship between the two unwanted guests, quipped that even someone as unpleasant company as a hangman would find a bride eventually. The Toreador in question, referring in his insult to Warwick's rumored job as the Prince's executioner, soon vanished, never to be seen again. The moniker "the Hangman's Bride" stuck, however, and Maryann wears it to this night as a mark of her devotion to her sire.

Life among the courts of the "Dark Colony" disagreed with her, so the Hangman's Bride eagerly accepted an opportunity to serve as archon after she had impressed the Nosferatu Justicar Petrodon at a conclave early in the 20th century. She doesn't remember much of her mortal life, but she has an instinctive and profound aversion against persecution and the abuse of power, which leads her into occasional conflict when working as an agent for the Camarilla. The Hangman's Bride considers it her duty to be as precise and unfailing in her investigations as possible, to expose the guilty and leave the innocent – an odd context in which to consider the Kindred – untainted by the evils of others. In this idiom, she has actively worked against Elders, Princes, and even other Archons who would find scapegoats for their own transgressions. Tonight, the Hangman's Bride is an Archon at large, unattached to a specific Justicar, but herself without the authority of that title.

Over her centuries of unlife, the Hangman's Bride has acted both as an antagonist as well as aide to young coteries. Kindred who stand accused of a crime come under meticulous scrutiny when Maryann investigates them. This complete loss of privacy and her offensively straightforward style of questioning have resulted in Kindred feeling helpless, violated, or just plain angry, greatly resenting and potentially even rebelling against their potential savior. The Hangman's Bride is completely unbiased, however, giving those whose condemnation she investigates a chance at redemption they might never have otherwise had in the prestation-trading courts of the Camarilla. Maryann even investigated and exonerated a Kindred accused of the assassination of her own patron Justicar, Petrodon, ten

years after his death. Everyone knew the accused was a patsy – but who else would have bothered to stand up for him?

Nosferatu Kindred know the Hangman's Bride in another capacity, as well. She remains very active in clan politics and is both a champion of and investor in SchreckNet, the communication network that functions as a sort of Nosferatu "dark Internet." Her interest in ShreckNet is as a vehicle for communication of information that is by definition true, though it may damn other Kindred. This often leads her into conflict with other ShreckNet users who propagate disinformation or who would hide an incontrovertible truth under layers of informational noise.

Sire: Stanford Warwick

Clan: Nosferatu

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Judge

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1614

Apparent Age: late 20s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 1, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Empathy 4, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Animal Ken 2, Etiquette 3, Larceny 3, Melee 3, Performance 3, Stealth 5, Survival 4

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 3, Finance 3, Investigation 5, Law 4, Occult 2, Politics 4, Science 2

Disciplines: Animalism 4, Auspex 2, Obfuscate 5, Potence 4

Background: Contacts 5, Influence 2, Mentor 5, Resources 4, Retainers 2 (two young Nosferatu traveling as her chroniclers), Status 4

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 3

Morality: Humanity 7

Willpower: 7

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 15/3

Image: Maryann is a burned and blackened thing, unrecognizable as the mild villager she once was. Her teeth bleached in the conflagration, leaving a shockingly bright maw punctuated by shattered fangs. The Hangman's

Bride's eyes are milky-white and her fingernails have become menacing, jagged talons. She frequently wears a wig to replace her long hair that burned away in the fire. In the field, the Hangman's Bride affects the shapeless robes often preferred by the twisted Nosferatu. When she appears before the Inner Circle, however, she affects elaborate Jacobean dress, though its rigid bodices and wired collars chafe and burst her savaged skin.

Roleplaying Hints: The Hangman's Bride is rather limited in her movement, as her skin is stretched taut and her muscles have atrophied. Thus she has almost no body language at all and takes her time getting places. Nightly, she chooses from a collection of walking sticks to support her movements. To overcome her considerable speech impediment, she gathers her thoughts before speaking and then communicates in one short burst of rushed and atonal words. She is polite but direct and firm. Although she affects truth first and foremost, underneath her formal manner, she has little tolerance for evasiveness, and those who lie to her risk rousing her to frenzy.

Haven: Maryann and her small retinue usually set up camp in an easily accessible but well-secured public building when they investigate a domain. These premises serve as the archon's offices and quarters for her Retainers. The Hangman's Bride calls upon Nosferatu hospitality in the sewers if the domain is home to a Nosferatu warren. The Bride cares little for conventional comfort, relying more on the feeling of duty to her clan.

Influence: The Hangman's Bride has served loyally and without any thought of personal gain as an Archon under a variety of Justicars. She enjoys great prestige and can rely on the respect for her title and support of her Mentor and the Inner Circle. However, her unwillingness to sacrifice individuals to further the political aspirations of others has also made her a great number of enemies. So far, her usefulness as one of the Camarilla's top investigators has shielded her from political backlash, but the tide may turn against her one night. Indeed, her position as Archon without a patron Justicar continues a special dispensation from the Inner Circle because she does her duty well, though any one of them may harbor ill will against her personally or politically. As such, her considerable influence is only of use at infrequent intervals, so she calls on it only rarely and with good reason.

Derangement: With her family having been executed vindictively and having suffered her own death in a fire, Maryann harbors a great aversion to physical pain. She avoids direct confrontation if at all possible and succumbs to frenzy as soon she is injured. (Thus, appearing in formal dress before the Inner Circle requires a great deal

of will for her.) This aversion extends to others as well. She never employs torture in her interrogations and if she must deliver Final Death, she does so as swiftly as possible. Additionally, fire drives her mad with fear – more so than other Kindred – and difficulties for her to resist Rotschreck increase by 1.





NASCH the CIRCASSIAN

Serpent Among Kings

A snorting mare, dark against the silver mountains, its hide limned auburn by the setting sun. The laughter of a sister teasing him near a muddy stream. The rich smell of his mother's cooking accompanied by the distant sound of his grandfather's pain. The sudden scream of an eagle just before it drops on its prey from the brilliant heavens like a javelin and in one brutal moment seizes and rends its prey: the snake that had been hiding so completely in the tall grass. These are the only memories that remain of his childhood, of the time before Egypt, before manhood, before the deathly chill of the long shadows of the Endless Night that engulfed him. These last remaining fragments, these momentary flashes of imagery and sensation are the last anchors of a vestigial sense of humanity that remains above all else his most treasured possession.

Nasch was born among the Bzhedugh Adyghes, one of the peoples known more popularly as the Circassians, especially in the Mamluk culture that dominated the Near East at the time of his birth. Like many Circassian boys, he was proud when his father arranged for him to travel to Egypt to serve in the sultan's army, viewing his sale to the visiting merchant as a ticket to freedom, not slavery. The sights and sounds that greeted him in Cairo were beyond anything he had imagined and he quickly heeded the clarion of Islam and the seductively mysterious culture of the ancient land of the pharaohs.

The boy became the property of Kulayb al-Naqid, a powerful bureaucrat who spent whatever it took to ensure that his young warrior received the best martial training available. His bow, lance, mace, and sword were as extensions of his body and his horsemanship improved so much that his patron regularly hosted competitions to further enhance his standing in the sultanate's administration by showing off his remarkable young charge.

Complementing Nasch's military education was a more cerebral one that was even more a source of

pride for the learned al-Naqid. The lad was given regular access to the personal and religious libraries of his master and his master's network of friends, which included Islamic scholars as well as Christian and Jewish authorities. Nasch was captivated by what he read and proved a quick learner, mastering Arabic and a handful of other important scripts and tongues before he had reached majority. He was most fascinated by those texts that revealed the older history of Egypt, its rulers, and its gods, and he made a special effort to teach himself hieroglyphics in order to pluck from the ancient inscriptions the lost secrets of the pharaohs.

Upon reaching the age for battle, Nasch was granted his freedom and provided arms and armor in addition to a mount. This did not remove his obligation to al-Naqid, however. As was the Mamluk custom, Nasch remained bound to his former master by an oath of blood loyalty. This was not an issue for the Circassian at first, but in time the elder al-Naqid grew demanding and continued to treat Nasch as a trophy to parade before his friends as the aging bureaucrat struggled to maintain his station in a shifting political landscape. As Nasch increasingly resisted this treatment, al-Naqid began to spread rumors of his "son" that resulted in doors being closed to him that previously had been open. He found himself cut off from the scholarly works that had become his great passion and his contacts refused to see him, all on account of al-Naqid's poisoned words.

Only one door remained open to the abandoned Mamluk. A Copt named Abul-Darda Hashim al-Musayyab, a rival of al-Naqid's who had been working hard to undermine him in order to assume his influential position as a tax administrator, openly welcomed Nasch and supplied him the intellectual companionship he desperately sought. Al-Musayyab also quickly changed Nasch's views on his obligation to his former master, convincing the young man that a father who does not treat his son with due respect is

himself worth none. When al-Naqid learned of Nasch's association with his enemy, he formally denounced him as a conspirator and traitor. The crafty Copt seized the opportunity his manipulation had provided, fanning the flames in Nasch's heart and urging him to take action before al-Naqid went any further. So effective was al-Musayyab's argument that when Nasch found himself standing over al-Naqid's bloody corpse, he was convinced that the idea had been his own.

Nasch's story might have ended there, but two things worked in his favor to save him from punishment. First, the Mamluks were swiftly rising in power on account of the recent ascension of Baibars to the sultanate, the first of the new dynasty's rulers after centuries of Ayyubid rule. Second, al-Musayyab was only the servant of Nasch's true patron, the Ventrue elder Palamon.

A devout Copt who dedicated himself to the goal of purging Egypt of Islam and restoring it to its ancient glory, Palamon had watched Nasch for some time and saw in him the perfect childe. He had actually masterminded al-Naqid's downfall with the assistance of "sympathetic parties" among the Followers of Set, with whom he had allied himself against the Muslim undead. It did not take long for Nasch to become convinced to swear a new blood oath to the passionate Ventrue and in 1263 he took an oath of fealty in the form of the Embrace. With his nights now freed of mortal concerns and the Followers of Set willing to share occult secrets with him that no mortal possessed, Nasch saw his sire as both his savior and a true father that deserved his eternal loyalty.

As much as he threw himself into his occult pursuits, Nasch also put substantial energy into mastering contemporary politics. Aided by his nascent mastery of Presence, a gift that seemed to come more naturally to him than his clan's parallel affinity for Dominate, he proved a skilled and valuable asset that his sire fully exploited. This partnership proved a successful one and by the time Nasch reached his fiftieth year as a Kindred and was rewarded by being formally released by his sire, the pair had become quite accomplished. However, this did not last, for even as Nasch and his sire cultivated influence among key officials throughout Egypt and the empire's Syrian territory, they remained wholly oblivious to the way they were being manipulated.

The Followers of Set who had allied themselves with Palamon were a very secretive cabal even among their fellow Setites: a group possessed of a secret that they shared with no one and would do anything to protect. Dubbing themselves the Coil of the Lion, these Serpents

were dedicated to no less a duty than protecting one of the clan's holy sites suspected of being the tomb of the Antediluvian Set. They not only knew its location, but had been guarding it from discovery and intrusion for millennia, keeping their progenitor safe until the time had come for his return. This responsibility meant that despite their dark stewardship, they occasionally had to relocate the torpid form believed to be the Antediluvian in order to protect him. The time had again come nigh for this task and they used their Ventrue pawns to ensure that this could be accomplished as smoothly as possible.

Key to The Coil of the Lion's plan was creating enough distraction among the region's Kindred to focus their attention elsewhere when the move took place. The cult decided that a political and cultural scandal would serve this purpose well and the best way to accomplish this was to turn Nasch against his sire. Just as he had been receptive to the deceptive entreaties of al-Naqid, the young Ventrue was equally susceptible to the persuasions of the agents of the fork-tongued Setites. He began to see his sire as no different from al-Naqid, an exploitive master who only pretended respect, which was not wholly untrue. He slowly came to believe that his release from his sire's authority was actually a ploy to make him more loyal to Palamon even as the elder took greater advantage of him: a thrallhood under the guise of freedom. Ultimately, The Coil of the Lion succeeded in convincing Nasch that, as a Mamluk and Circassian, he would never be able to achieve parity with his sire or other Ventrue, but he would instead always be viewed as little more than a fancy slave.

By this time, Palamon, in large part due to the help of his favored childe, had achieved near-total control over the immediate advisors to Sultan al-Ashraf Sha'ban. With the backing of the Setites, Nasch made his move and lent his support to an uprising among the Mamluks that began in Syria and quickly spread to Egypt. The turmoil took Palamon, along with other Kindred, by surprise and though their eventual downfall was not an overnight affair, they were unable to regain their upper hand. Nasch's mortal ally Barquq, a cunning Circassian like himself, was instrumental in the rebellion and, after nearly five years of political and military chaos, finally succeeded in seizing the sultanate for himself, thereby founding the Burji Mamluk dyansty.

Naturally, Palamon and the other Ventrue did not look kindly on Nasch's betrayal. They invoked the Lextalionis and did their best to make unlife difficult for the traitorous ancilla. Despite his best efforts, were

it not for his Setite patrons, Nasch knew he would be doomed. It was during this tumultuous time that the Coil of the Lion made its near-fatal mistake. Sure of their hold over the ruined Ventrue, they grew careless and boasted about their true purpose to enflame the imagination of the Ventrue they considered their debtor. They underestimated his understanding of the old ways and when they demanded his assistance in helping them ensure the protection of some pilgrims to the necropolis of Saqqara, he knew it was his only opportunity to seize an advantage that he so desperately needed.

In the winter of 1381, with the eyes of local Kindred directed elsewhere, the Coil of the Lion undertook the dangerous journey they had planned for so long. When Nasch's Mamluks attacked the small caravan the morning after their arrival in Saqqara, the Setite ghouls and mercenaries were unprepared and unable to defend their cargo. The raiders seized the opulent sarcophagus and all but two of the Setite escorts met Final Death, the survivors fleeing in snake form into the night-chilled sands. Their minions were slaughtered and all traces of the caravan burned or secreted away inside desert-scoured tombs. They dragged this choicest prize into one such funereal chamber and guarded it until the sun set.

When Nasch arose and stood before the ebony coffin he was not sure exactly how to go about the deed. He had read and heard many different things about the Amaranth, but such forbidden whispers bore no specifics. What he was sure of was that no matter how things happened, he was facing a creature that was whispered (fearfully, reverently) to be nothing less than a god in the eyes of the Setites, and to come unprepared would unquestionably mean his demise. For this reason he had worked every minion, contact, and pawn he could, and all but emptied his treasury in order to obtain something that might help him survive and accomplish this task.

Nasch's efforts paid off when he was able, a mere few weeks before the desert raid, to acquire a small sliver of ancient bone from a merchant who desperately craved the reward of "eternal life" in exchange for the relic. The merchant claimed that the bone was nothing less than a fragment of the forearm of Osiris, Set's nemesis. Nasch relished the opportunity, having read in a collection of Gnostic apocrypha that "one of the betrayer's get" might deal a grievous wound to "his thrice-damned progeny." Although Nasch asked a handful of trusted conspirators to verify the assertion that the bone

fragment was the real thing, he remained skeptical, but without other options and time running out he had little choice but to put his faith in the artifact.

When his thralls pried open the last seal and removed the startlingly plain inner lid that had concealed the face of Antediluvian, Nasch felt the world shift. The a susurrations quickly grew into a clamor – the sound of a thousand serpents rending the air with their unearthly hissing as the chamber around him vanished into blackness. He found himself standing upon a dais in a vast, open temple situated on an otherwise empty expanse of desert that stretched into infinity. Before him lay the body of a man with the head of an unspeakable beast, no sarcophagus in sight, naked but for a simple loincloth. For a few moments Nasch surrendered to a fear that made even the Red Fear seem insignificant. He could not move and was sure that he was to meet Final Death, sure that this was Set, and that the Antediluvian would slake its thirst on his vitae.

It was at that moment that Nasch recalled the memory of the eagle and the snake. Without permitting himself another thought, he leapt forward and sank his fangs into the dark god.

What happened next he cannot or will not permit himself to guess. To this night, Nasch recalls a distant memory of power, unimaginable power, surging through him, and of a tremendous roar that drowned out all other sensation. He knows, too, there was pain, as if the sun itself had swallowed him. And his body unconsciously quakes with a terror so all-encompassing that to this night all his other fears have lost their hold on him.

When Nasch awakened, he discovered that more than a decade had passed. He found himself in a monastery in Sicily. His servitors had arranged for his transport out of Egypt, but only one remained with him, and the man could provide few additional details about the fateful night in Saqqara. Nasch became convinced that the shard of Osiris had been real, for he could find no other explanation for his survival. At first he believed he had succeeded in committing diablerie, but this conviction did not last long. Strange visions began to haunt his dreams, visions of serpents consuming the world, writhing from the trees and walls, and worse. An unrelenting hissing plagued him when awake, a hallucination he struggled hard to master.

The most telling sign that whatever had transpired had failed was his own form. Upon arising from torpor, Nasch had become gaunt and reeked of the grave.



Initially, he assumed this was normal after torpor and that he would soon regain his former appearance, but no amount of blood would reverse this change. He soon came to believe that rather than taking the vitae an Antediluvian, whatever ancient Kindred this truly was had instead performed some lesser Amaranth upon *him*, leaving him permanently weakened. In the vain hope of reversing his condition he engaged in an orgy of blood-drinking that exceeded the capacities of his monastic environs. Sure enough, word reached the ears of a nearby Lasombra elder who had barely survived the Burning Times and had no wish to see them rekindled on her doorstep. With no minions or moneys at his disposal, and not wishing to draw too much attention to himself, Nasch chose to heed her warning and he left the domain for Milan.

For the next few years, Nasch kept a low profile and played the genteel and unassuming Ventrue ancilla. Although outwardly loyal to his clan, his closest ties were to the Tremere. Soon after joining the city's Kindred, he sought their counsel as to the existence of some art or artifact that might be able to mute his presence and hide him from Set and his agents. The Malkavian Oracle at Milan sensed an aura of doom around him and made an effort to avoid him, refusing to share her auguries

with him. The Nosferatu similarly had no interest in teaching their Discipline to the blighted Ventrue, but the Tremere had no such compunctions. In fact, on the contrary, the magus Marco Pessina was intrigued by the paranoid Blue Blood and promised to help in exchange for Nasch's knowledge of the Followers of Set and their cyclopean rituals.

In 1402, Pessina completed a ritual that he said would answer the Ventrue's prayers. According to Pessina, the Ritual of Concealing would diminish Nasch's presence so greatly that no Kindred of the foul blood of the Followers of Set, not even the founder of the clan himself, would be able to detect him. The rite came with two caveats: First, the ritual's power was contingent upon Nasch's own behavior. The more he advertised his presence, the weaker the protection would be. Second, given the incredible strength of the blood magic — it is no mean feat to obscure one of the Damned from a god — its efficacy would fade over time. The only way to replenish the ritual's potency was for Nasch to enter torpor, during which time it would regain its original might.

As final payment for the Tremere's efforts, Nasch had Pessina destroyed. He provided enough information to

a Toreador neonate inspired by the recent rumblings of the soon-to-be Anarch Revolt as was necessary and let Kindred nature take its course. Just to be safe, Nasch then tipped off the Tremere of Milan to the jealous Toreador in their midst, “to avenge the death of Marco Pessina, who aided me when I needed it.” Outside Pessina, only one other Tremere had knowledge of Nasch’s treachery, but Nasch was unable to find him after the betrayal – the archon Ambrus Kelemen, who was conspicuously absent the night Pessina met Final Death.

This became Nasch’s *modus operandi*. When, over the years, he sought an advantage among his kind, he identified a downtrodden neonate or ancilla and convince the patsy to stand against one or more established Kindred presented an obstacle, even while openly defending the Traditions and declaring allegiance to the establishment. Some, many even, fell for these lies, aided as they were by vampiric charms, but more often those in power saw through his sham and sought his head for stirring up the Anarchs. He survived as long as he did in Milan only because of his continued alliance with the Tremere, who found it more strategically beneficial to look beyond his likely involvement with the diablerie of one of their own in order to gain as much additional information about Setite and Egyptian rituals as possible. One night, they figured, his worth would expire, and then so would he.

The Tremere did not have that chance, however – at least not yet. Regardless of the danger he might invite, Nasch has historically been unable to avoid the limelight. His reliance on the Discipline of Presence stirred up feelings of rebellion and immediate action in any who fell under its sway, particularly those weak-willed neonates who had become dangerously numerous over the centuries. Even when he eschewed the use of his Disciplines, it was usually too late, and in more than one domain, the Anarchs had already taken to the streets shouting his name. Almost overnight, Milan became a battleground for those defending the Traditions and those howling for a new order and the blood of the defenders. Even as he was hailed as a hero by the Milanese Anarchs and their “patron saint,” a Lasombra named Giangaleazzo, Nasch became terrified that the Tremere ritual would be powerless to protect him from Setite vengeance. Even if it did, the Tremere would still have his head when they finally reached their tolerance of him, as Nasch was sure they would. Ironically, a third contingency proved to be a far more immediate threat.

The Anarchs were not the only ones who had seized power in Milan. The nascent Sabbat had converted many of the impressionable Anarchs to their cause, heeding the exhortations of Giangaleazzo, or taking the faith of the Sword of Cain under pain of martyrdom. Nasch did not escape the turning tides of Milanese politics and was brought before Giangaleazzo. Desperate, he played the only card he had. In a closed-door parlay with the Lasombra, Nasch traded his knowledge of the purported Setite Antediluvian’s tomb to the astonished vampire in exchange for his protection from the Sword of Caine. The Lasombra “saint” agreed and declared his safety in Milan, so long as the Archbishop himself was satisfied with the contents of the desert tomb.

Having secured his safety for a time, Nasch voluntarily entered torpor in order to recharge the Tremere Ritual of Concealment. He woke decades later, with the Tremere absent from the City of the Boar. Surprised that he had been spared by both angry Usurpers and tempestuous Sabbat – and now fully protected by the ritual once again – Nasch skulked away from Milan.

Since the fifteenth century, Nasch has spent significant time in at least a score of cities, usually doing his best at first to not draw attention, but always finding himself unable to resist the tendencies that advertise his presence and force him to flee and again seek torpor. His corruptive influence is almost like a virus, and in each place his legacy is one of destabilizing sedition and open violence against the powers that be that often lasts for some time after his terrified exit from the storm he incited.

Tonight, Nasch still clings to those few memories he has of life before the nightmare began. The horse, his sister, his mother’s cooking. But the last one, the memory of the eagle, is increasingly replaced not by another recollection, but by a vision of the future. Instead of the eagle falling upon the snake, it is the snake that finds the eagle asleep in his aerie and with cold-blooded intent sinks its fangs into the unsuspecting raptor and crushes it with the strength of a vengeful god.

Sire: Palamon the Copt

Clan: Ventrue

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Eye of the Storm

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1263

Apparent Age: Withered by time

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 6, Manipulation 5, Appearance 1

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Talents: Expression 4, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Etiquette 2, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Knowledges: Academics 4 (Pharaonic History), Occult 5 (Egyptian rituals), Politics 4

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Dominate 4, Fortitude 5, Potence 4, Presence 6, Serpents 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Influence 4, Resources 3, Status (Anarchs) 3

Merits/Flaws: Language (Adyghe, Arabic, Aramaic, Coptic, Hebrew), Smell of the Grave

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 1, Courage 4

Morality: Humanity 3

Willpower: 8

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 20/4

Image: Nasch appears taller than his entirely average frame on account of his unusually emaciated condition, a situation that also makes him seem greatly aged. His once-powerful muscles have winnowed to a wiry physique, contributing even more to his unsettling appearance. His dark hair is long and straggly, but otherwise he keeps himself clean-shaven, and the charnel scent that accompanies him completes the image of a monster. Only his deep brown eyes hint at his remaining humanity. Nasch typically dresses in clothing suitable for his environment, though it's perhaps a bit careworn. He is animated when speaking and unable to contain his passions, but he can swiftly transform into a creature of silent paranoia that is notably uncomfortable around others.

Roleplaying Hints: The Circassian is alternately terrified of the dreadful fate that he's certain will soon be his – the one he knows he deserves – or manically focused on a scheme that will earn him just enough time to achieve his short-term goals before rebellion once again erupts around him. He is at constant war with himself, seeking to avoid attention for his own safety while at the same time craving the cruel pleasure that betrayal and upheaval bring him. He is an awful creature, a liar for a lie's own sake and devilishly deceitful.

Haven: Most of the time, Nasch's haven is a private, secure home or small structure far from the path any Kindred would have reason to tread. He does not invite others into his domain, and is always prepared to relocate should it be discovered.

Influence: Among the Anarch Movement, Nasch is as much admired as a leader as he is reviled as a Jonah. While educated Anarchs respect him for his role in the Anarch Revolt, they also see him as the liar he is, knowing he has no loyalty to their sect. Cagey Anarchs may try to exploit Nasch both as the inspiring figure his Presence projects, but also as a necessary sacrifice for the dominant sect if their revolution or subsequent barony fails. This ruse itself usually comes apart as those who would use Nasch fall under the sway of his Presence (and they almost always do). The Camarilla certainly has no love for the Ventrue traitor, but it has refrained from formally pursuing his destruction on account of... things certain Malkavians and Nosferatu whisper about the Circassian.



MARC de BRABANT

Shadow Prince-Apostate

Deus vult! The cry of madmen, tyrants, and fools. We can never know God's will. That is all the more reason to treasure our own

Given to the care of the local Benedictine priory by peasant parents who were too poor to feed him, Marc de Brabant grew up in the 12th century half-expecting to become a monk. At the age of 16, he ran away from the priory in a fit of adolescent rebellion following the death of his beloved mentor, and took up an itinerant's life across France, eking out a meager living as an agricultural laborer. He sought, in a vague and incoherent way, some kind of purpose in life, and he found it, for a time, in the preaching of a young man named Stephan of Cloyes, the leader of the so-called Children's Crusade.

The "children" were in reality not children at all, but young peasants short of work and long on idealism. Stephan of Cloyes, whom history remembers as a 12-year-old boy, was actually a charismatic fanatic in his early 20s. The presumptuousness of this unwashed peasant and his ragtag army horrified the nobles and churchmen of Paris, who preemptorily sent them on their way, but Marc continued to believe in Stephan as the crusade meandered through France to the port of Marseilles. There, the naive and idealistic young vagabonds were offered free passage to the Holy Land by unscrupulous merchants who shackled them and sold them as a lot in the slave markets of North Africa.

Marc ended up in the service of a fat, greasy, Algerian merchant, who discovered that the youth had a remarkable memory. The slave became a living ledger-book in addition to a whipping boy and a reluctant catamite. The merchant tried to cheat the Kindred who would become Marc's sire, Megan of Bristol, who promptly offered the Algerian a choice between an ignominious death or signing over his wealth and property to Marc. The merchant chose the latter and

vanished into the night, presumably to die of old age in safe anonymity.

Next, Megan offered Marc a choice: life as an independent merchant, or the Embrace as her lieutenant. True loyalty, she told him, could not be demanded, only offered freely. She wanted his loyalty; she could be sure that she had it only if she gave him a genuine say in the matter.

Marc had spent his life doing what others had claimed was the will of God. He hadn't precisely lost his faith, but he had certainly lost his faith that anyone did or could know what God's will actually was. In place of blind faith, he would, he decided, simply have to follow his own will, hope that it found favor in God's eyes, and support the right of others to do the same. Megan offered him power, wealth, and immortality. Why should he fear a Damnation preached by a Church whose doctrine he could no longer believe actually represented God's plan?

His first few decades of coping with the Beast gave him more than sufficient answer to that question. But by then, it was too late, and his years as a slave had taught him a great deal about surviving a harsh existence.

The Crusades opened an avenue of profit for those who had an entrepreneurial spirit, savvy Kindred among them. From the Ventrue lords whose martial might gave them a valuable asset, to the Lasombra and Toreador who wielded influence in the Church, to an offshoot of the Cappadocians who supplied the Crusades via their trade routes, holy war made many Cainites rich. Marc, as the junior member of a coterie that included his sire and grandsire, spent the High Middle Ages roaming Europe and the Mediterranean Basin, laying the foundations of a trading and banking empire that would one night extend into India and the New World as well. With the War of Princes under way,

his coterie was able to parlay its services as couriers and (occasionally and very discreetly) spies, in exchange for permission to operate in the domains of many different Cainite rulers. Of these august elders, no few went on to become luminaries in the Camarilla or the Sabbat.

By the late 14th century, Marc had developed some sympathy for the nascent Anarch cause in its early stages, but that withered away as the Revolt gave way to the rabid Sabbat. He still believed that everyone, Cainite and kine, should have a chance to choose his own destiny and the Sabbat Vaulderie, in his view, eroded that choice in the name of a brutally wielded doctrine that merely replaced God with Caine. The Camarilla might be the vehicle of oppressive elders, but at least most of them took a hands-off approach to what their subjects believed, so long as they observed the Traditions and rendered tribute. And the Masquerade protected the kine by default, even if that wasn't its true purpose. Over the next two centuries, Marc became an advocate for the Camarilla at Gangrel Gatherings throughout Europe, building a (somewhat undeserved) reputation as one of the sect's greatest supporters.

By the dawn of the Renaissance, Marc de Brabant had amassed for himself a fortune, riding the tides of profit that came from the centuries-old struggle between Christ's followers and Mohammed's. As the Crusades wound down, Marc's coterie felt the weight of the ages and gradually dispersed. The Age of Faith gave way to the Age of Rebirth, and while much of the cultural landscape of Europe turned its attentions to the glory of the classical era, Marc found himself looking forward instead. Practicing a policy of enlightened self-interest, Marc found himself alienated from other, more primal Gangrel at the same time he found himself at odds with the more urbane Kindred of Renaissance cities. With unprecedented clarity of thought, Marc turned his outsider status and uncommon perspective from a liability into an asset. As his relationship with his fellow Gangrel grew remote, he engaged in Jihad where the more "refined" Kindred usually plied their schemes: in the city.

Those refined Kindred saw an anomaly in Marc, a Kindred who thought in terms of structures and systems rather than individual gains. He was especially popular in the salons of Brussels, where he ultimately decided to establish a haven. For Marc, the proximity to power but the distance from the serpentine courts of Rome and Venice was a great boon. Here, he could propose his systems of Kindred governance with the pomp of the Camarilla but the modern outlook of the Anarchs.

And though his personal ideals flirted with political heresy in the opinions of the moneyed gentry of the Ivory Tower, his forward-looking financial savvy earned him a number of influential patrons, who became merchant princes in the same idiom as their Italian counterparts. While the southern Renaissance thrived in Florence and Venice, in the north, Brussels was the seat of enlightenment and prosperity, no small amount of which originated with this charismatic Gangrel who brought his traveled insights to the opulence of the Flemish courts.

In time, a coterie of Dutch Kindred who aligned themselves with the Camarilla, familiar with Marc's history and sect politics, extended him an offer. The New World promised great opportunity, and their interest was looking for an agent who might take the "company" to new domains across the Atlantic Ocean.

By this time, Marc had settled into the luxury so many elders seek, and knew that unless he undertook a new challenge, he risked falling into the licentiousness of post-Renaissance privilege that the emergent Reformation sought to remedy. The Beast within him had grown comfortable and lethargic, and the wild Gangrel with whom he shared his blood would be ashamed of his success. He had become a lapdog, an advisor to Princes, and a victim of his own ability to see the way of the world before it happened.

With this in mind, Marc left his riches in his beloved Brabant. Provisioned by wealthy patrons, he followed the course of Henry Hudson to the New World, where he established himself as an overseer of company interests in Fort Orange.

And then he vanished from history.

Kindred knowledgeable in the politics of the New World sects believe that Marc de Brabant took his patrons' money and used it to establish a network of petty domains, each of which fell under the sway of one faction or another while ultimately funneling their tribute back to a "Prince" who ruled from the far-reaching dark of the North American forests. As Dutch interests favored free trade, a shadow market emerged in which mortal chattels and Kindred assets found safe passage to the New World, where they were quietly delivered to their masters. Gangrel trappers, guides, and couriers crisscrossed the region, tithing some of their earnings to the unseen lord of the region, who then ensured that some amount of it made its way back to the Netherlands and into the coffers of the company. Marc de Brabant may have gone, but his investors knew

better than to ask questions, so long as the ledgers remained in the black.

Marc de Brabant has not succumbed to torpor or met Final Death at the claws and fangs of some Lupine horror, however. He learned of Golconda from the Methuselah Menele during that Brujah's ancient vendetta with Helena, when the two crossed paths after the Dutch seized Spanish holdings in the West Indies. Marc sought personal redemption after making his fortune profiteering with the slave trade, and set out on the difficult path of Golconda to achieve it. Ultimately, the way of Golconda proved too arduous, and the Gangrel plunged into a period of self-exile, during which, despite fits of fugue, he reigned as the power behind the minor fiefdoms he had helped establish in the name of the company. In the form of wolf, bat, or creeping mist, Marc followed a path across the country and back for centuries that only he understood. Only during the past several decades has he felt any impetus to retake the shape of a man and see what has come of the world in the absence of his eye for profit.

And so it has been for the centuries between the Dutch trade company period and now. Even as the Sabbat and Camarilla clashed, as domains burned, praxis shifted, and territories passed from the clutches of one night-fiend to another, the money kept flowing. Those who tried to withhold their tribute from the invisible Prince of the petty domains surrounding the prestigious ones felt not the ruinous claws of a berserk Outlander, but the cold vengeance of a remote master. Their partners soured on them, their contacts abandoned them, their families suffered hardships, and their interests waned. For vampires may come and go in a domain, but steadier than the tides of Kindred politics are the customs of mortals. In some of the petty domains, Marc's interests had been paying tribute to their mysterious patron for five generations. And when some upstart Ventrue or hell-bent Lasombra shows up in the lesser territories on the fringes of the more prominent domains, he's seen as an outsider. Far safer to do as the family has always done and keep paying the "dividend" to the boss who visits only at night and let him deal with it.

The scheme didn't always work. Marc had to temporarily abandon a domain or let an ally languish more than once. The territory was simply too vast, and the number of Kindred psychos each of the sects is willing to throw at each other too overwhelming to engage. As ever, though, Marc knew that patience and slow confidence would always win out over reckless bravado. Although he grew up in Crusading era of the

early 13th century, and spent his first Cainite years as a bit player in the War of Princes, Marc de Brabant finds his medieval world-view surprisingly relevant to the 21st century. From the mom-and-pop antique shops of St. Lawrence county to the foundries of Allentown, from the lonely domains of the Adirondacks to the bridge-town territories crossing the Schuylkill, the tribute trickles up to the unseen Prince.

Deus Vult

The popular crusades, including the misnamed Children's Crusade, were a kind of ideological and theological revolt. Mainstream crusading was an aristocratic enterprise organized by the Church; the popular crusaders were peasants who thought themselves directly inspired by God. Mainstream crusading was all about putting the infidel to the sword; the popular crusades advocated peaceful conversion through love and redemption. Mainstream crusading was a rich lord's craft; the popular crusades associated holiness with poverty and humility. Unlike later revolts such as Wat Tyler's, though, the popular crusades weren't about challenging the existing social order, though they did implicitly challenge the moral authority of its leaders.

The tragic end of the Children's Crusade destroyed Marc's certainty that he was doing God's work. His distrust of the Church's moral vision widened to encompass grand visions or ideologies of any kind (which remains his main quarrel with the Anarchs and their ill-defined notions of "freedom"). But his attitudes are still largely shaped by the events of Children's Crusade and its aftermath. He retains a tarnished faith in God, but is still instinctively distrustful — if not outright hostile — toward any religious figure who claims to speak for Him. Saracens, Jews, gays... the targets change, but the tired old calls to Holy War against them stay the same. The Sabbat's conversion-by-the-sword ideology, so eerily reminiscent of the mainstream crusading movement of his youth, is simply the most extreme manifestation of the phenomenon, in his eyes.

Marc still clings, albeit weakly, to the idea that converting an enemy is better than destroying one. After eight centuries in the darkness, he uses violence with a casualness that would have horrified his younger self, and his belief in the efficacy of love and redemption has long since withered away, but he'll always prefer a peaceful resolution to a violent one. Of course, his ideas of "peaceful" now include the Kindred portfolio of lies, manipulation, deceit and treachery, but an echo of his old conviction still remains. So, too, does his

belief in good and evil and the importance of pursuing a higher moral purpose, which is why he nominally supports the Camarilla and occasionally indulges the title of Prince. The Camarilla, horribly flawed as it is, at least observes Humanity as the proper moral path, and persuasion and negotiation as the default mode of interaction between Kindred. Not, to be sure, for ethical reasons, but the end result is the same. As he puts it, “The Camarilla creates morality the way a Victorian factory created smog. It’s an unwanted by-product that the owners would gladly be rid of, but the air’s still thick with it”.

The appreciable wealth Marc has accumulated came as a result of a more practical kind of revolution: the tremendous development of shipping, trade, and related arts like cartography that took place across the Mediterranean basin as a result of the Crusades. He spent his early centuries in constant travel, sometimes through the domains of hostile Cainites, with his wits and resourcefulness constantly challenged. Perhaps it was the habits of mind established in that era that have allowed him to avoid two of the endemic banes of elder Kindred – stagnation and a tendency to rely on others to do his dirty work.

Tonight, Marc’s fortunes are a fraction of what they once were, but those incomes are steady, if dirty, and still enough to keep him well appointed. Like a medieval reeve collecting the taxes, Marc prowls among his tenant domains, taking blood and money at every stop of the territory that stretches for hundreds of miles. He’s no stranger to the more populous domains, and he nurses a penchant for travel that’s well-served by his Gangrel lineage and his practical experience moving through what others would consider a Lupine-haunted backwater. Those seeking a quiet transition from one domain to another might of necessity move through Marc’s “border domains,” and he may find himself amiably disposed – or wrathful if an interloper is reluctant to provide the proper tribute or tithe.

Sire: Megan of Bristol

Clan: Gangrel

Nature: Competitor

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 10th

Embrace: 1216

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 4, Leadership 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge (confidence) 4

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette (Elysium) 4, Larceny 4, Performance (acting) 4, Stealth 4

Knowledges: Academics 3, Finance 5, Investigation 4, Occult 3, Politics 5

Disciplines: Animalism 5, Auspex 2, Celerity 2, Fortitude 5, Obfuscate 3, Protean 5

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5, Generation 3, Herd 3, Influence 3, Mentor 3, Resources 5, Retainers 5, Status 4

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 4, Courage 4

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 7

Image: Marc stands around five-and-a-half feet tall. His build is thin, but his early life as an peasant laborer shows through in his wiry muscle. He has a slender-boned face, with short, fair hair. His body has relatively few permanent animal features, given his many years of comfort, and these he conceals using Mask of a Thousand Faces. Embraced a few months after his 20th birthday, he uses his youthful looks to pose as a college student when he hunts, and he usually dresses the part.

Roleplaying Hints: Your distrust of the harmful ideologies and ideologies of the cosmopolitan domains has itself becomes a harmful ideology, and your desire to avoid abuse at the hands of more established Kindred powers makes you demanding at best and yourself abusive at worst. While you genuinely prefer the rigors of the Path of Humanity, you’re perhaps a little too comfortable with choosing a lesser evil when “good” seems too difficult, and quite ruthless toward anything you can label overtly “evil.” You sometimes affect a benevolent mien, and by the standards of a Kindred elder, you may well be, but you’re also capable of a great deal of vengeance, spite, and catastrophic violence when you consider yourself taken advantage of.



RODERIGO AL-DAKHIL

Lich of the Dead City

For all the time he has existed, Roderigo al-Dakhil best remembers his few bright shining years as one of the architects of fate.

His first touch of magic almost broke him. As a Castilian soldier in the army fighting to reclaim Cadiz, he'd drilled for the day when he encountered the Moors, like many young men he knew. But the reality was very different from the stories, from the scenarios a fervent young Spanish man had woven in his imagination.

Gone were the monsters he was sure the Moor would be, flaunting God's grace and the sovereignty of his beloved Spain. When he drove his sword through the first of his enemies, it stuck, trapped between two ribs. He pulled and grunted, trying to work it free, while the dying man screamed his life away and soiled himself.

The reality wasn't noble or brave — it was horrifying. This was a man, a man with a mother and two younger brothers, Roderigo saw somehow, a man with a lover who at that moment was praying for him to return to her safely. He glimpsed all those who were important to the dying man: a loving son, a devoted brother, a passionate and tender lover.

And when the man died, Roderigo's soul shattered.

He woke to find a strange monk bending over him on the nighttime remnants of the battlefield. The man shushed him and told him to rest. The monk blessed the body of his slain enemy and took Roderigo away to explain what had happened. He was now one of the secret angels of the world, blessed by God with a great destiny. On his head and soul was placed the mark of Uriel, the angel of death.

For a year, Roderigo learned from his new mentor Brother Figueroa. Once Cadiz had fallen and Roderigo released to go home, the two undertook a long journey along the Silk Road. Eventually, they found themselves in Turkey, where Brother Figueroa introduced him to other magi like himself, in a citadel carved by magic

within the volcano called Nemrut Dagi. They were not only Muslims and Christians, nor even all People of the Book. They belonged to every faith Roderigo had ever heard of, and several more besides. And all claimed the same destiny: to bring an ending to the world when the thread of Fate was overlong.

There he studied the arts of destiny, death and the afterlife. He learned the great Mysteries of this order of death-sages. Roderigo met ghosts from ancient civilizations, and mystics from all corners of the world. He met stranger figures, as well, including the one who would have the most lasting impact on his existence, the scholar and necromancer called Mokhadaji Ranpur, a vampire of great age.

Ranpur and Roderigo spent many nights together, discussing the nature of the dead and death itself. From Ranpur, Roderigo first learned of the soul of a whole city, an ancient city lost in the howling ghost-winds of the Underworld. In time, however, the order to which Roderigo belonged came under attack by their enemies. Ranpur disappeared one night, returning whence he'd originally come, with only a written promise to Roderigo that they would meet again.

Roderigo found his soldierly talents in demand once more as their enemies sent great and shining angelic spirits to bring an end to the "spiritual corruption" they claimed had taken root in the volcano. He and all his order fought hard, but they were outmatched. At the suggestion of Brother Figueroa, the magicians of the order performed a great ritual to move their citadel to the mountains of northern Spain.

Over the next several years, Roderigo and the vampire Ranpur carried on an extended correspondence, carried through the winds of the Underworld by the voices of ghosts bound to their service. By the time Roderigo had seen his fifteenth year as a sorcerer, his power had grown, and for the first time he ventured into the Underworld.

Into the Dead Lands

His journey was fraught with dangers to body and soul, particularly for a lone magus, and he braved their terrors with an iron will. Following one of the ghosts bound to his and Ranpur's correspondence, he managed to find his way to the strange black city in the heart of the afterlife.

Sadly, these walls did not offer him sanctuary, but dangers greater than any he'd faced. A small moment, a lapse in judgment and the black horrors that lurked within those ancient walls snuffed Roderigo al-Dakhil's life. Before his soul fled him entirely, however, Mokhadaji Ranpur found and Embraced him.

Thus, he woke a second time as a changed creature. For a time, the loss of his connections to the realms of spirit and magic broke him, and he howled in a prison labyrinth beneath the ancient city.

For years, Ranpur would venture down into the cells where the mad neonate dwelt, and simply sit and talk. He spoke on many topics – Hindu theology, philosophies of the ancients, funereal customs, the role of fate in mankind's destiny. Ranpur read to Roderigo from the *Guarded Rubrics*, the sacred texts of the Tal'Mahe'Ra, the sect that Ranpur served as a *Rawi*. In time, through sheer pedagoguery and tenacity, Ranpur restored some sanity back into his suffering child.

For almost a century, Roderigo remained in the Dead City, learning at the feet of his master. He read the crumbling libraries of the Tal'Mahe'Ra and spoke with its most learned sages. He listened to the philosophies of the enigmatic Del'Roh and made himself available to the sect's Liches for any tasks that might need the attentions of a young and eager Kindred.

Finally, at the dawn of the 15th Century, he petitioned the Basalt Throne for permission to return to the mortal world. The Del'Roh considered the request for one week before granting permission. Roderigo would go and serve as an agent of the Dead City in the world of mortals, however, acting as the voice of the Del'Roh to those Cainites of the sect who worked to inflame the Inquisition against the rebellious childer of the Antediluvians.

Seeker of Heresy

For years Roderigo worked tirelessly in Spain, applying a gentle pressure to the agents of the Church. Many vampires claimed to have controlled the Inquisition through the years, but if any came close to it, it was Roderigo. Even his influence was subtle, consisting of

whispers in the right ears, relaying information on the whereabouts of vampires to them occasionally and – most important of all – preventing any other Kindred from gaining unreasonable sway over the Inquisition.

While acting in this capacity, he found evidence of strange heresies among the Bogomils. While the Tal'mahe'Ra specialized in seeding their own strange rituals and beliefs into the heretical notions of mortals, this was different. According to one informant, these Bogomils used full stanzas from the *Guarded Rubrics* as liturgy of some kind in their debased chthonic rites. Moreover, they quoted the *Rubrics* with verses that Roderigo had never heard of, suggesting that they might possess a fuller copy of the *Rubrics* than had been seen to date.

Delivering responsibility for continuing his work to another agent of his sect, Roderigo departed immediately for Kievan Rus. Upon his arrival, he found the truth of the matter soon enough. These Bogomils did indeed worship the wicked demiurge of their Gnostic faith using a tattered, but almost complete copy of the *Guarded Rubrics*.

The gap-toothed, cloudy-eyed priest merely smiled and pointed to the ground. Clearly, some Kindred who masqueraded before these degenerates as a demon or devil of some kind had left it with them. But for what purpose? Intrigued, Roderigo remained, copying the *Guarded Rubrics* and continuing to investigate the origins of the manuscript.

Weeks later, however, he discovered the truth of its origins when an ancient Gangrel rose from the ground at the center of the village. The priest's gesture was not an indication of infernal origins; it referred to an earth-melded vampire. Roderigo introduced himself, explaining why he was present in this elder's domain.

The Gangrel's name was Mitru, who claimed to have once been a Prince, but who sickened of the ways of the Damned and retired to the crags and forests away from the cities of the Eastern Lord Ventrue and their wretched minions. This raggedly bound, scrawled manuscript had belonged to one of them before he'd removed her worthless head from her neck. The manuscript had been among the things he'd claimed as his trophy. Since it did him no good, he'd given it to these degenerate Gnostics, who believed him some kind of apostle of their demiurge.

Unfortunately, far from solving the riddle, it merely deepened it. True Hand holy writ stolen from the hands of a secular Ventrue at the bloody whim of a Prince who abandoned his domain and had gone to haven in a den of heretics? Madness.



Finally, though, Roderigo's probing and questions raised Mitru's suspicions, and then his ire. When his herd of Bogomils came to regard Roderigo as a figure of importance for his knowledge of the *Guarded Rubrics*, it was the last straw. Mitru attacked the interloper late at night, and Roderigo escaped only by befuddling the Outlander with hostile ghosts. He fled west, stealing the tattered copy of the *Guarded Rubrics* as Mitru screamed his rage into the night.

Among the Rroma

Although Mitru pursued him, Roderigo found aid and succor with strange nomads whose people had been trickling into Europe in small numbers for the past few decades. They called themselves the Rroma, and those who aided Roderigo claimed they did so at the behest of their ancient patron, the spirit called Mokhadaji Ranpur.

He learned that the elder vampire had been watching his endeavors, and reporting his successes to the Del'Roh. His sire lent his aid where he could, mainly through the network of temporal connections he'd somehow managed to keep intact through the years. These connections slowly became Roderigo's.

Roderigo and his caravan of gypsies arrived in Western Europe just in time to encounter the Black Death, and the devastation was terrible. Worse, they were often hounded by minions or childer of the Princes of the western domains, who considered Roderigo's intrusion a violation of the Traditions.

One by one they came, and Roderigo defeated or confounded them. One such agent of a Bohemian Prince realized that he could not slay the necromancer alone, and so Embraced one of the young women of Roderigo's Rroma family, a young woman named Reveka. This Nosferatu agent hoped to use her to strike at the necromancer unaware, he underestimated the ties of the Rroma with one another – even one who'd become accursed *shilmulo*. His plots undone, the Prince's childe fled with specters on his trail.

Ashamed that the aid his hosts gave him selflessly was repaid by the death and cursing of one of their daughters, Roderigo swore to avenge her. Departing to find the fleeing Nosferatu, Roderigo found Reveka following him, insisting that she be allowed to take her revenge. Although hesitant at first, Roderigo agreed, and set about teaching her the intricacies of her undead state.

In a short time, they found the Prince's pawn and the confrontation was short and brutal. In the grip of frenzy, Reveka consumed her sire's blood and plucked the amaranth of his soul, consuming him wholly.

Returning to the encampment, Roderigo and Reveka found the small tribe fled, broken off in a dozen directions, each going their own way, in hopes of evading the *shilmulo*. Roderigo offered what comfort he could to the mourning Reveka, promising her that she would never be alone. From that night forward, Roderigo acted as a sort of surrogate sire to Reveka.

The two traveled Europe for a time, though the Black Death scourged all of Christendom. In the midst of the devastation, the two became lovers – a carrion duo, she skulking among shadows and he devouring the flesh of those wretches she delivered to him. In time, however, Roderigo’s duties called him back to Spain. The two parted ways then, for Reveka felt that she could call no domain her true home. Privately, Roderigo suspected that she sought her family. He only hoped it wasn’t to kill them.

The Anarch Revolt

In the late 1300s, a fury gripped the Blood of Caine, like a frenzy that overtook them as a race. The Anarch Revolt sundered all of Kindred society, and stories of atrocities trickled in to Roderigo’s havens in Spain. As the Revolt ran its course, strict lines of allegiance emerged, and the war of factions left no place for those who wished to avoid the strife. Unfortunately, it was not Roderigo’s intellect that chose his place, but his affections.

Reveka returned in the early 1400s, a harried creature full of fear. “Hide me,” she begged him, and her kisses tasted of old blood and wormwood. Her nightmares were terrible, and for a time she was deeply afraid of the dark. Eventually, Roderigo prised the full story from her, a story of the ultimate rebellion. She’d joined the coterie of a Cainite named Gratiano, and together they’d done the impossible. They had consumed the heartsblood of an Antediluvian.

The horror of her act was almost too much to bear for Roderigo. What would his masters say, his masters who revered the Ancients in some capacity? Knowing that this act would not go unremarked upon in the Black City, Roderigo found safe haven for Reveka and entered the Underworld.

Arriving at the foot of the Basalt Throne, he found the Tal’Mahe’Ra just as he suspected he might, in a state of wrath over his protégé’s betrayal. Seeking justice for the destruction of one of the Holiest, its elders demanded swift and terrible punishment for those responsible. Knowing the ways of heretics and blasphemers as few other did, Roderigo spoke up against that plan.

Wouldn’t it be better, he argued, to shape this nascent tool to their ends, rather than shatter it? Why make martyrs

of those involved, when they might make amends for their evils, willing or not? Roderigo won many enemies in the Black City that night, but the Del’Roh merely narrowed its ancient eyes, and gestured for him to continue.

If this force were guided away from the actual resting places of the Antediluvians, and instead directed against the many elders who’d built empires in the mortal world, it might succeed where the Inquisition had been intended to work, but failed. The Church would not bring its might to bear against the elders who accrued the kind of power that might allow them to battle the Antediluvians at the End of Days. A ravenous pack of hounds, clamoring for their heart’s blood, on the other hand...?

“We must command them, and shape them,” he said in his quiet, refined tones. “With ourselves among them in ways we never could be among the Inquisition, let us chain this rabid dog rather than put it down, and unleash it upon our foes.”

The Del’Roh considered, and the *Rawis* spoke in favor of the suggestion. The voice of Roderigo’s sire was loudest among them, and finally the Del’Roh assented. “Let us forge of them a sword, with its hilt firmly in our grasp,” was the command from the Basalt Throne, and Roderigo was empowered to make that happen.

Returning to the world of flesh, Roderigo engaged Reveka in his plan. She had already proven herself to the rising Sabbat, and she quickly found her way into its growing throng again. From the shadows, Roderigo aided her, slaying her rivals and seeing that her own goals were realized.

Even as Reveka helped to shape the movement, however, Roderigo became aware of other forces operating within it. With time, research and the interrogation of at least one vampire, he found a name: the Lost Tribe. His masters in the Black City identified this as a sect of vampires from the cradle of civilization, founded by ancient rebels against the authority of Alamut. By this Roderigo’s time, however, it consisted of little more than outcasts and rebels of Haqim’s get. The Lost Tribe had become practically a cult, dedicated to the destruction of the Ancients in revenge for Zillah, whom they revered.

Forced to conceal himself more carefully, Roderigo’s efforts became a game of cat and mouse, requiring him to avoid discovery while uncovering those who also hid in the shadows of this Anarchs’ Movement.

Forging the Sword of Caine

While Roderigo was not himself present at this momentous occasion, Reveka was nearby, ready to lend aid to her compatriots should it be required. The wildest of the Anarchs christened themselves the Sabbat, and

Reveka was one of its first adherents. She seemed the perfect fit for the new movement, exulting in the rituals introduced by the old orthopraxic Lasombra who still longed for some measure of religious symbolism, and the hoary *kolduns* among the Tzimisce.

In short order, Reveka became a respected member of the burgeoning Sabbat, well-regarded for her dauntless pride and tenacity. In many ways, the Nosferatu *antitribu* counted her as one of the first among them, and she was among the first in the Sabbat to use the term “pack” to describe the cohort she gathered for herself.

Returning from a year-long visit to the Black City to report his actions and continue his education in the theology of the Tal’Mahe’Ra, Roderigo discovered a change in Reveka, not the least of which was a strange black crescent tattooed to her palm. She had joined the faction of assassins and warriors made up of the remnants of the Lost Tribe.

More terrifying still, she’d suggested calling the group the Black Hand, a name that seemed to stick. Not once had Roderigo ever mentioned the vulgar name of the Tal’Mahe’Ra to his adopted childe. How did she know of it? Had someone suggested it to her? She was evasive on the matter, dismissing it as unimportant, something she’d thought of in the passion of the moment when she’d seen some of the others sporting the black crescents.

In the Dead City, Roderigo claimed to have fostered the name himself through his adoptive childe, and quickly called for more Tal’Mahe’Ra initiates to infiltrate the Sabbat and its Black Hand. Over the next decade or so, younger members of the cult and the childer Embraced for the specific purpose of seeding it with agents were all inducted into the Sword of Caine, while Roderigo continued to see the disciples of the Lost Tribe.

The necromancer quickly found his power base threatened with the death of Reveka. Intoxicated with her own growing power, the ancilla Nosferatu *antitribu* decided that she was owed a position of more authority within the Black Hand, and foolishly challenged one of its leaders. Roderigo’s agents told him that not only did the Assamite *antitribu* extinguish her life mercilessly, but did so with such ease that he could only have been far older than he claimed.

Enraged, Roderigo stepped from the Underworld into the haven of his childe’s murderer and slew him as he slumbered during the day, scattering his ashes in the howling tempests of the dead lands. In the last moments of the Assamite’s existence, he threatened the

retaliation of the Lost Tribe, and Roderigo understood then. The elder leaders of the Zillah-worshipping cult were not hiding behind the Black Hand. They were in it, posing as younger vampires. He then returned to the Dead City, grief-stricken and disillusioned.

There was no way he could exert the kinds of influence on the Sabbat that they could, Roderigo realized, even manipulating multiple agents from afar. No control is quite so firm as direct control, and his own lineage and occult talents were strange enough to invite unwelcome scrutiny.

Returning to the Basalt Throne, he begged that this burden be lifted from him, and the Del’Roh agreed. His sire Ranpur lauded his achievements before the Basalt Throne and other *Rawis*, however, urging the Del’Roh to consider a position worthy of his devotion and successes. To Roderigo’s shock, she agreed, naming him one of the Liches of the Ancient City.

The Third Lich

For several hundred years, though, Roderigo found his new position demanding of him — almost fatally so. The Liches of the Ancient City are rivals beneath their skull-masked veneers of politeness and *noblesse oblige*. His sire aided him where he could, but his greatest aid was demanding that Roderigo seek out and master blood magics with the fervor with which he had once learned magic as a mortal.

As part of his researches, Roderigo often undertook journeys into the world of flesh. This made him unique among the Liches, and among many elders of the True Hand. He always made it a point to learn the nuances of the world, and how it had changed since he last was there. Even when in Enoch, the Sabbat agents of the Tal’Mahe’Ra often learned that they might foster a patronage with one of the venerable Liches if they but maintained correspondence with one who wished to know as much about the world as possible.

For decades, he studied the venerable necromancies chiseled into the walls of Enoch, and whispered into the crypts of the Aralu, hoping for a reply. Roderigo journeyed into the world of mortals frequently, investigating various forms of blood sorcery. The Tremere fascinated him, as did the blood sorceries of the Tzimisce and Assamites, but the paranoia and xenophobia of those clans prevented his acquisition of any but the most elementary of their mysteries.

The Giovanni, on the other hand, were a whole other business. Roderigo learned long ago that patronage was a quick route to obedience among the childer of Caine,

and the easiest way was to aid an ambitious Kindred in secret, without even that vampire knowing it. Roderigo put these methods to tremendous benefit, recruiting agents both on behalf of the True Hand and for himself.

In his investigations of the Giovanni, Roderigo discovered the ancient vampire named Apacia, an outcast Cappadocian who was neither cast into their founders' prison nor consumed by the childer of Augustus (though not for lack of trying). Her presence in the Sabbat drew his attention, and he approached her directly.

Suspecting that his normal subtleties would do nothing more than antagonize her, Roderigo instead chose to approach her with an open proposal of alliance. Fascinated with another Cainite necromancer not of the blood of Augustus, she returned his overtures. The two spent almost thirty years together in the 1600s, she teaching him the deathspeaker-lore of the Scythian peoples and the Cappadocian clan, and he subtly aiding the Sabbat in whatever of its goals interested Apacia.

In many ways, she reminded him of Reveka, though with the feral sort of barbarian wisdom Reveka might have developed if she'd existed long enough to cultivate it. By the early 1700s, their goals and obligations took them in separate directions, but the two remain bonded by oaths and Vinculi, as loyal as elders of the blood of Caine might ever be said to be.

Upon his return to Enoch, Roderigo found himself in a position of active knowledge of the Sabbat's workings that outstripped even the Del'Roh's preferred agent for such things, a Ventrue by the name of Karnof. It made him a new enemy in the Black City, but Roderigo publicly humiliated the Ventrue before the Del'Roh, demonstrating his own knowledge of the workings of the Sword of Caine. One of the *Rawis*, John Sidestorm, also made a case on Roderigo's behalf, citing the *Guarded Rubrics* as a precedent for Karnof's atonement: He must seek the forgiveness of the aggrieved for one thousand and one nights.

In response, the Del'Roh ordered the hierarchy shifted, and Karnof now answered to Roderigo. The Sabbat's status within the True Hand ceased to be one of political identity. By the command of the Del'Roh, the doings of the Sword of Caine were now an occult matter, within the purview of the Liches.

Although he remained in the Ancient City almost exclusively, Roderigo has never allowed his understanding of the Sabbat to fade to the risible levels

that Karnof did. Once a decade or so, he journeys into the world of flesh to speak with his agents and see the workings of the Sabbat himself.

Padre Cráneo

In the early 1900s, a hallucinogen-maddened pack priest in Guadalajara, Mexico spotted a skull-masked man among the nacreous caverns beneath the city where the young Tzimisce's pack held their Ritae. Over time, various Sabbat have seen him lurking here and there, and the tales about him have grown over time.

The name for the skull-faced figure has stuck: Padre Cráneo. Some packs have taken him as something of a totemic figure, incorporating the mortal rites for La Santísima Muerte into their Ritae, calling on Padre Cráneo to help them in an upcoming crusade. Others believe he was the herald of the Harbingers of Skulls, and yet others believe he is an identity that Sabbat elders in the Black Hand assume among themselves like a costume. Others wonder if he isn't perhaps a member of the Inconnu, seeking to eradicate the most monstrous of the Sabbat as an affront to the ideals the Inconnu hold precious.

For Roderigo's part, he is happy to be all of these things and more, so long as these urban legends serve him well. He takes a fledgling's delight in lending small aid to those packs that revere him, or in haunting those that fear him.

When the Black City was destroyed, Roderigo was one of the few among the upper echelons who managed to escape. Some among the Tal'Mahe'Ra whisper that he knew of the terrible storm, thanks to his alliance with Apacia, who somehow foresaw the maelstrom's devastation. However it happened, Roderigo was quick to gather those elements of the Tal'Mahe'Ra and establish a new sanctuary for them in the world of flesh. The tale had come full circle, and he offered the broken sect his cabal's sanctum in the mountains of northern Spain, which had been abandoned for many centuries.

Although he has gathered many of their agents together, it cannot be properly said that Roderigo al-Dakhil continues the traditions of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. The Aralu are gone, he assumes, and the Basalt Throne no more. In their absence, he maintains the resources and tactics of the True Hand, drawing on its agents for their own ends, subsisting on the stripped flesh of revenants bred to feed his hunger. He is something of a lost creature, an elder in his own right with no other power governing or commanding him. Some

of the former True Hand agents have claimed that he is merely consolidating the Hand's power to use for himself... and they may be right.

Sire: Mokhadaji Ranpur

Clan: Nagaraja

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Eye of the Storm

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1354 AD

Apparent Age: Late 30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 6

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics (Running) 2, Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Empathy 5, Intimidation 3, Leadership 5, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 4, Melee 4, Performance 2, Stealth (Urban) 5

Knowledges: Academics 4, Finance 2, Investigation 5, Law 3, Medicine 4, Occult 6, Politics (Sabbat) 4

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Dominate 4, Fortitude 3, Necromancy 6 (Sepulchre Path 5, Ash Path 5, Bone Path 3, Cenotaph Path 5, Corpse in the Monster 5, Grave's Decay 5, Vitreous Path 5), Obfuscate 3, Thaumaturgy 3 (Path of Blood 2, Elemental Mastery 2, Hands of Destruction 3, Movement of the Mind 2, Path of Corruption 1)

Necromantic Rituals: All Necromantic Rituals of up to ••••••••.

Thaumaturgical Rituals: Defense of the Sacred Haven, Devil's Touch, Domino of Life, Wake with

Evening's Freshness; Blood Walk, Recure of the Homeland; Clinging of the Insect, Incorporeal Passage

Backgrounds: Resources 3, Rituals 5, Status (True Hand) 4

Virtues: Conviction 4, Self-Control 5, Courage 4

Morality: Path of Bones 8

Willpower: 6

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 30/6

Image: Roderigo dresses in simple, dark clothing that fits his small frame well. He is generally quite innocuous, with slicked-back black hair and dark eyelashes. He is given to donning a stark bone skull mask, however, when he intends to be seen, to fearsome effect.

Roleplaying Hints: Roderigo is calm, the very image of the perfectly composed elder Kindred. He has a haunted, melancholy air to him, and seems to bear some measure of affection for the Sabbat, particularly its wild younger members.

Haven: His primary haven is in an old mage sanctum, concealed through cunning sorcery and now blood magic, in the mountains of northern Spain. Roderigo maintains multiple havens in areas that attract and hold his interest for any length of time. Currently, those areas include Mexico City, Cadiz, London and New York.

Influence: Although he has no influence to speak of in the mortal world, Roderigo was one of the Liches of the Tal'Mahe'Ra and even now still wields tremendous respect among the remaining True Hand agents. He is also one of the only members of the True Hand's leadership to survive the destruction of the Ancient City, as far as anyone knows.



ANDREW SENECA

Emissary of Lies

Born into slavery on a cotton plantation in Georgia, Andrew knew nothing but hard labor and the despair and exhaustion that slave owners deliberately cultivated in their chattel in hopes of keeping them too downtrodden to be trouble. He never knew his father, but from the whispers of the other slaves, he guessed that he was probably a by-blow of the master's "private time" in the slave quarters.

Andrew's mother worked hard for her boy, instilling in him the sort of manners that white folk liked in their slaves. His refined manners, combined with his quiet bearing and pretty face, drew the attention of his owners by the time he was fourteen. Shortly thereafter, the owner of the plantation, Jackson Mills, brought him into the house as his manservant.

His life in the plantation house was easier than out in the fields, that was for certain. But it was also very lonely. He rarely had the opportunity to socialize with the other slaves, and when he did, he found they resented "the easy life of the house nigger." Nonetheless, he found ways to help his mother, and she was grateful.

In time, he left the plantation with Mr. Mills on a trip to Virginia, visiting the tobacco plantation of an old friend of his master's. While there, he remained in the slave quarters at night. After that first night, he awoke feverish and ill, and all the other slaves regarded him with fear and pity. The next night, he remained awake and saw a shrouded woman enter the slave quarters. She approached him and was surprised to find him awake.

"Is there something I can help you with, miss?" he asked politely. She looked at him with surprise, and laughed. She introduced herself as Miss San Valentin, and she had the crisp accent of a Spaniard. She asked him about his life and they stayed up into the small hours, he sitting up against the headboard, she sitting on the edge of his bed.

The next night she came in, looked at him with that terrifying green-eyed gaze of hers and commanded him not to cry out or react with fear, and then she fell on the man sleeping in the bed next to him. Fear churned his gut as Andrew watched her sink tiny fangs into the man's throat and then gulp at the wound greedily. She stopped before he died, and licked the blood and wound away as though it had never been there.

Every night for the next week, she came into the slave quarters. Some nights, she came only to talk to Andrew. She was fascinated with the young man's pleasant wit and perspective on slavery. His life was wholly unlike anything she imagined, when she bothered to think of the lot of slaves. For his part, Andrew grew more and more fascinated with Monica San Valentin.

On the night before he and Mr. Mills were to return to Georgia, she asked him if he wanted to come with her, and to be like her. With only a little hesitation, he said that he did, and she stole him away that night. He dressed in his best clothes, and carried her luggage from the carriage to the train.

"That was your last chore as a slave, Andrew," she told him aboard her private car. She took all his blood that night, which felt like being submerged in icy water, and when he regained his senses he found himself suckling at her neck. As he came to, he felt two sensations that sat like great weights on him: a soul-deep hunger, and the terrible feeling that he'd traded one kind of slavery for another.

Andrew realized a short time later that those two things became intermixed with his Embrace, and he could feed only among the slaves, craving the taste of desperation and despair in their blood. Despite constantly being haunted by his own slave origins, Andrew learned quickly. Monica taught him to read by year's end, and he consumed book after book in her library.

Although he learned readily enough, it wasn't until Andrew read *On Benefits*, the treatise by Seneca that discusses the virtue of *humanitas*, particularly with regard to treatment of slaves, that what he read made an impact on him. For many nights thereafter, while learning about the Traditions of the Camarilla, its history and his lineage as a Ventrue, Andrew was distracted.

When she finally asked him what was wrong, he confessed, admitting to her that he thought he was in agreement with the ancient philosopher. Every part of existence was slavery of some kind, and genuine freedom was an illusion. Even the mighty Kindred were beholden to the laws of the Camarilla, to Tradition of clan and sect, and to the very Curse that defined them.

He wept to realize that the young man who'd foolishly given up his blood in hopes of freedom had bound himself to another set of shackles. Monica consoled him, explaining that what he'd found was a truism of their clan. But those who understood this must do everything in their effort to rise to the challenge of being slave to as few as possible, and master to as many as they might. This was an opportunity, she whispered, for him to become master of not just his once-fellow

slaves, but of all the kine. In time, he might even rule over the Kindred, if he were ruthless, clever and intent.

Andrew took the name of the scholar as his surname, considering the man's philosophy to be as much as part of who he was as his body and Blood. When Andrew Seneca was presented to the Prince of Philadelphia, how the Harpies tittered, each fascinated but trying to pretend to be scandalized at the presentation of a black man to the Prince's court.

In the next decade, however, he proved his worth to sire, court, and Prince many times over. Seneca was quick to appraise a situation and quick to react appropriately. Unlike many childer, he didn't rebel against the demands of the Ventrue elders. To his mind, even their bloodiest demands were steps on the road toward mastery, compared to the dead-end path of being another man's property.

By the 1820s, as the North inclined itself away from slavery, he found his supply of vitae was beginning to dwindle. In a short period, the needs of an increasingly compassionate civic mind and a sort of ruthless business mentality overlapped strangely, and it became clear that slavery would soon end in Philadelphia and the rest of the North. Wealthy owners moved their slaves South,



selling them to the plantations there that could always use more manpower.

After a discussion with Monica, he resolved to move South as well. Andrew sent his retainers ahead to scout out plantations that fit his needs while he tied up affairs in Philadelphia. His sire released him formally in the court of Philadelphia, and the Prince offered him a letter of introduction to the Prince of Atlanta. Some few in Philadelphia wished him well, primarily his sire and the Prince, but others – usually those who were in competition with him for the Prince’s favor – were glad to see him leave.

Andrew Seneca joined the Kindred of Atlanta at court, rendering his introductions and presenting his letter and lineage formally. His welcome was a frosty one, and he was warned against being found in others’ domains. He assured them that he would impinge on no one’s territory and left.

For the next few decades, he was an infrequent visitor to court, preferring to focus on his own efforts. He chose a handful of plantations away from Atlanta proper as his hunting grounds, feeding from among their slave barracks. Several of them were in financial trouble, and he assisted them, using his Disciplines to acquire bank loans and other aid for them, making ghouls of the owners.

Seneca’s life became one of simplicity, affording him the time to study the classics at his leisure, in extravagant guest housing in one of several plantations he all but owned by then. He took to studying law as well, and from there politics. Occasionally the Prince of Atlanta or the sneering elders of the city domain had something they needed of him, and he always acquiesced to their demands with grace, taking pride in exceeding their requests of him in all things.

By the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, Andrew Seneca saw the signs boiling up against slavery once more. It was infuriating. He’d worked so hard to consolidate his position, and yet now the politics of the kine threatened to strip him of his carefully cultivated herds. He bent all of his efforts toward preventing the end of slavery, joining in common cause with a great number of his clan, to their surprise.

Eventually, though, it all came to naught. With the Civil War, the kine destroyed his efforts. He was helpless to do anything to prevent the freeing of his indentured vessels, and he was forced to flee to other nations where slavery continued.

For the next several decades, Seneca haunted backwater domains often populated by thoroughly antagonistic Kindred – or worse – just to maintain a Herd from which he could feed. He made a point of keeping his hand in politics wherever he was, and observed the Americas from afar, watching the aftereffects of slavery’s forced abolishment on the psyche and laws of the United States.

Finally fleeing violence in a South American domain, Andrew Seneca returned to the United States in the early 1900s, intending to enter torpor there. Unfortunately, his wounds were grievous and his Beast thoroughly enraged. He frenzied upon arriving in Alabama, and awoke from his rage in the home of a freeman family, their dwelling a hideous bloody ruin. Fearful of having violated the traditions of the domain even before he could present himself to the Prince, he burned the home to the ground, affixing the flaming cross of the newly formed Ku Klux Klan to their front lawn to divert attention.

He fled the city by cargo train, returning to Atlanta. Along the way, he pondered what had happened, including the fact that his body did not reject the blood of that family. It was palatable to him. Perhaps it wasn’t slavery exactly that characterized their blood to allow him to feed – that family was certainly free, and had been for more than a generation. But still, they dwelt in a run-down shack, in a poverty-stricken neighborhood.

Seneca was forced to reconsider his assumptions about his feeding limitations. For a season, he explored his limits, eventually finding that it wasn’t slaves, specifically that he could feed on. There was something in the blood of those poor, displaced peoples that nurtured his Beast best. Desperation, and the knowledge that the law considered one less-than – or in the terminology of the day, “separate but” – equal.

With this newly discovered freedom, Andrew settled in to Kindred politics with gusto. Over the next few decades, he served as Primogen in both Atlanta and Birmingham, Alabama. He was a voice of stability, abhorring violence except when strictly necessary, preferring to use persuasion and alliances even on those who presented themselves as enemies.

When the Civil Rights movement finally showed itself as a lasting entity, Andrew Seneca found it alarming. His political and legal influences hardly had to do anything to keep such notions as full equality under wraps. The kine tended their own prejudices well enough that he had to do nothing but lend the occasional assistance

from the shadows. As such things develop, when legal recourse failed, the movement turned to protest and activism.

Seneca sent his servants to investigate this movement, hoping to find a way to dissolve or otherwise hinder it. What he discovered terrified him, a movement of strong, intelligent individuals no longer content to remain lesser-than. Bitterness and envy stirred within him. Where were such people in his day? Who were they to demand what he'd never had?

He told himself that he was merely acting to protect his feeding grounds, but there was more to it. Seneca worked subtly, implicating some of the movement's leaders in vice and scandal, discrediting them. But at every turn, he ran into men who were special. Men like one of the movement's leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr., whose will proved unassailable. The only time Seneca met the man directly, the reverend King merely regarded him with pity and shook his head sadly. Seneca felt his Beast rise in something like Röttschreck, and he took his leave to avoid an incident.

Eventually, though, he met Theo Bell. A fellow former slave, Bell was an Archon of the Brujah Justicar who was investigating the presence of Anarchs employing the Civil Rights movement as cover for their own activities. The two formed an uneasy political alliance: Seneca sought to destroy the Civil Rights movement, while Bell tacitly supported it. Still, both worked against the Anarchs throughout the South.

Seneca dutifully reported the activities of Anarchs who had attached themselves to the movement to Bell, who disrupted both Anarchs and activists out of necessity. In time, the two Kindred came to hate one another, though the Princes of the American South hailed them both for their efforts. Tonight, the pair remain cordial in public, despite the fact that the fragile alliance worsened over time into active hatred.

In the end, though, it was for naught. As always, it seemed, the kine insisted on directing their own destiny, despite the best efforts of the Kindred. With the advent of Civil Rights and their enshrinement as national law, Seneca was forced to restructure his existence.

In the modern nights, Andrew Seneca is a wanderer. By rights, he could probably rule any of his now-expanded domains as Prince, but he fears that his feeding restrictions make him too vulnerable to ever place himself in such a role of power.

In order to satisfy those feeding restrictions, Seneca is now involved in various forms of organized crime, farm

operations and manufacturing, all of which engage in various forms of human trafficking and illegal slavery. He is involved with brothels in which immigrants are kept imprisoned, with border-town sweatshops, and with farms in California, Texas, and Florida that employ migrant workers who are practically kept as slaves. He remains one step ahead of legal authorities in such situations, and works constantly through his influence and connections opposing anti-immigration laws, as well as laws that would grant more rights and protections to immigrant workers.

Seneca moves from domain to domain, tending to his needs, rarely staying for more than a year or so. He is inevitably granted domain visitation rights by the Prince of these places, as he is happy to help his hosts with any issues he can. He is also an avowed enemy of the Anarchs, forever bitter at their part in the success of the Civil Rights movement.

Sire: Monica San Valentin

Clan: Ventrue

Nature: Sadist

Demeanor: Director

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1807

Apparent Age: Early 20s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Empathy 5, Expression 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 3, Firearms 2, Larceny 1, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Finance 2, Investigation 3, Law 3, Politics 3

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 4, Fortitude 4, Obfuscate 2, Potence 1, Presence 4

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 4, Herd 4, Influence 4, Resources 5, Retainers 4, Status 4

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 3, Courage 3

Morality: Humanity 3

Willpower: 8

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 15/3

Image: Andrew is a tall, thin man of African-American heritage. He wears his hair shorn close to his

scalp, and has high cheekbones, beautiful, luminous eyes and a gentle smile. He dresses in crisply tailored business suits, with wire-rimmed glasses that give him a genteel, professional air. He speaks with a cultured, pleasantly deep voice.

Roleplaying Hints: Andrew exudes calm, confidence, and ability. But underneath, possibly deeper than he is aware, he is angry. He has watched as the kine freed those who were once like him, raising them up and giving them things he was never given, and that has left him a very bitter creature. His feeding tends to be sadistic, evoking fear and suffering as though he would make his vessels all pay for the indignities heaped on him while he was alive.

Allies & Contacts: Andrew maintains corporate, labor, and municipal contacts and allies everywhere he goes. He also maintains allies among human traffickers in the areas that he frequents. A Kindred named Petro Andryvyz keeps his apprised of affairs in the vampire courts of the American southeast while Andrew travels.

Herd: Unwilling prostitutes, migrant workers, sweatshop employees – these modern-day slaves make up the whole of Andrew's herd. They are scattered

through his various operations in the United States, and are all African-American. Although they are accustomed to very rough treatment at Seneca's hands, they are treated better than the others in their situations by their captors, as they maintain Andrew's good favor.

Influence: Andrew's potential national influence is fairly broad, but he restricts his manipulations to his immediate interests: labor laws, immigration policy and the like.

Retainers: Seneca maintains a handful of ghouls in his service. His constant companion is Darius, a manservant and bodyguard. The others are various officials and legislators.

Status: Seneca's influence in the Camarilla is the result of long decades of securing the respect of clan and sect. Most who know of him regard him as a steady, predictable and reliable Kindred who plays the game of prestatation with aplomb. If he were to settle down in any one locale, he would likely attain a position among that domain's Primogen, but he travels far too much to do so – something that those who would rather he didn't take a spot on their Primogen council are only too happy to accept.





JAROMIR CERNY

The Judas of Prague

It has been more than twenty years since the iron grip of the communists yielded in the historic Velvet Revolution, a tide of political, cultural, and intellectual change that set a precedent for peaceful regime change. Seemingly overnight, a population controlled by fear for more than four decades emerged from the darkness and breathed the air of freedom. No more did they have to look over their shoulders for government agents watching their movements. No more did they have to guard their words and fret about who might overhear their conversations. And no more did they sit up at night wondering when the black sedan might pull up and disgorge its monsters, men who had forsaken their souls in service to the Soviet nightmare. The bogeyman had been vanquished by simply pulling away the curtain of totalitarianism and allowing in the brilliance of the modern age with its free press, uncensored arts, and democratic elections. Or so it seemed.

Some bogeymen are stronger than others, however. Some are fiendish creatures not so easily slain, who survive by dint of cunning and unnatural gifts that permit them to not only endure turmoil, but to direct its transformative power to their advantage.

The people of the Czech and Slovakia believe that it was the beacon of freedom and the light of truth that made their revolution a peaceful and successful one. They believe that the dark times have fled, that the monsters of old are gone, and that they are free to chart their own path for the future of their nations. In the shadows of Prague's dim-lit streets, just beyond the light spilling from popular cafes filled with the optimistic voices of students, artists, and intellectuals, there is an almost inaudible sound, an inhuman presence that belies these notions and hints at the far more malignant truth.

Jaromir Cerny was the second son of a pair of prominent actors best known for their sometimes controversial performances on the Prague stage in the

late 1960s. In the political climate of the age, their work in the arts put them squarely in the crosshairs of the anti-reform minded wing of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC), which viewed the liberalization efforts of Alexander Dubček, the party's leader, as a threat to the socialist agenda. The so-called Prague Spring of back-and-forth political accusations and maneuvering ended when finally, on August 20, 1968, Warsaw Pact troops invaded in order to quell the perceived threat to communism that was blamed largely on the cultural and literary elites. The Cerny actors joined their friends and peers in demonstrating against the anti-reformists and stood with them to condemn the occupying soldiers and their Soviet masters. It came as a surprise to many, but these pacifistic tactics worked and the Soviets backed down from their plans to remove Dubček, preferring to simply provide him "guidance" to ensure that his reforms would pose no threat to the Soviet Bloc.

In the ensuing years, Lukas and Renata Cerny remained involved in the mostly intellectual movement to end communist rule in Czechoslovakia. Thus, even as a child Jaromir inherited their anticommunist sentiment and became a mascot of sorts to many of his parents' friends, who were convinced that the boy's generation would succeed in ending their oppression even if they could not.

Spending a great deal of time in theaters, young Jaromir followed in his parents' footsteps and appeared in plays across the city. At first most of his shows were comedic or simple fare that drew no attention beyond the theater crowd, but by his teens he had taken roles in plays that were not so easily overlooked by the government.

Dubček's reforms had been rolled back by the mid-1970s and life quickly became difficult, especially for those involved in the arts and the intellectual life. The resurgence of censorship in particular under the regime

of Gustav Husak had a significant impact on the people of Czechoslovakia, and nowhere was it felt more acutely than in Prague, a city once famous for its theaters, bookstores, and intelligentsia. Jaromir's parents' continued involvement in dissident expression and organizations led to their arrest after the final curtain call of one of their more inflammatory performances in the fall of 1976. They were escorted into a black sedan and, like so many others they knew, were never seen again.

Thus occurred the most transformative event in Jaromir's life. After being robbed of his parents and abandoned to face the world, the youth threw all his passion and energy into the underground opposition movement. When the historic Charter 77 manifesto was drafted he, along with more than 240 other leading thinkers, artists, and activists of the day – including Vaclav Havel, a renowned playwright, poet, and essayist – signed their names fully aware of the danger this invited. Upon its publication on January 6, 1977 the signatories were immediately accused of treason against the state and the government employed harsh punishments against them. However, these punitive actions were carried out as secretly as possible, for the government had no wish to create martyrs of the dissidents. This plan failed when some of the signatories and their supporters organized and made public what was happening. The communists ceased their pretense and arrested the leaders of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted (VONS), tried them in a kangaroo court, and sentenced them to prison.

Jaromir had joined Havel and his compatriots in VONS, but escaped a prison term. Despite his best intentions, he found himself unable to resist the StB secret police interrogators who abducted him from his home in the middle of the night and questioned him about his involvement in the Committee. He did not later remember what happened that night, but for weeks afterward was haunted by nightmares dominated by a pair of piercing, inhuman eyes that seemed to bore into his very soul and leave a legacy of physical pain with the merest glance. Shortly after his release, his “voluntary collaboration” with the regime was vigorously publicized by the state-controlled media in a largely successful effort to damn him in the eyes of his fellow dissidents.

During the 1980s, Jaromir was able to redeem some measure of his reputation as a devoted dissident. He assisted some of the *samizdat* publishers in producing and distributing outlawed literature, and he was

actively involved in helping promote various musicians whose music had been banned for being subversive. Although such work allowed him to reclaim some fraction of his former place among the revolutionaries, he continued to be denied a position of leadership on account of his tarnished past. Rather, he became an important go-between and increasingly found a sense of accomplishment from exercising a more indirect form of influence. He avoided the limelight and instead became adept at supporting – or manipulating – those who were more suited to leading the movement.

When the Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989, Jaromir was fully prepared for what he knew would soon be the transformation of the Czech intellectual revolution into an overtly political and quite possibly violent one. He occupied himself by helping to organize for this inevitability, shuttling between meeting places as the revolutionary movement prepared for the moment it would take direct action against the Communist regime. Throughout the summer, the movement had gained momentum and now, as Czech citizens watched in amazement while the Iron Curtain crumbled to the ground, the time had come for the people of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia to rise up and reclaim their long-lost freedoms.

On a snowy night shortly after leaving one such meeting place, Jaromir found his passage from a narrow alley cut off by a black sedan, a situation that gripped him with fear as he recalled the similar abduction of his parents years before. He considered turning and running, but his will to do so evaporated when one of the windows opened enough for him to see the two eyes burning in the darkness of the car's interior.

The same two eyes that had once haunted his dreams.

He found himself unable to move and, like a sheep to the slaughter, he entered the vehicle's open door in silent submission.

Not unlike his arrest by the secret police, Jaromir later recalled little about that car ride from the heart of the city. It was only later, upon his departure, that he learned that he had been driven northeast for nearly an hour to Kokorin Castle, an impressive fortress rising high above the surrounding countryside on a nearly insurmountable outcropping of rock. Dominated by a single tower, the castle had been purchased and meticulously restored from near-complete ruin early in the century by Vaclav Spacek, an aristocrat from Starburk. Spacek spent much of his vast fortune transforming the crumbling remains overlooking the Kokorin Valley back into the formidable castle it

had been at its height of power in the 13th and 14th centuries.

The car stopped outside the heavy castle gate and Jaromir was escorted by the person with the burning eyes the rest of the way. The castle lacked electricity and other modern amenities, which Jaromir assumed for a time was simply due to the castle's official designation as a historic site. However, by the time he arrived in the great hall, a magnificent place dominated by iron chandeliers and large glazed windows offering a breathtaking view of the broad valley far below, he was not so sure. Everything about the castle seemed too anachronistic, too real, even for a museum-quality restoration, especially given the lack of priority the socialist regime gave to such matters.

His escort finally introduced himself as comrade Stepan Sebirov, a ranking member of the StB. He informed Jaromir that he stood upon a precipice, both literally and figuratively, and that before the sun rose and bathed the ancient hall in its fiery light his fate would be decided. However, to Jaromir's surprise and confusion, Sebirov told him that it was not he who would decide the young man's fate, but rather another, a person he simply referred to as the "lord of the castle."

For the next hour Jaromir waited, trembling, watching the snow dance outside the dark windows, obscuring any sign that he had not actually been transported into the barbaric past. He had no sense of time, as his wristwatch had been confiscated at the castle gate by a silent and very disturbing character whose fingers seemed too long and who sniffed at Jaromir as if he could actually detect such things by scent alone. Sebirov stood, barely moving, the entire time, his gaze withering any possible thought in his prisoner's mind of trying to escape.

Finally, the antique door to the hall opened and a figure out of a dark and twisted fairy tale entered, almost gliding across the floorboards, and came to stand before the terrified revolutionary. The "lord of the castle" was dressed in a full-length ermine cloak that opened in the front enough for Jaromir to see that the entire wardrobe was as outdated as the castle itself, yet notably rich, as he spied numerous jewels and precious metals decorating the heavy fabrics, furs, and leather. The wearer was a tall individual whose features were more suited to a nightmare than a real person. Its skin was sunken and deathly pale, yet hideously criss-crossed here and there with black veins that stood out in an alien fashion. Its hair was long and dark, standing out in starkest contrast to its face. Its mouth was small, twisted

into a cruel smile, and its ears seemed oddly...long. But it was its eyes that made the greatest impression, eyes that were as the mouth of a volcano compared to the bonfire intensity of Sebirov's.

When the creature — for this was surely not a man, at least no more — spoke, any last doubts as to the reality of the situation fell away and Jaromir's heart surrendered to the horror before him. Its graceful, aristocratic tenor made its message that much more malignant, even as it incredibly welcomed Jaromir to its castle and told him that he was an honored guest, despite the manner by which he had come to the place. It told Jaromir that its name was Janek Ritka, Voivode of Kokorin, and that, despite all public appearances to the contrary, it had been the castle's occupant and its only real owner since it was first granted the deed by Emperor Sigismund in the first half of the 15th century. Under the circumstances, Jaromir had no doubts whatsoever that what he heard was the truth, no matter how mad it may have otherwise sounded.

Janek was one of the Damned, an elder of the Old Clan Tzimisce who had survived the Inquisition, the Anarch Revolt, and the formation of the blasphemous Sabbat, among the last of its fiendish lineage to maintain the strict traditions of the past and safeguard them from the constant threat of revolution and obsolescence. Not only had Janek succeeded in standing firm in the face of threats endemic to Kindred society, but had managed to hold onto its personal demesne despite the political and cultural instability that had tormented the traditional lands of Bohemia for the past six centuries. The Old Clan had long been rife with infighting, given its solitary, feudal outlook, and Janek's interests had too long been distracted by a rivalry with the rival Fiend Michal Albertus Staniewski.

Despite that deathless grudge, Janek's tenacity proved particularly important in the twentieth century, when the pace and the nature of change in its homeland became far more dramatic. The First and Second World Wars both posed dire threats to Janek's haven at Kokorin, if not to its very existence. The Nazi occupation and subsequent rapine of the region and its people was astonishing in its utter inhumanity and coldly mechanical execution. For decades Janek, like many of its kind, was convinced warring Methuselahs or possibly even the Antediluvians themselves, had executed the penultimate move in the Jyhad that foretold the Final Nights of prophecy.

But Janek's domain did not fall to the Germans. Instead, Janek called upon the *gromnik* of earth, wind

and sky, to keep the Panzers and Messerschmitts from what belonged to it. Cornered, and with many of its mortal thralls deported, killed, or otherwise unable to come to their master's aid, the fiend turned to Koldunic Sorcery to save itself and its domain. Janek had once used the *vorozhei's* arts extensively to establish protective power and to stave off the most dedicated attacks of its vampiric foes. However, Janek came to believe that too much reliance on these dark arts would enslave its soul to a demonic presence that rumor suggested had already taken possession of most of his fellow Tzimisce, changing them into something even more unwholesome than the unliving fiends they already were. With no other options, Janek felt the risk was worth it. When the war ended and Czechoslovakia was again a free and independent nation, the Voivode of Kokorin smirked in its tower.

When the Communists seized control of the nation, the canny Tzimisce moved quickly to gain influence over those kine and institutions that were necessary for it to protect itself. The oppressive nature of the socialist regime made it unusually easy for the medieval aristocrat to accomplish this, as fear and secrecy were already fast becoming the trademark means of control in the reconstituted state. Because all property ostensibly belonged to the government, it was a relatively simple matter for the Fiend to have its haven proclaimed off-limits to interlopers and to use the Communist military to protect it from worldly dangers.

In a similar fashion, Janek gained extensive control over certain elements within the KSC and, more importantly, within the much-feared StB. Its agents allowed the Fiend a great deal of sway over policies and actions that might harm or benefit it personally and allowed the Tzimisce to have a *de facto* voice in the politics of its Dom. Janek's network of spies, bureaucrats, and thugs rivaled that of other Kindred, even as the city of Prague and most other heavily populated parts of the country technically belonged to Camarilla Princes and their quislings.

Janek had no desire for esteem among the Kindred, the great majority of whom it viewed as so far beneath its station as to be unworthy of its attention. Janek had been Voivode for more than six centuries and neither the Camarilla nor the Sabbat had anything to offer it.

Even so, Janek had not survived for so long by being a fool. It recognized the sway other Kindred held over the kine, and ruled the domain from its castle. It meticulously avoided the games of prestatation contrived to ensnare it and swiftly destroyed those Camarilla and

marauding Sabbat that trespassed into its domain. The Prince of Prague, the idealistic Toreador Vasily, agreed to a formal "understanding" that the Kindred would avoid the Kokorin Valley and steer clear of certain other territories that Janek considered close to its unbeating heart. In exchange, the Tzimisce elder gave its word that it would abstain from Camarilla's affairs and domains and that it would not, should it ever come to pass, offer aid or comfort to the Sabbat.

The unprecedented historic events leading up to the eve of democratic revolution in Czechoslovakia had surprised Janek with how quickly they unfolded. The Fiend had long cultivated spies and other agents among the dissident movement that had provided it the tools to monitor a rising threat to the Communist regime that provided it so much. But the astonishing rapidity and shocking impetus of the wave of democratic change that was roaring across the Soviet Bloc caught the old Tzimisce off-guard. Spurred to action, like a manic puppeteer, it directed its minions as best it could in order to protect its interests in the Voivodate. It became clear to Janek that despite its iron grasp over its remote domain, it was faced with something that it lacked the ability to prevent.

The elder Fiend already knew of Jaromir, given his celebrity as a dissident, when it summoned the young actor to the castle. Janek had learned more from its most trusted thrall, Stepan Sebirov, the patriarch of the Sebirov boyar family that had faithfully served the Voivode of Kokorin since the earliest nights of their monstrous existence. Sebirov's position within the StB had enabled him to gain whatever intelligence his domitor desired, and what he provided his master had convinced Janek of the rebel's value.

Kneeling on the cold floor of the great hall, sure that he would not live to see the sunrise, Jaromir listened in fearful confusion as the monster that stood before him offered him a choice. He could return to Prague and with Sebirov's help convince certain key members of the revolutionary movement to pledge their loyalty to him. Once accomplished, he would coordinate their efforts so that, if the government they espoused represented the people of Bohemia, Janek and all he possessed would be protected – and obeyed. The other option went unspoken.

In that moment Jaromir, for all his love of democracy and his desire to avenge his parents, realized that from the perspective of this creature, what form a government took mattered little. All that mattered were the individuals who pulled the strings, and whether

they called themselves monarchists, imperialists, nationalists, communists, or democrats, they were still just chattel ruled by the same fears and desires. As the Voivode's eyes fixed their awful gaze on his cowering form in that hellish castle, as he faced his own very personal awful choice while staring the Devil in the eyes, Jaromir felt his idealism flayed away. It was a time for pragmatism, not hope or aspiration.

Jaromir made his decision, and though his fear of never seeing the sun rise again proved to be well-founded, it did not spell his end. Janek Embraced him and, after a necessarily hasty introduction to being Damned, sent him back to Prague to do his sire's bidding. When he exited the black sedan on the corner of Jan Palach Square ten nights later, it seemed a lifetime had passed. The Velvet Revolution was underway, with mass strikes paralyzing the city and open calls for the dissolution of the Communist government sounding from every quarter.

With the help of Sebirov and the rest of the creatures comprising Janek's motley cabinet, Jaromir wasted no time. He had been provided a crash course in how to administer the Blood Bond, crude though it would be, and the pair undertook a lightning-fast campaign of "convincing" a host of targets of their new purpose.

The pair was exceedingly successful in their mission, given the uncertainty of the moment. They found their targets — dedicated democratic revolutionaries, journalists, academics, artists, and student leaders — and made plain to them that their passion for societal change relied upon an unholy addiction to the blood and will of their new master. With each draught of vitae given, with each soul bound in anachronistic servitude, Jaromir felt his own humanity slipping away.

The undead coup nearly failed on November 24, when Vaclav Havel's speech of the week before was publicly broadcast on television. So amazed was Jaromir by how quickly things were happening, things he could never have imagined a month before, that he foolishly slaked his thirst while within a part of the city claimed by a territorial Malkavian. He barely evaded capture by the Prince's Hound and only avoided further trouble through Sebirov's intervention, a boon he still owes to his resentful blood-sibling.

However blunt and crude their master's strategy was, it worked. By the time President Gustav Hasek swore in a new government in the second week of December, one no longer controlled by the Communist Party, Jaromir had amassed more than a dozen blood-bound thralls. These ghouls were instrumental in helping

Sebirov's StB agents ensure that the revolution did not devolve into civil war and later guaranteeing that Janek's holdings and assets remained unmolested.

More than two decades later, Jaromir still serves his master's whim in the Magic City. The idealism that he once believed defined him has been replaced by a far more pragmatic instinct that has grown out of his need to compete for control of the city's most useful pawns and the power they possess. Prince Vasily was outraged at the fledgling Tzimisce's intrusive campaign during the Velvet Revolution and scribed a grievance to Janek, requesting that it punish its rogue child. Furthermore, the Prince forbade Jaromir from entering Prague, enumerating his violations of the Traditions and the pact between Janek Ritka and the Camarilla of Prague to justify this exile.

Jaromir has paid no heed to these threats and Janek finds them laughable. The old Fiend's prestige and the fear the ancient Voivode of Kokorin is capable of stirring has meant that so far, despite a series of additional violations of Prince Vasily's will, not to mention a much longer list of lesser crimes against individual Kindred, the young Tzimisce has avoided any real retribution from the Camarilla. This immunity wears increasingly thin among the Kindred of Prague, however. Already a number of Kindred seek to convince the Prince that Jaromir can be eliminated without bringing down the wrath of Janek, now that the fledgling — for fledgling he is, having never been granted his release, as is the way of the hoary Old Clan — has served the purpose to which he had been Embraced. Vasily has been entertaining these arguments and may soon decide to act on them, but until he does, Jaromir tests the patience of the Ivory Tower.

Even if the Camarilla chooses to seek his head, Jaromir has an ace up his sleeve that even his sire would be hard-pressed to defeat. In part due to his access to spying equipment on account of his close partnership with Sebirov, Jaromir has become quite adept at the use of modern technology, particularly computers. His activity on the Internet now outstrips his face-to-face interaction, and rarely does a night go by that he is not discovering secrets, distributing misinformation, increasing his wealth, or plundering someone's fortune. In fact, even if the Prince declares a Blood Hunt upon him, Jaromir believes he has garnered enough currency to buy off the Camarilla's slayers. His plan then would be to flee the domain to head... anywhere, really, offering token allegiance to whatever sect claimed the domain and establishing an identity no longer under the yoke of his foul sire.

Sire: Janek Ritka

Clan: Old Clan Tzimisce

Nature: Competitor

Demeanor: Idealist

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1989

Apparent Age: 20s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 4, Empathy 3, Expression 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 1, Performance 3, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Academics 1, Computer 4, Politics 3, Technology 4

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 4, Dominate 3, Obfuscate 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Haven 2, Influence 4, Resources 2, Retainers 2

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 4, Courage 2

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 5

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 15/3

Image: Jaromir appears in one of two distinct guises. In his most common and most socially accessible aspects, he looks like a stereotypical Gen-Y technology geek in his dark hoodie, blue jeans, sneakers, and backpack. Clean-shaven, with tousled black hair and a slender build, he is usually mistaken for a student. His experience on stage serves him well and permits him to easily transform himself to better suit his audience and his intent. Upon occasion, however, he appears ungendered, alien, and not even altogether organic. Like an ikon to a brutish and forgotten spirit – or demon – of the land, his features become coarse and otherworldly, a creature forged for a more primitive time. Those who don't know his background assume that, like many Tzimisce, Jaromir has simply manipulated his appearance with Vicissitude. In truth, Jaromir has

no idea why he sometimes rises from the day-sleep in this form. In his more paranoid moments, he suspects that it's a psychological trial imposed on him by the old Fiend, or perhaps by the jealous Sebirov, though he has no idea how they'd accomplish it. On the other hand, he has heard of the brood known as Gargoyles, and wonders if something in their makeup still calls to the Tzimisce blood from which the wretched Tremere supposedly crafted them.

Roleplaying Hints: You enjoy nothing anymore, though you are adept at pulling strings from the shadows, pitting enemy against enemy, and fomenting a sense of loyalty among those who taste your blood even as the petty Kindred of Prague seek your destruction. You still miss the relatively naïve struggle for democracy against the Iron Curtain of communism, and every so often your idealism makes itself known in symbolic but dangerous ways, such as turning free a blood-thrall or Embracing and releasing a childe to make what she will of her new condition. In a way, you hope the Camarilla does come for you, for it might actually bring you to the justice you deserve for betraying what had been your cause in your days among the living.

Haven: The Tzimisce fledgling maintains a small apartment in the heart of the city that brims with computer and audio/video equipment, including a variety of security devices and applications. He relocates his haven at least once a year in order to avoid his enemies and makes it a point to never invite anyone as a guest.

Influence: Jaromir has a great deal of influence over 77, a hacker collective that he founded in 2009, which he uses to carry out the lion's share of his online operations. The hackers of 77 are, however, more adept at their craft than Jaroslav, and while he formed the confederation to serve him, it's only a matter of time before they discover what their patron actually is and react in a way he can't possibly predict. Unbeknownst to Jaromir, a Toreador on the East Coast of the US named Michael Dillon has connections to the 77 collective, and while he remains unaware that Jaromir is the group's patron, he's discovered a few telltale informational lacunae that indicate the presence of a Kindred.



COLM OLLIVER

Autarkis at Large

Wrong place, wrong time, wrong decision. A combination of events led to Colm Olliver's ouster from the domain of Birmingham, not the least of which was his own refusal to heed both the Traditions and the mortal laws of the domain.

The Embrace that brought Colm Olliver into the world of the Damned was a fluke. A pack of Sabbat made it all the way to Birmingham from Bristol, where its members decided to bolster their ranks and throw a few shovelheads at the Sheriff of Bristol's Hounds. One of the pack's Cainites grabbed Olliver, put the bite on him, pointed him southward, and told him to kill any other vampires he saw. In the throes of frenzy, Colm did all of this and more, taking down two of the unsuspecting Hounds as well as four police and almost a score of innocent bystanders.

Unfortunately for Olliver, this all happened on the night of the Birmingham pub bombings. The police, already facing the chaos of the domestic terrorist attack, reacted to the news of their fallen comrades and civilians as a related terrorist event. Riot police finally managed to subdue the enraged Kindred, who had exhausted himself at the end of his frenzy. Olliver sank into torpor as he was being hauled to Winson Green Prison. The violence of being dragged out of the police van and into the prison roused him from his shallow torpor and he frenzied again, killing two more police and slaking his thirst on their blood. While the attentions of the police at the prison were otherwise occupied by the so-called "Birmingham Six," Olliver escaped into the night with police blood on his hands.

Shortly thereafter, England passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Under the law, Olliver's actions were classified as terrorist activity, even though he'd had nothing to do with the actions of the Birmingham Six — who were themselves later exonerated — in support of the pub bombings. On the lam from mortal authorities, Olliver chose to leave his Birmingham stalking grounds,

where the local Kindred were becoming unpleasantly aware of him. After all, he'd had no introduction to what he'd become or the society of the night. He was simply a rogue Kindred, presumably Caitiff or some debased elder's by-blow, in a very traditional domain. Olliver knew that something else was out there, hunting him, and before the Sheriff had a chance to bring him before the Prince, he vanished into the darkness.

Olliver came to understand his situation quickly. He deduced the vagaries of the Kindred condition and, piecing together the fragments of his frenzied memory, he realized that his options were limited. There was no way he could get out of the country. With the swift passage of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, Scotland and Ireland's borders were heavily guarded, and the English Channel was too great a risk in the dark. London seemed to have the numbers and the urban chaos required to hide an accidental dissident, at least to a Kindred who couldn't stay in his home domain.

So London it was, and Olliver's understanding of the Kindred state increased exponentially during the journey. He traveled by stolen car, by stowing away aboard passenger trains, and by traveling on foot when no faster method presented itself, all the while leaving a trail of ravaged vessels and traumatized onlookers. Along this trail of horror, Olliver learned the vagaries of placating the Beast and avoiding the Red Fear. He gained first-hand knowledge of, the impotence of God's dominion, and the inaccuracy of so many of the popular culture banes of vampirism. Being undead came with more than enough drawbacks, but the benefits it offered made him feel like a fucking god — the midnight king of Hibernia, Albion, and even that shit-swamp Caledonia, if he wanted it!

Reality intruded as Olliver approached the London domain. The mortal agents of Lady Anne Bowesely had followed the news of Olliver's trajectory and had braced themselves for the inevitable arrival of the rampaging

hell-monger that the police reports and tabloids had indicated was heading their way. A network of ghouls, vigilantes, and “private security freelancers,” each unknowing that others had been summoned to aid the effort, converged upon the London-bound farm truck carrying him into the city. Olliver had no idea he had been anticipated, but when a dozen interlopers who seemed to know fact from fiction when it came to the Kindred’s banes, he woke from the daysleep that had so recently overtaken him to find them hammering a stake into his heart.

Das Ungeheuer Darin

When he came to, it was no longer 1976. Three years had passed before someone had seen fit to remove the stake that held him in deathless stasis.

The Prince of London, not wanting to connect herself to Olliver’s lurid person, had tasked one of her Primogen with the extirpation of the rising Caitiff menace, which happened to include (and indicate) Olliver in particular. Shit rolls downhill, and this particular odious task tumbled down the Kindred pecking order until it unfortunately ended up in the hands of a coterie of young Gangrel who had no especial enthusiasm for Anne Bowesely’s reign. The Gangrel unstaked Colm rather than risk their own Humanity in an act of murder-for-favor and promptly fled the domain for Manchester.

Political fallout was characteristically severe. How could this simple task, Lady Anne raged, result in such a debacle? Neonates shrugged their shoulders. Ancillae shrugged their shoulders and kicked the concern back up to the elder level. Elders blamed each other, and hid behind an impenetrable snarl of prestation that left it unclear exactly who was supposed to carry out the death sentence. The result was a blemish for not only the Camarilla as an organization, but for the system of obligation that let such a high-profile duty fall through the cracks. Two Harpies found themselves relegated to the Whitechapel hunting grounds, a Primogen saw his clan banned from Elysium for a month, and the Tremere lost the patronage of the Prince and had their claim to domain revoked – in a territory that held a crucial chantry. Amid the whole mess, Olliver was pardoned *in absentia*, with the vain elders hoping that the sooner the whole affair was swept under the rug, the better. Death sentence? What death sentence?

The trouble he had caused the elders brought Olliver to the eventual attention of London’s Anarchs, who gathered at Carfax Abbey, a deconsecrated church

converted into a nightclub. A Brujah attached to the scene, Ian Corso, recognized Olliver from the tabloid stories, and that was all it took for Olliver to become royalty at the Abbey.

To his surprise, these vampires weren’t fucking asshole ponces who prided themselves on what gigantic cocks they could be to one another. Instead, Carfax Abbey was home to a movement that actually hated that part of vampire society. The whole lace-and-makeup thing was a little rich, but Olliver soon found a home in the company of the scene’s rougher element. This rowdy faction had connections to other countercultures, all of which were at least initially receptive to a new Kindred who had given such an audacious (if accidental) finger to Queen Anne herself. It was here that Colm first felt the forbidden rush of suborning his Humanity. A few of the scene’s members were actually slumming Sabbat infernalists, who taught him a bit of their forbidden blood magic in exchange for sharing the Vaulderie with them. Olliver laughed off their overblown ritual, but took their witchcraft with him.

The relationship that developed between Colm Olliver and the Anarchs proved to be a tumultuous one. While both certainly resented the rigid structures of the Camarilla and the equally relentless dogmas of the Sabbat, the Anarchs of Carfax Abbey aimed to rebuild London’s political landscape into one that offered more opportunity for younger Kindred. More than anything else, Olliver thrilled to the vast quantities of vitae that Carfax Abbey’s blood dolls readily yielded to him, often without his even having to ask them.

Olliver had no such lofty ambitions. Indeed, his outlook ran more toward that of a particularly selfish Autarkis. He fell in love with the outlook espoused in one of the quotations bandied about around the Anarch rallies:

“No one holds command over me. No man. No god. No Prince. What is a claim of age for ones who are immortal? What is a claim of power for ones who defy death? Call your damnable hunt. We shall see who I drag screaming to hell with me.”

The Anarchs just wanted to replace Princes with other Princes more sympathetic in outlook to their own. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. Anarch politics even used the same kinds of outdated fantasy-fetish terms to honor their heroes. Baron instead of Prince? What does the word matter if you’re still kissing his ass, Olliver reasoned.

Tearing Down the Tower

Over the course of the next decade-plus, the Anarchs rebelled openly against Prince Anne Bowesley's praxis in particular and Camarilla dominance more generally. As punk, goth, krautrock, new wave, oi, protest reggae, and other musical genres colored the political and cultural scene of Carfax Abbey and London's Anarch Movement, The Camarilla tightened its grip over the Traditions, cracking down on the Anarch Movement under the guise of protectionism against Sabbat encroachment. The Kindred had their own Iron Lady in the form of Queen Anne and her parliament of Primogen. The Camarilla pronounced death sentences on those self-identified Anarchs who chose to Embrace (and their childer), but stopped short of declaring a unilateral Blood Hunt against the Anarch Movement. In response, the Anarchs redoubled their rhetoric against the Queen, winning little sympathy among the largely conservative Kindred power structure in London. With little few options left to them, the Anarchs waged open Jyhad against the Camarilla, their ostensible parent sect, and struck down a series of "pretender Primogen" among the Ventrue, Toreador, Tremere, and Malkavian clans. Olliver participated in several of these conflicts, not out of sympathy with Anarch philosophy, but out of hatred for Queen Anne herself.

By the summer of 1982, Olliver and the Anarchs had disavowed themselves of each other, though their relationship wasn't as hostile as the attitudes each of them harbored against the Camarilla and Sabbat. In this case, it simply worked out that the enemy of both of their enemies didn't happen to be an ally. Carfax Abbey ceased to be a haven for him, though he was free to attend as he chose. It simply represented a time, a mindset, and a philosophical standpoint that he felt he had left behind. When the Tremere Justicar Gabrielle di Righetti showed up at the door of Carfax Abbey to formally censure club impresario Hortense Holden and her confidant Ian Corso, Olliver and the Movement had already formally parted ways.

After the split, Olliver entered the darkest phase of his unlife. Hated, lost, and exhausted, Olliver succumbed to a fugue that must have been nurtured by the roaring of his Beast. He simply does not recall the years from 1984-1997. When he returned to his senses, he felt that nothing had changed. The "no-future" mantra of the postpunk 1980s had morphed into the millennialism of the 1990s and would adopt a new slogan for the same anxiety and nihilism. Even Queen Anne still held the Princedom in London, while Carfax Abbey

continued to harbor the same bitter Anarchs and their screed, stinking of the same stale, spilled lager and smoke-machine chemical runoff. The only thing that's changed is that Ian Corso looks as ravaged as punk icons Penny Rimbaud or Vini Reilly these nights.

After Olliver regained his sense of self, he decided that he simply had to leave London, as it had nothing to offer him. With a suicide's sense of finality, he planned a gesture that would graphically underscore his disgust with the Ivory Tower and its despotism. At the time, London had suffered a spate of terrorist bombing attempts, and Olliver intended to strike a similar message against the Camarilla's blood-cult of demagoguery while the Kindred of the city were gripped with the same climate of fear that held the mortals. Over the span of a week, in early November of 2009, Olliver placed over a score of nail bombs throughout London, in targets such as Underground stations, shopping centers, banks, and nightclubs — including Carfax Abbey. Each of the targets had some connection to a Kindred who exerted influence over the locale, from the Nosferatu warrens beneath the Underground to the Ventrue-favored skyscrapers of the Bishopsgate financial interests.

Some of Olliver's bombs exploded, causing the desired effect. Various mortal and Kindred agencies and Kindred found others. In the cases of those that discharged their improvised payloads, the Camarilla of London conspired to cover up the acts of domestic terror or to tie them to radical organizations among the kine. Among the Kindred community, response ranged from the incredulous to the wrathful. Hortense Holden from Carfax Abbey lamented the act as "depravity brought on by an obviously eroding Humanitas" while even the insider Malkavians of the Camarilla courts howled for retribution. The result was inevitable, of course: Colm Olliver had finally earned a Blood Hunt.

Olliver considers himself a freedom fighter, primarily for his own freedom rather than any greater political sentiment, which is why he splintered from the Anarchs. Under Queen Anne's decree, Olliver is a terrorist. Similarly, Olliver remains wanted by British Special Branch and the Metropolitan Police Service for his mortal law violations that have no statutes of limitations. In response to his Kindred infamy, he's under Lextalionis in both London and Birmingham, and has pledged never to return to either unless it's to stake and devour their Princes. (Obviously, he has no direct knowledge of the events surrounding the disappearance of Prince Mithras or the fate of the

diablerist Monty Coven.) The Camarilla has considered adding him to the Red List, but prevailing sentiment is that sooner or later, he'll manage to destroy himself, and no specific clan has stepped forward to pursue any possible trophy placed on him.

Colm's terrorist past has placed him in numerous worldwide security databases, however, and those Kindred with access to such classified information may well be watching him. In particular, an American clanmate of Colm's, Godfrey Burns, has kept apprised of Olliver's movements through a dark web copy of a CIA database. Surely, others watch the renegade's activities as well, with Colm none the wiser.

Tonight, Olliver flirts with the idea of joining the Anarch domains (but not the Movement) in northern Italy or California. Whatever his decision, he must hide the route he takes out of England from both mortal authorities and Kindred toadies, and will likely end up passing through several interim domains before arriving at his final destination. And if he has to pledge more boons along the way to take his fight to a different front, what of it? That is, if he manages to make it out of Queen Anne's London with his head still attached to his shoulders.

Sire: Fat Ciaran

Clan: Brujah

Nature: Child

Demeanor: Deviant

Generation: 11th

Embrace: 1974

Apparent Age: early 40s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Crafts (butcher) 3, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 1, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 1, Politics 1, Science 2, Technology 2

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Potence 4, Thaumaturgy 2 (Path of Corruption 2)

Thaumaturgical Rituals: Bind the Accusing Tongue

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Alternate Identity 1, Contacts 1

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 3, Courage 3

Morality: Humanity 4

Willpower: 5

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 12/1

Image: A rough-and-tumble butcher from an industrial northern suburb, Olliver has been scarred by an impoverished youth and outlaw unlife, and he looks it. He's not big, but he's a hellfighter, a knuckle-cracking Mick with black hair and a scarred-over eye. Having been on the lam since his Embrace, Olliver's a bit ragged around the edges, having no time to settle into a domain and get comfortable. He has a hostile, vicious look about him, which he relies upon to scare others away from contact.

Roleplaying Hints: You're angry with everything because nothing ever works out for anyone except the people who already have everything they need. You give people a chance in the infinitesimal hope that they might see things as they truly are: that mortals want to be taken advantage of and that Kindred should be able to do what they want without having to answer to someone pretending to be superior to the other monsters. Eventually, though, everyone fails that test. You just want to find that one Lick who knows the truth.

Haven: Olliver makes his haven wherever he finds it, bullying his way into "crash space" where he can find it or breaking and entering if nothing else presents itself. He's not above evicting a rightful tenant, and home invasion is one of the many mortal-law crimes on his lengthy rap sheet.

Influence: Practically nil. Olliver's Allies and Contacts are those last few lingering connections to his time among the Carfax Abbey Anarchs who feel a sense of duty even after the bombing. Even these will probably atrophy to nothing once he manages to escape England, and whether he's able to cultivate new relationships with other connections along the way... well, it's unlikely. The future probably holds a great deal of loneliness and bitter regret for him.

Colm has made the acquaintance of a strip club owner in Boston, a Setite named Ryan McGrath, who might have the ability to smuggle him into the country. But whether either or both of them are using each other remains to be seen.



ESPERANZA LUCIFER

The Devil's Darling

Few Kindred are renowned beyond the limits of the city in which they have made their haven. The interests of the Damned are almost universally personal and rarely furthered by activity that exceeds the geographic boundary of their own domains. In fact, despite a salacious social construct that elevates its saints and bogeymen to artificial heights, most Kindred spend the bulk of their existence in local pursuits. Pursuing a secret, acquiring information, creating a work of art, mastering a Discipline, enjoying a literary or cinematic work, or simply overseeing one's nightly affairs takes time. Even setting aside the never-ending hunt for blood, most Kindred simply have no interest in involving themselves in the affairs of other Kindred who don't threaten their domains. Even the vaunted Primogen and Princes much prefer to remain big fish in their respective small ponds than small fish in a much larger ocean. Recognition and fame only invite a host of political and supernatural entanglements that offer far more trouble than benefit. Worse, celebrity among the undead is the surest way to draw the attention of hunters, Kindred or otherwise.

Some few among the Damned have risen to notoriety, however. Besides the semi-mythical Antediluvians and a host of legendary Methuselans, for the most part these Kindred are elders whose achievements were instrumental in shaping the modern society of vampires. Hardestadt, for example, whether admired or reviled, is known across the globe by many Kindred for his role in the founding of the Camarilla. On the other hand, Francisco Domingo de Polonia, the one-time Sabbat Archbishop of New York City, achieved fame primarily due to the global importance of his domain. In addition, certain Justicars and a few of those they hunt have also become known throughout the world's Elysiums. Still, besides their names, little else of these figures is known, even by Kindred of a scholarly nature.

Ultimately, only a handful of Kindred have achieved anything akin to true fame, becoming legends by virtue of their deeds and misdeeds. One of these, a rogue whose exploits have been recounted by the Damned from Los Angeles to St. Petersburg is Esperanza Lucifer, the Devil of the Deep.

According to some accounts, Esperanza was the daughter of a Spanish naval commander who fought the mostly French and English buccaneers who patrolled the waters off the coast of Hispaniola. Others claim that she was actually a prostitute, brought to the island of Tortuga by the French to sate the rampant lusts of the local pirates. A few voices say she was both: a lord's daughter captured and forced into prostitution by her captors. Whatever the truth, all tales agree that she was quite young and quite beautiful, with long, fair tresses and eyes of the deepest blue, like the sea.

Aristocrat or harlot, Esperanza fell in love with a veteran captain employed by the Dutch West India Company, one Hendrick Jacobszoon, a rather rough-around-the-edges fellow who adopted the surname Lucifer to enhance his image among friend and foe alike. How the affair began is the unclear, but in 1627 the two were together when Hendrick's ship had a fateful encounter with a pair of Spanish ships sailing from Honduras.

The three Dutch West India Company ships dared not let the opportunity pass, and so set upon the Spanish ships, succeeding in capturing one, while the other escaped their barbarous clutches. The fighting was fierce and Hendrick was injured by a bullet in the action. Ignoring pain, he fought as if possessed, winning the day as well as an untold fortune in guilders. He was unable to enjoy the spoils, however. Later that day, in his own cabin with Esperanza at his side, he breathed his last.

Terrified at being left alone with Hendrick's bloodthirsty crew now that her protector was gone, Esperanza racked her brain for a way of avoiding what seemed an obvious and unwholesome fate. She hatched a scheme that called upon all the imagination, courage, self-control, and willpower she could muster, along with a hearty helping of rum. Emboldened by drink and what she saw as her only possible recourse, clad in some of the accoutrements of her now-deceased lover, armed with his pistol and rapier, the young girl vanished in the blood-stained cabin and the new captain of the ship stepped onto the deck.

The crew was flabbergasted at Esperanza's daring and thought it a joke, laughing at the woman's audacity. The humor died when one of the pirates dared to grab her and found six inches of steel in his stomach, courtesy of the self-anointed Captain Esperanza Lucifer. The action gave her enough room to quickly tell the crew of how, unless they accepted her command, they would suffer at the hands of the Spanish. She surprised even herself with her rhetorical gifts at that moment and feared it might not prove enough for the hungry, drunken crew, but many were exhausted, wounded, and in no more mood for violence. They had their gold and they wanted little more than to return to port to enjoy their share of the plunder. Until they made port, most reasoned, the sailors might as well give her the service she wanted.

Esperanza's initial plan to flee upon making land did not come to pass. Perhaps she had nowhere to go, or she was more worried about her fate away from the crew than with them. Or, she simply realized the potential offered by being a pirate captain. Again, it matters little to most Kindred what her thinking was at the time. What is of importance is what happened a few years later when, for a second time on the high seas, she faced a truly life-altering decision.

Word of Captain Lucifer's "mutiny" was widespread, especially in Tortuga and among those seafarers who frequented that infamous port city. She became one of the most wanted pirates when the Spanish recaptured the town in 1654, yet she proved exceptionally capable of evading capture. But all man's works must come to an end, and her own ship (which she had rechristened the Devil's Darling) finally met a force that it could not outgun or outrun.

Esperanza's foe was not another ship, but rather a mysterious visitor who appeared on deck one particularly stormy night: a master of the briny waves, who proved unbeatable. A Lasombra of great age — some claim a Methuselah, even — rose from the

depths of the churning sea, inexorably drawn to the charismatic pirate captain. Under cover of unnatural darkness and torrential rains, the shadowy vampire entered Esperanza's cabin and introduced itself. Those who tell the tale hotly debate its name and even gender, but it was undeniably potent. One version of the story even claims that the Lasombra was the Antediluvian's spawn and that it had lain in torpor beneath the sea floor since the Great Deluge, rising only when it tasted a tide-borne drop of the fiery Captain Lucifer's blood.

The Ancient had fed on nearly half the crew before entering the captain's private bedchamber in order to quench its ungodly hunger, so that when it did enter and present itself to the half-asleep woman, it was able to do so with a demeanor of civility. The incalculable power of its presence and the unbelievable words it spoke left Esperanza incapable of responding. When she finally did, the legend says she agreed to become like her visitor only so long as she was permitted to keep her ship and crew, which had apparently become her life's purpose. The Lasombra gave its word that she would be able to do as she pleased, then it unleashed the forces of the ocean's blackest depths and she drowned in the darkness of its Embrace.

Of course, a few stories relate Esperanza's activities or whereabouts for the next decade. Some among the Night Clan assumed that she accompanied her sire for at least some of this time, learning the ways of the Damned and doing his bidding, whatever that may have been. Suffice to say that in 1666 the Devil's Darling was again in action and once more making quite the name for itself and its Damned captain. By this time, however, though the ship was involved in a number of well-known acts of traditional piracy, its real target was of far more interest to the Kindred. Esperanza's primary concern had become the destruction of those Lasombra who did not cleave to the Sabbat, the *antitribu* traitors who had joined Montano's cause and threw their support behind the Camarilla and its staid ways. Yet other stories attribute more mercenary acts to the Devil's Darling, including the smuggling of the Lasombra *antitribu* Methuselah Aludian Thex to the New World. For cause or currency, the Devil's Darling was a significant force in Kindred maritime power.

Throughout the Caribbean and the Atlantic the Devil's Darling hunted these wayward Lasombra, many of whom had themselves taken to piracy. Perhaps it goes without saying that many of her most recounted battles took place under the light of the moon, though her crew, rumored to be ghouls or revenants possessed

of some small measure of supernatural ability, certainly took advantage of daylight to capture enemy vessels and more easily dispatch their captain's enemies. As the stories of Esperanza's adventures grew even in her own time, the Camarilla made some effort to put an end to her business, more to protect their financial interests than the Lasombra fugitives she hounded.

It is said that, like her sire, Esperanza came to possess an unusually formidable mastery of Obtenebration, one that seemed fittingly adapted to her environs. In particular, one popular tale tells of how she found herself along with another ship cut off from an escape route near Cuba by a half-dozen warships backed by Camarilla interests. As her second ship listed under cannon-fire and her own seemed poised for a similar fate, Captain Lucifer called upon the very void of the ocean depths and from it summoned the mythical Kraken, a nightmarish monstrosity whose umbrageous tentacles rose up from the swelling waves and pulled each of the enemy ships to their watery doom. The crews on board were drained of their vitae, exsanguinated by the hellish thing before being sent to Davy Jones' Locker.

Some suggest that Esperanza consumed the souls of her foes when she could, sometimes engaging in diablerie and sometimes indulging something even worse, if such a practice exists. This tall tale, and many others, ensured that the Devil's Darling, as both Esperanza's ship and later the captain herself were named, would not be easily forgotten and would go down in the history of the Kindred as entertainment at the least, if not actual fact. Even some of her pack, who served as officers both on her flagship and other vessels of her buccaneer fleet, gained some acclaim of their own. A particularly repulsive Tzimisce known as Abbatoir, who led the ritae for the Devil's Darlings and is said to have committed diablerie no less than four times, was put down in 1708 near the Florida Keys by a Gangrel of some esteem. Another member of the pack, a Toreador *antitribu* named Mogrovejo destroyed a trio of Ventrue, including a childe of London's Prince, who were traveling to England from the Americas in 1811.

While the great age of piracy finally ended in the mid-1700s, the name of Esperanza Lucifer proved far more durable. Rather than fade away into the shadows along with tales of swashbuckling avarice and dramatic sea battles, the Devil's Darling continued to make her presence felt in ways that her fellow Kindred could not ignore.

In 1812 Esperanza threw her support behind the just-announced war on Britain by the United States. Quiet

for a time, she recruited a crew for her fleet in Baltimore and terrorized ships of the Royal Navy, technically as a privateer under the flag of the U.S. Naturally, the targets chosen were often those ships believed to be transporting Camarilla Kindred, for the Devil's Darling had by now largely turned her aggressions toward that sect as a whole rather than merely her clan's *antitribu*, who were likely too few in number to reasonably pursue. With Lucifer's ships in play, the Sabbat had a very real impact, with no less than two dozen Kindred meeting their Final Death in the cold waters of the Atlantic.

What is not known to many Kindred storytellers is that by the late 1700s, Esperanza was becoming quite tired of plying the sea lanes for victims. She doubted she would find many more traitorous Lasombra and she felt the heavy bonds of the ennui that plagues so many of the Cainite race, which had progressively extinguished all but a few embers of her previous passions. Whether the heaviness of her sire's Ancient blood in her dead heart, her own detachment from Humanity that was part and parcel of her Sabbat identity, or something else from deep below the waves, she grew weary of her existence. She so rarely participated in the Vaulderie that even her Vinculi to her packmates had become little more than faint tethers, and were unable to stand the growing might of the dark current that called to her and made her days sleepless.

In 1802, she surrendered to the call of the deep. While her pack performed the Blood Feast on the deck of her flagship, courtesy of a helpless merchant ship that had appeared on the horizon, she summoned from the abyss the same unholy monster that her sire had learned to command, an entity of shadow and evil from *elsewhere*. She called it to her and then, making her own escape in a rowboat, she released the abyss-thing upon her pack. None but her survived the calamity. Relying upon her own wits and now quite impressive gifts, she made her way to Baltimore and hid among the noisy throngs of the city's busy harbor.

For a time, Esperanza stayed clear of the affairs of the Damned. She made use of her kine contacts in order to access part of her fortune, which she had spread among various institutions and locales throughout the coastal domains of the Atlantic, but otherwise kept to herself and ceased using her infamous name. Part of her regretted what she had done to her fellow Sabbat, but not enough to make any atonement. She was no longer Captain Esperanza Lucifer, but simply a vampire who sought some semblance of solace and solitude that could not be found while bound to others. In her loneliness,

she would return to the ocean, or wherever she must go, to find her sire. She labored without a knowledge why her Ancient sire Embraced her, wanting to be by its side among the darkest shadows of the world.

Vanity intervened. A small part of the Devil's Darling still did not want to see her legend die, and she came to the decision that before embarking on her journey she would Embrace a childe and bestow upon her progeny the identity and legacy she had spent centuries building. Just as the War of 1812 ignited, Esperanza found her replacement. Like herself, Mary was barely more than a girl when she received a visitor in the black of night. The Devil's Darling extended an offer to enter the shadows for eternity. A laborer's girl with no obvious merit, Mary nonetheless had a certain confidence about her that Esperanza was drawn to, as well as an unusual lack of fear. She learned quickly under her mentor's tutelage, and when the Devil's Darling appeared off the coast and word spread that she was seeking a crew, the Damned perked up as readily as the kine. Naturally, the living assumed that the ship and its eponymous captain were not the originals – how could they be, over a century after their first tales of infamy? However, the Cainites were not so sure and when the captain introduced herself to a group of Sabbat by the light of a bonfire on a Maryland beach, they were convinced that this was indeed the legendary Captain Lucifer.

To ensure her childe survived her first years, the real Esperanza remained at her side, claiming to be her fledgling's childe and taking her name, Mary, as her own. In this way the elder Lasombra was able to teach the "new" Esperanza all she needed to know to both command a fleet of ships and a pack of wild-eyed Sabbat Cainites. A few years later, while in the Caribbean at a place where "Mary" felt strongest the call of her own sire's Blood, she bid her childe farewell and vanished into the ocean, sinking beneath the waves and leaving only one Esperanza to the Sabbat.

Esperanza (the younger) proved nearly as capable as her predecessor, though her interest in the seafaring unlife waned and by the mid-1800s she had abandoned her legacy and made her way on land. Some members of her pack remained with her when she turned her back on the ocean, but the Devil's Darlings never truly disbanded. Instead, the pack served its sect by supporting a series of actions against the Camarilla in the Americas. From Florida to Boston, Esperanza's reputation grew as her pack ran the length of the East Coast striking at its enemies and plundering their precious vitae. The pack ranged in size from as many as

a dozen vampires to as few as four, but, bound by their Vinculi, they were always a force to be reckoned with.

For the next two centuries, Esperanza Lucifer led her band of marauding Sabbat in an inchoate, yet effective crusade on many Camarilla domains. In truth, there was nothing random or unplanned in what they did. While most packmates were unaware of it, Esperanza and those closest to her had actually been very precise in deciding what the pack would and would not do. The destruction of the arrogant Camarilla Kindred was surely a worthwhile goal, but this inner circle had another, more overriding aim: a transition from nomadic unlife to that of a founded pack. Even as they harangued the Camarilla and its close ties to the kine and their money, the Devil's Darlings adopted the same practices as their nemeses in order to grow the great wealth Esperanza had from her sire. She hadn't wasted the intervening centuries. Rather, Esperanza had studied economics and understood their importance, even to the unliving, and she felt that without real financial assets the Sabbat would eventually find itself outmaneuvered. With money she could purchase loyal agents among the kine, and she could protect herself from her growing list of enemies' moves against her.

Even as her pack massacred the kine and stormed the havens of their elders in the name of the Sabbat, she took advantage of the mayhem to seize whatever assets she could: cash, unsecured stocks, bearer bond certificates, property deeds, and whatever else she could get her hands on. To make use of these, she employed a small network of accountants, lawyers, businessmen, and bureaucrats, all isolated from one another, but nonetheless pawns ready to cross ethical boundaries in return for a small cut of the illicit gains. Indeed, the Devil's Daughter emulated her Camarilla foes in whatever way best served her purposes.

As the 20th century became the 21st, Esperanza, like her sire before her, became aware of a bizarre homeward urge, a calling from her blood to that of her predecessor and her grandsire. In an increasingly complex world that whispered of the Final Nights on the winds, she decided that she too would step out of the limelight and seek the patron of her bloodline. For the past few years, she has actively sought her own replacement, the next Captain Esperanza Lucifer, to pass on the legacy she feels she has no right to let wither. Once she finds the next Devil's Darling, she will instruct her as she had been, albeit at the head of a Sabbat pack and not aboard a ship, and she will then release the childe as her incarnation. She knows that this means that she

will also have to dispose of her pack so that none know the truth, and to this end she has also been working hard, seeking to weaken her Vinculi in order to do the Devil's work, though it has come at great cost to her morality.

Soon, a new Esperanza Lucifer shall step onto the stage and, without missing a beat, take over the role made so fearsome by those Lasombra who came before her.

Sire: "Mary"

Clan: Lasombra

Nature: Capitalist

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Generation: 5th

Embrace: 1812

Apparent Age: Late teens

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Intimidation 2, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Firearms 3, Melee 4, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Finance 3, Politics 2, Technology 2

Disciplines: Chimerstry 1, Dominate 5, Fortitude 2, Obtenebration 5, Potence 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Fame 1, Resources 6, Retainers 2, Rituals 3, Status (Sabbat) 2

Virtues: Conviction 2, Instinct 3, Courage 4

Morality: Path of Night 3

Willpower: 5

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 40/8

Image: Esperanza appears as a very attractive nightclub patron, with long brown hair and deep blue-green eyes. She has a thing for leather pants and corsets, as well

as motorcycle jackets, and she always wears a ribbon around her neck. She carries herself with a cavalier air and is always ready for the next challenge, whatever it may be. She protects the secret of her identity jealously and usually keeps at least one pistol on her person, if not a more formidable arsenal.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a legend in every sense of the word. Act like it. You love to regale others with tales of your exploits, or at least those attributed to you, all the while sizing up your listeners and considering how you can use them to your advantage. Beneath your hellion's facade, you are tired and hope to soon let another assume the role given you by your sire. Ride the wave until then, but when the time comes, yield to it, for you will finally be able to rest among the darkness that, in a voice suppressed by the sea, calls to you in your sleep.

Haven: Because she is always moving around, Esperanza uses a number of different havens along both sides of the Atlantic's coasts, most of which her own packmates do not know about. Most of these are as opulent as one might expect of an immensely wealthy Magister's lineage, but many are also unassuming and pragmatic. When with her pack she usually repurposes an existing structure, like an automotive garage or neglected office building. She uses only enough of her fortune to ensure her safety, keeping the rest hidden from even her closest fellow Sabbat.

Influence: Esperanza has a surprising volume of financial assets spread wisely among a variety of industries and interests. She usually uses proxies to manage this empire, but will involve herself directly when she feels it necessary. Were she to consolidate all her resources and influence in a single city, she would likely rival a Camarilla Prince, but that would put a big red target on her back. By doing as she does she avoids becoming too *real* for her enemies, something that would destroy the legend that has taken so long to build.



APACIA

The Queen of Tombs

She is called the Queen of Tombs by those who know of her legend in the Sabbat. Nominally a Bishop, Apacia the Scythian is a motorcycle-riding hellion frequently chosen to lead crusades against the enemies of the Sword of Caine when others have made the attempt and failed.

More than a few licks have made the mistake of assuming the tattooed motorcycle gang leader is young, due to her comfort with certain elements of modern society. That can be a deadly mistake, as Apacia was born a slave to Ygratt, a warrior of the Paralatae (the people Herodotus called the Scythians) in the Eurasian steppes, some five centuries before the birth of the *Christos*.

Apacia's mother was blind, as was the custom for slaves of the Scythians, and her owner fathered Apacia on her. Ygratt claimed the girl as his kin when she was born, intending on later selling her into slavery should his household's fortunes wane. As such, she was permitted to keep her sight.

Apacia grew up in the house of her father, servant to his wife. She helped her mistress with the myriad duties the wife of a warrior might need done, keeping their home clean and fine. She also tended to the lady's needs, such as the woman's personal cleansing with the plaster made of cedar, cypress, and frankincense woods. Once she grew strong enough, she also bore the responsibility for cleaning her father's weapons and armor, making them ready for when he might need them.

Ygratt's wife bore him no children, so as Apacia grew old enough, he trained her in arms, an education she took to eagerly. The Scythians accorded their warrior-women the full respect of their male counterparts. They were known for their ferocity; indeed, the peoples of the Hellenes carried stories of these women back to their own lands, as the Amazons.

Her first battle came at the age of fourteen, and Apacia slew her first man. Her proud father led her through the customary celebration of a warrior's first kill: She drank of her fallen foe's blood and cut off his head, flaying it and making of it her soldier's cup. She hung the cured skin of his head from her bridle-rein.

The Paralatae defended the ancient tombs of the Scythian kings. When a king died, the wise men mummified his body, filling it with chopped cypress, frankincense, parsley seed and anise seed and covering the body in wax upon a funereal wagon. This wagon was taken to the steads of all the Scythian clans, that they might see his remains and honor them. The Paralatae were the last to see him, for they also guarded the tombs of the kings.

When Apacia was fifteen, the Enaree, the women-like men who were soothsayers, braided their linden-bark fetishes and foresaw that Apacia was to be a queen of tombs, a guardian of the dead. Although it meant that she may never march to war again, it was a position of great honor, and she accepted the prophecy, swearing to ever defend the noble dead, and drinking of the earthen bowl filled with wine and a few drops of her blood to signify the oath.

Embrace

Although she'd been elevated in status, chosen to defend the tombs of the kings from scavengers seeking to take the treasures with which the great men of the Scythians were buried, Apacia found her duties dull. She continued to train to pass the time. It was this bored, restless young warrior woman that the black-garbed Malenchaenos found.

As dawn neared, the sound of grating stone woke Apacia and she found him pushing back the stone of the tomb of Arilannos. She drew her blade, but he bound her will and forced her to drink his blood. He then took for himself the tomb of the king Arilannos,

bidding her to guard his sleep. By night, he fed from her tribe and spoke to the soothsayers, learning their funereal rites and the tenets of their ancestor worship.

Occasionally the pale Malenchaenos wandered to the other tribes, bidding Apacia to guard his tomb while he was away. Deep in the tomb, he wrote, making his strange signs on the page in ink wrought from black walnuts and olive oil, and she was fascinated. He offered to teach her, but she refused – her people had no use for writing.

This continued for three years, until Malenchaenos heeded a call he would not make known to Apacia. Before he departed, however, he Embraced the tomb-guardian, bidding her to defend his haven while he was gone. His absence lasted for only a few years, during which Apacia learned the arts of the dead from the whispering of her ancestors. The greatest of the Scythian kings taught her not just occult secrets, but also the tactics and battle-skill they wielded in life.

Then came the war with King Darius of the Persians.

The first engagement with the Persians did not go well, ending in the almost-complete destruction of the Auchatae, the tribe whose land the Persians first invaded. When the king of the Scythians came to the tombs of his ancestors to pray for guidance, Apacia revealed herself to him.

Claiming that she spoke on behalf of the ancestors, she urged him to do what the Persians would not anticipate. The warrior tribe must not engage the Persians at all. The Scythian people held neither towns nor castles to defend. They need not fight the wars of wall-builders. With her guidance, the Scythian king led the Persians on a harrowing chase through the lands they knew far better than the invaders, attacking in small groups and fading away again.

The Scythians never engaged the Persians in outright battle. Apacia herself led several night-time skirmishes, demonstrating a terrifying warcraft and the lust for blood that her Embrace inflicted upon her. Shortly, the rumors of the terrible Corpse Queen of the Scythians passed among the Persians.

One night, when she led an attack, she encountered another master of the dead among the forces of Darius. The two withdrew while the mortals fought. In discussion with him, she explained that her tribes would not stand and fight, but would whittle away at the Persians generation after generation if they were forced to. The necromancer assured her that the Persians wished merely to pass through the Scythian

lands to tend to other, further-off enemies. The two parted having imbibed draughts of each other's vitae, and the Persians left the Scythian lands behind them shortly thereafter.

Wandering Warrior

In time, Apacia left her people behind and took up wandering Europe and North Africa, exploring its many peoples. It was during this wandering that she first met others of her clan, whom the Malenchaenos had named "Cappadocian." Apacia seemed a strange barbarian cousin to them, though one who was clearly quite potent, for all her youth.

During these years, Apacia served several Cappadocians as a guardian, thanks to her skill at arms. She remarked in a black humor that she was as good a Cappadocian as any, but that her true skills with the dead were simply in making them. During this period, she attempted to study the Path of Bones, but found its philosophies repulsive and esoteric, resulting only in a quick and terrifying erosion of her *humanitas*, and an unwillingly intimate relationship with her Beast.

Her reputation among the Cappadocians grew, and even the Lamia, whose blood oath was the defense of the clan of death, came to regard her with respect. These years she spent in near-constant conflict. She was over four hundred years old when she saw her sire again, sent by the Monk of Cappadocia himself for a special project.

Atop the mountain known as Argaeos was a holding of a vampiric cult known to worship Osiris. Cappadocius desired this stronghold for his own clan, and doubly desired the archives the cult had collected regarding the secrets of the Underworld. Although Apacia was not the oldest or most potent in blood of those gathered for the clan's first and only military campaign, she was easily the most martially capable. Apacia led the assault against the vampiric cult of Osiris, and won the holding, which came to be called Erciyes. Cappadocius showered her with honors, and she remained in Erciyes for several mortal generations, marshaling its defenses.

During this time, the clan discovered the fascinating cultus of a dying-and-resurrected messiah from Judea. They invited scholars of this new mystery cult to Erciyes, interviewing and learning from them.

One of these scholars was a man named Rudori. Formerly a military tactician who retired to a life of contemplation of Christianity's teachings, Rudori and Apacia spent much time together, discussing military feats of the past and sharing such secrets with one

another. In time, she Embraced him, though he had seen five or more decades of mortal life by then.

Before long, however, the denizens of Erciyes came to resent Apacia's disinterest in their studies and philosophies. Indeed, many of them considered her an embarrassment to the clan's blood, as she remained stubbornly illiterate. Those who reproached her for her ignorance received a face full of her contempt in their obsession with the written word. Those who pushed the issue found themselves on the wrong side of Apacia's martial prowess, treated to the thrashing of their unlives.

In time, the elders of the clan asked her to leave Erciyes, claiming that her savagery was disruptive. She and Rudori departed then and traveled for a few years before finding their way to Kaymakli. Rudori's scholarly tendencies let him fit in quite well there, and though Apacia continued to bear the honors of the Cappadocians of Kaymakli for her age and accomplishments, she hated it there. Melancholy and ill-tempered, Apacia found a resting place in the great underground city, slipping into a torpor of many decades.

A Return to Barbarism

When Apacia rose again, Rome had all but fallen apart. She found that nearly the whole of her blood clan had taken up reverence of the Christ Risen, following the lead of Cappadocius, who had woken from his own recent torpor with visions of godhead. She journeyed to Rome to pay homage to her sire, who'd found a place for himself in the upper echelons of the Roman Cappadocians.

She liked the city of Rome no better than she liked Kaymakli or Erciyes, however, and remained there for less than a year before striking out again. Her travels took her home this time, and she returned to her ancient charge, the tombs of her peoples' kings. The Scythian people all but forgotten, she found the countryside lonely and quiet.

Nonetheless, she remained there, taking up haven in her ancient tomb there. She found the ghosts of her ancestors still extant, though nearly mad with longing for the ancient rites of the Scythians. She performed these rites from half-forgotten memories, and though she knew they weren't fully correct, the ancestors seemed to rest more easily.

By the time word reached her of Rome's fall beneath the onslaught of the tribes, she was ready to see the world again. She traveled first to Rome, to see if she

could find word of her sire. He was gone, as were the rest of her clanmates there, though she suspected that a few had retreated into the tombs revered by the Messianics as the resting places of their Lord's disciples beneath the city.

While there, she encountered her childe Rudori once more, and he urged her to take up the written word and the cross for her soul. She teased him for his soft, bookish ways and left, with a goal. She'd heard impressive stories of the battle-prowess of the tribes who had sacked impregnable Rome, and she wished to see them for herself.

For the next few centuries, Apacia traveled among the people whom she considered the descendants of the Scythians, starting with the various Gothic tribes and then making her way further and further east, finding a new tribe and remaining with them until she heard their legends of other tribes to the east, tribes who always seemed to match her memory of the Scythians. Wherever she traveled, she posed as the avatar of some warrior queen or a rageful ancestor, choosing the tombs of royalty as her havens.

In Russia, Apacia came to be revered as a queen by several tribes of people called the Avars, in the frigid Khanate of Sibir. These people won her heart, for she saw in them the echoes of her own ancient peoples. To the Avar warriors who exalted her, she taught the nomad warrior traditions of the Scythians, and they thrived for generations.

Once more, however, Apacia's chosen people faced invaders. This time the armies of Kubrat the Bulgar threatened, and again she found supernatural forces hiding among the enemy. But these were no other Kindred. Instead, they were werewolves of a silvery hue and regal bearing. In battle with them she slew many, but they overwhelmed her and left her grievously injured. She fled into the icy wastes of Sibir, interring herself in the tombs of a warrior-queen whose people preceded the Avar folk.

A Legacy of Ashes

Apacia might never have risen from that torpor had the Mongol grave-robbers who invaded her tomb-haven not fallen to fighting among one another. The blood they shed woke her Beast and she rose from the funereal bier, a hungry revenant with ice-white flesh. When she returned to her senses, she was gorged on the hot blood of the steppe tribes and she stumbled into the midnight snows to see what had become of the world.

It was the early 13th-century, and the descendants of Kubrat had themselves been conquered by the Mongols perhaps a generation before. She traveled south and west to Kaymakli, seeking her childe. Disoriented and unsure, Apacia avoided the main travel routes, remaining in the wilderness until she came upon Kaymakli.

Instead of a small, comfortable town dug into the earth, Kaymakli was a great tomb. On the sealed stone, Apacia found the great and terrible curse of Cappadocius wrought into the spiritual borders of the place. She could not enter it, but when she slumbered beside the great seal, she woke the next night with the unshakable knowledge that not only was her sire trapped within it, but that her childe was as well.

She raged at it then, and used her might to try to destroy it, all for naught. In a fury, Apacia set out to find her clan, seeking out nearby Derinkuyu. The young Cappadocians there told her of the Feast of Folly, of Cappadocius' demands of his clan and how those who failed to meet his merits were imprisoned on the other side of the stone seal of Kaymakli.

The Queen of Tombs sought the Monk of Cappadocia in Erciyes, demanding that he should free her sire and childe, but to no avail. Cappadocius slumbered, and his favored childe Japheth refused her access to him. Moreover, he intimated that not only did Rudori and the Malenchaenos deserve their fate, but that she ought to have been beside them.

He renounced her claim to the Blood then, calling her "infitiore." Although she was not Japheth's equal in age or potency of the blood, she was a dedicated warrior where he was not, and she broke him against the marble walls of the temple, allowing her precious time to escape his judgment against her. She could not flee Erciyes, for dawn fast approached, but she found an ally in Japheth's brother, Augustus.

Augustus and his childer granted her sanctuary, hiding her through the day and smuggling her out at night. He sympathized with her, finding the Feast of Folly hideous and inhuman. The Giovanni assisted her flight from Japheth's wrath, hiding her in Venice for several months.

During this time, Augustus and she spoke often. In time, he revealed to her his plan to replace Cappadocius as the clan progenitor through the act of diablerie. He promised her that if his Conspiracy of Isaac were successful, he would free those wrongfully trapped in Kaymakli.

Kinslayer

Apacia agreed and assisted him in planning the coup. When the time came, she provided the violence needful for Augustus' plans to succeed. She slaughtered her own clanmates where necessary to open the routes for Augustus to reach Cappadocius, and she did so without remorse or hesitation. Her Beast came closer to the surface during those bloody, ashen nights than any other time in her existence.

In the end, however, the Giovanni betrayed her, attempting to destroy her as a lingering Cappadocian. She fled, but not before laying waste to many coterie of Giovanni *gabeloti* sent to end her. She traveled across Europe seeking allies against the Giovanni, without success, while Augustus' clan ceased to try to end her themselves, and instead hired assassins to send against her.

Apacia fled once more to her "mother tomb," the tomb she'd claimed as her first haven, among the tombs of Scythian kings. Here she entered a deep and mournful torpor in which the screams of her clanmates echoed in her dreams. She woke, ravenous, less than a century later, slaking her thirst on a patrol of Ottoman Turks. Still wary of the Giovanni, she traveled east into Wallachia, pretending to be a much younger Brujah vampire. Her puissance was quite evident, and she served as bodyguard to more than one territorial vampire lord of the Land Beyond the Forest.

It was in such a situation that she first truly encountered the Sabbat. Ieremia the Porcelain Lady, a Tzimisce of middling power, had been aggressively "petitioned" by fellow Fiends. Members of the nascent Sabbat, they demanded that she join their cause. The paranoid Ieremia refused them, and Apacia met these Sabbat in battle. Forced from Ieremia's side by a pair of Lasombra brutes, Apacia was not present to witness Ieremia's destruction.

When she returned to the top of Ieremia's hold and found her mistress to be so much ash on the wind, with her heart's blood staining the teeth of her assailants, Apacia slew the vampire responsible for the Tzimisce lady's diablerie and then "surrendered." She told them that her duty to Ieremia was discharged, and asked that they cease the slaughter that she might ask them some questions.

The much-younger Sabbat vampires – now reduced to a mere quarter of their original number, thanks to Apacia's terrible martial prowess – agreed hesitantly. They discussed the philosophies of the Sword of Caine

through the rest of the night, surrounded by Jeremia's ashes blowing on the night winds. By the time the sun peeked past the Carpathian peaks on the horizon, the two parties agreed. The Sabbath would take her to the closest diocese, that she might undergo the ritae that might make her one of them.

The elder Tzimisce there recognized Apacia's age by the strange Scythian tattoos that covered her body. Hedging their bets, they sent for a Priscus to meet and induct her. That was how Apacia met Sasha Vykos, a young firebrand Tzimisce who was enchanted not only with her graceful savagery, but her ethnic tattoos as well.

The two spoke at length that night, and for several nights after that. Apacia found something familiar in Vykos, something wise and otherworldly, like the Enaree soothsayers of her old tribe. His fiery passion for the Sabbath cause was infectious, and she told him all of her history. In the end, the two undertook a journey to her mother tomb, to give her the Creation Rites in the place where she was Embraced.

On that pilgrimage, however, the two shared blood both in the form of Vinculum and as lovers. Something foul passed from Vykos to the much-older Apacia, an evil borne in the blood of those Tzimisce who themselves practice the abomination of Vicissitude. From those nights onward, the tattoos that had been Apacia's last link to her Scythian tribe took on a significance of their own. The marks of the serpent that adorned her upon occasion subsumed her, bringing her after a short and bloody chrysalis into a serpentine creature herself. Vykos never saw this – indeed, Apacia was so mortified by it, not understanding its connection to the primal curse-gift of Vicissitude that she took unexplained leave of her brief paramour to hide in shame.

The Queen of Tombs

Despite her newfound horror, Apacia made a place for herself in the Sabbath quickly and easily. Her blood-borne fascination with burial customs and graves served her well in the nascent death-cult, and her itinerant tendencies fit well with the nature of Sabbath nomadic packs. Indeed, she became the obvious choice as war-leader for crusades of such Sabbath, many of whom come to respect her.

In the modern nights, Apacia serves as a Bishop of the sect, though were she so inclined, she could probably rise to greater heights. She is the favored war-leader sent to oversee multiple packs in crusades where another, lesser leader has already failed, or is in danger

of doing so. Apacia is disdainful in roles of leadership for too long – once the demands of the job become more administrative and ceremonial, she tends to vanish again, wondering how the true warrior cultures have faded from the world and been replaced by such puling whelps.

The only time that Apacia is known to actively volunteer for such endeavors is when the crusade has named as its enemy the Giovanni. She continues to harbor an ancient, seething wrath for Augustus' childer and can be counted on to not only slaughter as many of them as she can find, but to lend aid in protecting against their ghostly minions.

In the 1960s, Apacia became fascinated with an American nomadic culture that resonated with her own origins: motorcycle gangs. Upon first encountering them, something about the leather-wearing, nomadic gangs sparked a sense of familiarity. To Apacia, these are the Scythians of the modern nights, and she has embraced the culture whole-heartedly.

Apacia has gathered to herself a sizeable, national-level motorcycle gang called the Skiths, who use a tattooed skull as their emblem. They are on par with the Hell's Angels and the Pagans in terms of national scale of criminal operations, and closely watched by organized crime task forces in law enforcement and the FBI.

Interspersed in the membership of the Skiths are nomadic Sabbath packs who consider themselves loyal to Apacia first and foremost above any other Sabbath authority, though she rarely takes an active hand in their activities. It is only when she has been tapped to direct a crusade that she calls on them, and they arrive with her at the new crusade site, a leather-clad, tattooed cavalry on roaring Harleys. Indeed, she has established herself as the patron of an inner-circle blood cult of the Skiths, and even shown them her serpentine form in order to strike fear or admiration into them.

Recently, Apacia dropped entirely off everyone's radar for several years. So complete was this disappearance that one of her packs investigated and found her motorcycle and belongings abandoned in an out-of-the-way valley in the Appalachians. Rumors began to circulate that she'd fallen into torpor somewhere, or been destroyed.

When she returned, however, it was accompanied by a few of the strange vampires who called themselves Harbingers of Skulls. She introduced them first to her old confidant Priscus Vykos and sponsored them in

their petition to join the Sabbat. She has since become their biggest supporter, even taking on a more active role in Sabbat politics in the name of aiding them.

Sire: The Malenchaenos

Clan: Cappadocian

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Pedagogue

Generation: 6th

Embrace: Sometime between 500 and 550 BCE

Apparent Age: late teens

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 7, Stamina 7

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 5, Athletics 6, Awareness 3, Brawl 6, Empathy 4, Expression 3, Intimidation 5, Leadership 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Animal Ken 3, Crafts 2, Drive (Motorcycle) 4, Firearms 3, Melee 6, Stealth 4, Survival 5

Knowledges: Investigation 3, Law 2, Occult 5, Politics 3

Disciplines: Animalism 3, Auspex 4, Celerity 4, Fortitude 6, Necromancy 5 (Sepulchre Path 4, Ash Path 4, Corpse in the Monster 5, Grave's Decay 5), Obfuscate 3, Potence 5, Presence 2

Necromancy Rituals: All rituals of • to •••; Bastone Diabolico, Peek Past the Shroud; Esilio

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 3, Herd 4, Influence 3, Resources 4, Retainers 4, Rituals 3, Status 4

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 3, Courage 5

Morality: Humanity 2

Willpower: 8

Blood Pool/Max per Turn: 30/6

Image: Apacia is a tall, strong girl, appearing as a blonde of about five foot, nine inches in height. She wears motorcycle leathers with ripped-up jeans and t-shirts and tall motorcycle boots. Her arms are usually bare, and show off the extensive tattooing she was given as a Scythian warrior, which extends across her collarbone, up her neck and across the left half of her face.

When she indulges the great *nigricancies* that are the legacy of her clan, however, she takes on the aspect of a snake. Her appendages become serpentine, her face

an ophidian mask. The tattoos that crisscross her now scaled skin writhe of their own volition and her slitted eyes glint brassy as they drink the light around them.

Roleplaying Hints: Apacia is a quiet young woman who speaks English with a clipped accent that most listeners assume is Russian or something similarly Eastern European. Those who meet her for the first time assume that she's just someone's daughter playing at being tough. For her part, Apacia doesn't hesitate to take advantage of those who underestimate her. She finds motorcycle gang culture comfortable, a modern analog of the nomadic Scythian culture she grew up in.

Haven: Apacia usually finds shelter from the sun in one of the many safehouses associated with the Skiths, homes of former members or the lovers of one or more current riders. Some are even clubhouses maintained by someone who also serves as a local drug dealer or pimp. When outside of such territories, Apacia is quite good at finding shelter nonetheless, hiding out in basements or abandoned buildings. When staying in one place for a while, she usually prefers to find space in a mausoleum or cemetery.

Allies & Contacts: The people Apacia knows are usually on the level of organized crime. Her allies are well connected among other motorcycle gangs or organized criminals. She tends to eschew Mafia connections, due to the occasional Giovanni influence one finds among La Cosa Nostra. Her contacts tend to be the various hangers-on and useful sorts who find their way into criminal circles: thieves, fences, crooked cops, and the like.

Herd & Retainers: Apacia has an extensive Herd, with a few vessels in most of the major areas where the Skiths operate. These are usually members of the gang itself. Because Apacia chooses to feed primarily from those she considers strong fighters, it's a mark of distinction in the gang to act as one of Apacia's vessels. Her Retainers and cult members tend to be the leaders of local gangs, charismatic and intelligent criminal leaders who greatly benefit from the power of her vitae.

Influence: Apacia's influence in the world of American crime is not to be dismissed. Her Skiths are the third- or fourth-largest motorcycle gang in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and that carries a great deal of weight with gangs, drug dealers, and contraband smugglers across the nation.