



A SOURCEBOOK FOR THE DARK AGES™

Devils Love



By Michael A. Goodwin, Morgan A. McLaughlin, and
Patrick O' Duffy

Vampire created by Mark Rein•Hagen

Credits

Authors: Michael A. Goodwin, Morgan A. McLaughlin, and Patrick O'Duffy. Storyteller game system designed by Mark Rein•Hagen

Development: Matthew McFarland

Editor: Ellen P. Kiley

Art Direction, Layout & Typesetting: Becky Jollensten

Interior Art: Mike Chaney, Steve Ellis, Travis Ingram, Ben Mirabelli, and James Stowe

Front Cover Art: Jim Di Bartolo

Front & Back Cover Design: Becky Jollensten

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1554 LITTON DR
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USA

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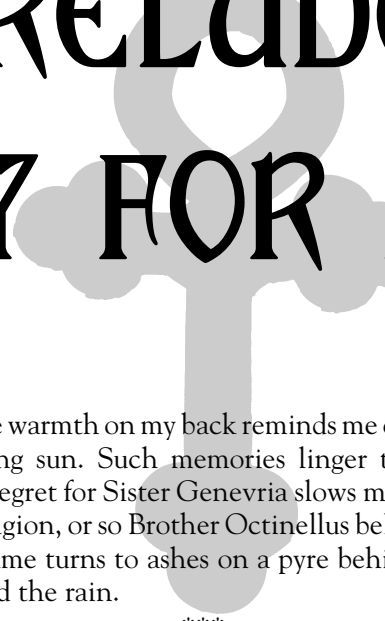
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PRELUDE: PRAY FOR RAIN

The fire's intense warmth on my back reminds me of creation and the first heat of a newly hung sun. Such memories linger through the Abyss. A momentary pang of regret for Sister Genevria slows my steps, but martyrs are the foundation of religion, or so Brother Octinellus believed. The body of the first martyr in my name turns to ashes on a pyre behind me. When the last embers die I will send the rain.

"Athaniel."

A voice called me from nothingness and I followed. I crossed out of the Abyss as through a crack of light in dark stone, finding myself bound in a circle transcribed on a stone floor, facing a frightened mortal holding a large, leather-bound tome. I made a subtle gesture and he leaned in closer, still clutching the book. Looking down at the pages again, he recited a string of words in a tongue older than most of humanity. In his impassioned recitation, he crossed the circle and I reached out to him with hands of formless cloud, embracing him.

The heavy tome fell dully to the stone floor.

His words invited me in, clearly offering a shelter of flesh. I overpowered the human's weak soul so easily, crushing it and subsuming it with barely a struggle. I felt the shock of filling his flesh. He offered me such blissful respite after the emptiness and solitude, alone but for my torment and my knowledge of being forsaken by God. In the vestiges of this mortal's soul I found the remnants of God's grace. Brother Octinellus, my new host, knew God's love. Remembering, I wept, overwhelmed in this new shape. My host's knees — my knees — began to buckle.

I fell backwards and reached out a hand to steady myself. Contact with the wall behind me immediately seared my palm, the sudden pain forcing me



forward and onto my knees. Thick bound books surrounded me, shelves lining the walls for the length of the hall; my host's memory insisted that I stood in the library, no cause for such immediate repudiation by God. My disquiet and confusion gave way to understanding. The far wall must join the sanctuary — holy ground. I held my burned hand up in front of my face, just for the pleasure of seeing with my new eyes. The red blisters on my palm and fingers burned and throbbed, but even the pain was pleasure after an eternity of nothingness. I flexed my fingers, turned my hand over, marveling at the ink stains on the index and middle fingers, the calluses, all the marks of humanity. Reaching up tentatively, I touched my new face, feeling the contours of the aquiline nose and sharp cheekbones. Warmth suffused my cheeks and tears sprang anew from those strange eyes, wetting my fingertips. Bringing a tear to my lips, I tasted salt.

I reveled in Brother Octinellus for as long as I dared, rummaging through the fragmented memory he offered up to my usage, intimately learning the life I now inhabited. I stretched myself into every corner of his being until I wore him like the finest vestments. When asked, Octinellus invited me into his emotions, his prejudices, his very human successes and failures, which I experienced in flashes and segmented scenes of memory. At last I admitted this was no dream, no cruel hallucination or new punishment issued by God. The flesh I wore belonged to me, obeyed my command and took me where I guided it. I longed to unfurl wings of thunder and touch the skies again, but I knew I needed more than the shocked belief of a monk to reclaim those wonders. This new need whispered to me, stirred me from my revelry of self-discovery.

Stumbling blindly thought the arched stone doors, I collided with a young woman, knocking her to the ground. Dismay creased her delicate features and she stammered apologies to the one monk every sister in the abbey sought to avoid whenever possible. Brother Octinellus, I learned through memories, made no secret of his disgust for women, particularly those who took holy vows and tainted the purity of his abbey.

I fumbled through Octinellus's memory for her name. Sister Genevria, of the Second Franciscan Order. Octinellus's distaste for women bubbled momentarily to the surface and I felt my new features twisting into a sneer. Surprised at the strength of his emotion, I toyed briefly with letting it spread fully across my face, but then noticed Genevria's trembling fingers

touching the beads at her waist, her lips moving in prayer. My need reared its head, cutting through the games I played with my new humanity. I saw faith written clearly on her face. Sister Genevria believed in the divine unquestioningly, considering minor inconveniences like Brother Octinellus's wrath a small price to pay for fulfilling her obligations to God.

I tasted her faith and I wanted it. Panic touched me briefly. What if I were locked in this form, unable to reveal myself, unable to take what I needed from the other breathing, pulsing mortals surrounding me and taunting me? Suddenly I realized how very tired I felt in this flesh, and how thinly I had stretched the insignificant reserves I brought into this body from the Abyss. Still, garnering her belief justified the immediate cost to my strength. I reached for it, uncertain how I knew where to reach, separating flesh from divine. I let the form of Brother Octinellus recede and angelic radiance slip forth. Sister Genevria could not know that radiance was diminished, a poor mockery of my former heavenly glory. She only saw iron-gray wings of mist and fog unfolding from my shoulders and a corona of light surrounding me like sunlight illuminating the edges of a storm cloud. When I reached towards her my hands carried the heavy scent of rain and the acrid taste of lightning.

Sister Genevria dropped to her knees with tears streaming from her eyes and hands pressed together before her in prayer, and I became once again Brother Octinellus. Genevria prayed, thanking God for sending me, thanking me for appearing to her who so desperately needed an affirmation of her faith. So easy then, in the throes of her religious ecstasy, to whisper an impassioned blessing to her and make promises of miracles and wonders if she only loved me, believed in me.

"Do you know what I am?" I asked Genevria, turning her face up to me with trembling fingers beneath her pointed chin. I needed her answer to be the right one, just as I needed her to bind herself to me with words and faith.

"An angel!" she exclaimed, radiating beautiful belief that sparked again my rapacious need, this hungry fire begging for tinder.

"Be my prophet, Genevria," I spoke softly into her ear as I knelt on the cobblestone beside her. "I am the angel Athaniel. Call my name and I will come to you. Be my prophet and through you I shall work all the miracles of Heaven."

A wonder it did not burn my lips to call myself an angel still, but the wickedness of my lie, so close to the truth, stole all the holiness from the words. Her ringing

affirmations pleased me and sustained me, stirring unfamiliar longing in my new body. God was on Octinellus's lips, but I filled the rest of him. As the woman gazed up at me in abject worship, the tear tracks streaming down her ripe cheeks like hot summer rain, I felt my skin heat, my blood rush and a thundering in my ears that shrouded all peripheral noise and forced my focus on Genevria. I wanted her. I wanted to wrap my hands, solid hands of substance at last, around her delicate bones, bury my nose into her hair and remember God's love again; to feel, smell, taste and touch. Yes, to touch again after being so long starved and alone.

I recoiled from this arousal, new and strange. Could this be what I wanted, truly, after eons of separation from my mortal charges? I vaguely remembered loving them all, smiling on them from above as they danced under my clouds and blessed me for the nurturing rains, but I could not recall the exact sensation or apply it to the supplicant before me. Then, perhaps, I finally realized the magnitude of the punishment inflicted upon us by God. The isolation and agony of the Abyss had taken our love and twisted it from something pure into this burning lust that sought fuel from human flesh. I hungered. What could I do but feed the fires?

I took Genevria's small hands in mine. She did not recoil from my blistered hand; she accepted it as easily as she accepted an angel clothed in Brother Octinellus's body. She was no fool, this darling child of God, only a believer with faith too long unsubstantiated. I would give her substance enough to satisfy her spiritual longing, miracles enough to fulfill her childish dreams of sainthood and salvation. Genevria was my first, but more would follow. I saw an endless sea of conviction stretching out before me and I had only to dip my fingers into it.

"God created the angels and the angels created the world." Genevria's voice carried easily over the small crowd of nuns and monks gathered on the stone seats in the garden nook. The devout men and women shifted uncomfortably in their seats, eyes darting around nervously for the abbot. Genevria clearly spoke blasphemies, but her claims of angels walking among men were too alluring, too hopeful, to go unheard. Already her enthusiasm spread tendrils through the abbey, spurring belief in tired adherents to an unrewarding religion.

They wanted to believe that something divine existed beyond books and hymns. They wanted to believe in God's angelic host, to hear the great rush of wings promising eternity and reconfirming the maxims of the Church. More importantly, they wanted something to reignite the passionate devotion to God that

once urged them to separate from their fellow man and cloister themselves away in this great stone fortress of worship. How they hungered for something more, these black-clad crows of God, cawing their tired Scriptures without bliss or sincerity. I would fuel their hunger as they sated mine. I desired each and every one of them and wanted their devotion, their faces flushed from the excitement and the promise of wonder yet to come.

I watched Genevria from afar, admiring her skillful manipulation of the crowd and obedient echoing of my words. I found it most effective to tell my disciple as much truth as possible, burying the seeds of deceit in the familiar axioms of Christianity.

Her voice lilted on and on, easing worry lines from faces and lifting care from burdened shoulders. From across the garden blew the first tiny breath of adulation from the gathered proselytes, little zephyrs of virgin faith as yet untested by time and unravished by stark reality. I inhaled the sweet perfume of belief from my new devotees, blind creatures who lavished their attention on the lovely nun and her zealous speeches, unaware that the source of her zeal watched them more closely than their God ever did. Genevria spun beautiful stories of Heaven, angels and salvation, largely of her own construction. I had little to tell her of Heaven, shrouding my own obliterated memories in veils of mystery, which she accepted unwaveringly from her personal angelic messenger from God. Watching her dispense her beautiful lies, which she thought the finest truths, an uncomfortable shudder passed through my flesh. My skin tightened as in cold air and would not relax, even in the golden warmth of Genevria's voice.

"And Athaniel, angel of storms, brought rain to the parched earth." Her words swelled, rising up into the air, as she lifted her white hands towards heaven, tilting back her head and closing her eyes. I glanced at the heavy clouds overhead, ripe with potential and awaiting my command. Stretching my own arms to the sky, I called the waiting lightning to branch in an arc across the cloud face. A sprinkling of rain fell down upon my golden prophetess. Even Genevria appeared startled when the first cold drops struck her upturned face, and a wash of faith poured from the crowd.

"Praise to Athaniel," Genevria cried. "Praise to the blessed angel of God!" The monks and nuns in the garden, robes glistening with rain droplets, lifted their voices to join her in worship.

"Praise to Athaniel, angel of storms!"

Faith, once sparked, becomes a living thing. Genevria planted a seed of belief that grew and spread like vines in Eden, overtaking the whole

abbey before I even realized how far my reach extended. I heard chanting begin in the abbey courtyard. Genevria could not understand her own reluctance to lead devotionals within the sanctuary and gratefully accepted my command that worship services be held beneath the open sky, where all may receive the blessed rain should I deign to offer it. I never attended her sermons, instead visiting the library or strolling up and down the corridors. Brother Micchele hurried by, pausing when he noticed me.

"Brother Octinellus," the young man exclaimed, breathlessly, "are you coming to Angel's Mass?"

I shook my head and he raced past me towards the courtyard. As activity in the abbey increased, I spent less and less time among the other brothers, preferring the relative quiet of the library. My mortal body proved an increasingly ill-fitting garment. I seldom left my cell. I sensed the importance of subtlety and secrecy, the continued necessity of hiding the truth of my mortal form, which grew more difficult as my skin pulled tight across my bones. Only Sister Genevria connected Brother Octinellus with Athaniel of Storms, as my growing throng of acolytes called me, and I often relied on her for the details of my worship. I spread my wings for Genevria alone, who paid me in kind with total devotion of spirit, mind and body. Though her ever-increasing faith lingered about her like a halo of mist, I drank of her but little, despite my thirst. What little I dared glean I savored like the fine, sweet wine my cultists weakened with rainwater before drinking in my name.

Within the bare walls of my cell I heard my supplicants call my name. I breathed deeply, filling my lungs with the whispered prayers and rising plumes of incense that carried across the courtyard. Even as I tasted faith in the air, I still felt constrained, bound by this flesh that seemed to tighten and shrink. The flickering flame of hunger still smoldered and I struggled to satisfy my growing desire, to slow the wasting of my body. I needed more. I needed them to pray until the wind of their breath was the wind of my storm, a storm to wash away the apathy from this abbey for all time.

I needed a miracle.

As always, Sister Genevria came to me after her sermon, face rosy in the dim light of dusk. I fought the smile that wanted to blossom at her appearance, striking a dark countenance as she recounted the numbers in attendance, the tribute trickling in from the surrounding village. I withheld comment until she grew concerned.

"Athaniel?" she asked, her eyes tight and worried. I glowered at her, summoning a cracking aura of orange

lightning to surround me. Genevria backed away wide-eyed, but even in her fear I tasted renewed belief.

"Have we become so familiar, Sister Genevria?" I demanded, my voice like soft thunder. Panic in her eyes, she flattened herself against the wall. "Do you grow so complacent in my worship?" I took a step toward her with each sentence.

"No, Athaniel!" Genevria cried. "No, never!"

"Do you think you call the rains, that the storms obey you?" I unfurled my wings to their full span, towering over her in dark glory as she cowered against the rough wall. My words vibrated through the stone.

"Will you receive the second revelation?"

"Yes!" she wept, crumpling into the corner of the room. Outside the sky roiled and lightning cracked.

"Will you behold the storm that is coming? Do you believe?"

"Yes, yes, yes," she sobbed, reaching towards me in desperate supplication and horrified confusion. The sky calmed and grew quiet.

"Then bring forth the word of my miracle," I whispered in the sudden silence. "I find you worthy to bleed for your faith." As I kissed her forehead I reached into her with my mind, filling her and rearranging her. Wounds opened in her palms, blood welling up.

"Go to my flock, Genevria. Tell them to spread my name like rain upon the good earth. Tell them to pray." She fled the room, red drops splattering on my floor, rubies of her devotion. I sank onto my pallet, starving and exhausted, and waited for the gale of faith to sweep over me.

My devotees overran the courtyard at each mass and Genevria added additional devotionals. The miracle of her stigmata drew crowds of curious and reverent alike. Faith wrapped around me in a torrent and still I craved more. Genevria's fine features grew pale and peaked under the strain of constant sermons and the wounds of her devotion. Fearing another fall into pride, and therefore into my displeasure, she came to me every evening to confess her sins. The whispering vestiges of Brother Octinellus pitied her and I saw that overwork threatened to break my chosen prophet. To expand my worship, Genevria needed assistance and I needed the additional security of knowing my word could spread two ways at once.

Since wrapping myself in flesh I had revealed myself to only one mortal, Genevria. Now I chose a second. Brother Gratianus, a skilled painter of icons

and frescoes, proved a natural choice. He wore his belief openly, requiring no conversion, only a simple display of divinity to crystallize his faith. Now that my name sang from every mouth in the abbey, I could afford an ostentatious display. I needed relief, even temporary, from the failing human cage in which I willingly locked myself. When my storm-blown wings spread across his ceiling, Gratianus wept in delight and reached almost immediately for his paintbrush.

After vowing his eternal devotion to the angel Athaniel, Brother Gratianus stopped painting icons of Christ and the Blessed Virgin. He only painted angels, their glowing forms limned against dark storm clouds. These new icons bespoke divinity, the picture of heavenly perfection, and those who looked upon the images felt a stirring in their souls. Many pairs of hands clutched these icons tightly as monks and nuns alike hurried to the newly scheduled devotionals, their faces fervent in spirit. When I saw one in the hands of the abbot, I knew the abbey was truly mine.

Genevria devoted herself to sermons alone, leaving the proselytizing to Gratianus. She directed the flows of belief, the central figure of my cult, the eye in the storm. Night and day voices chanted my name in a beautiful litany, and with faith garnered from their prayers the rains kept the usually dry countryside green and cool. Peasants copulated in the fields during thunderstorms to conceive strong sons. Everything moved with the rhythms of God's Will, as we angels had laid down so many eons ago.

I was the angel of storms. I should have sensed the danger in that lull. My ambitions reached too far and the rumble of distant thunder was not my own.

Sister Genevria came to me, a rolled vellum scroll in her hands and a radiant smile upon her face. The scroll bore a large and intricate golden seal.

"Blessed Athaniel," my loyal apostle beamed as she knelt before me. "I bring the most joyous news. Rome has heard of the miracles we perform in your name. They send pilgrims to see these miracles for themselves." She looked so very proud as she handed the scroll to me. I reached out to take it.

As the gold seal pressed into my hand I remembered my first moments in this body, months before, and the scalding pain in my hand as I touched the sanctuary wall. That pain was nothing compared to the molten bolt of agony that burned into my palm. Genevria smiled at me expectantly and I gritted my teeth together to keep from screaming in pain. A mixture of anger and another, unfamiliar emotion — fear — threatened to overwhelm me. I put my

burning hand, still clutching the scroll, behind my back and forced calm into my voice.

"You may go." Genevria bowed her head in respectful obeisance. She left my presence confident of my pleasure, the presumptuous wretch. Not until Genevria disappeared around the corner did I realize I still held the scroll. Dropping it to the floor, I looked at the smoking, bloody welt in my palm. A symbol stood out, carefully delineated amidst the rising blisters: a cross, clearly, but the bottom tapered to a sharp point. Staring at my hand, I could only wonder what it meant and await the coming storm.

From such a distance they appeared as little more than a bloody blot upon the horizon, but the magnitude of their faith reached me nonetheless. The small delegation, made up mostly of men and women in red robes, approached my abbey within the half hour. One woman clad in black and a heavy-set, red-haired man in Dominican dress completed the party. The abbot hurried out to greet them, obviously wary, as he had been since Genevria informed him of the impending visit. I believe he knew the nature of the threat, if not the specifics. Perhaps when I noticed his inquietude I should have warned Genevria. I watched the polite, if guarded, greeting from the library window. The breeze obeyed me and I overheard their words on the wisp of wind. The fleshy Dominican spoke first, interrupting the abbot's inquiries into rest and sustenance for the travelers.

"We are the delegation from Rome. We request that you gather the members of your Order and bring us to the woman who talks to angels." Who refuses the will of Rome? The abbot obeyed and soon many of my worshippers assembled in the courtyard. Genevria's face blended into the crowd, but I felt her presence there. I moved to the edge of the gathering and stood there silently. Denied providence or belief in God's divine plan, I could only thank serendipity for my decision to send Brother Gratianus to a neighboring monastery two days before. The pilgrims from Rome walked in the courtyard center, trailed by the anxious-looking abbot. The Dominican turned impatiently towards the abbot.

"Where is the woman?" he inquired sternly. The abbot squinted, searching the crowd for Genevria. When he found her, he beckoned for her to step forward.

"This is Sister Genevria of the Second Franciscan Order," the abbot said softly, presenting her to the delegation.

"I had not realized the Poor Clares were so active in this region," murmured a red-habited nun to a red-

robed monk behind the Dominican's back. The monk in red pursed his lips thoughtfully. Genevria approached the Dominican friar and bowed.

"There is no need for that, Sister Genevria," the Dominican scolded paternally. "We are all servants of God here." Genevria smiled beatifically under his cool gaze.

"Thank you, Brother Thomas," the red-clad monk behind him said. "If this is the woman," he waited for Brother Thomas' nod, "I will proceed." He moved closer to Genevria.

"I am Brother Philangelus. Sister Genevria, tell us the name of the angel you claim appeared to you, and recount to us his message." My heart thudded under Octinellus's drab robes. Genevria, too pious and proud to do anything less, told them.

"The angel is Athaniel of Storms," she proclaimed joyfully. "He declares that the angels created man, and that he wishes to watch over us and nurture us. He blesses us with his bountiful rains. He works miracles for his devout believers."

"Sister Genevria," Brother Philangelus replied, his tone intimate and vaguely amused. "We can find no scripture that speaks of 'Athaniel' or any account of such an angel visiting other men or women of God. Why has no one else ever heard of this angel?" My servant's eyes flashed righteousness and defiance. *Genevria, I thought, do not do this. Do not bring this ruin upon my house.*

"Because God did not want us to know the truth," she cried. "That the angels are responsible for creation!" A shocked silence filled the courtyard. The Roman envoys talked amongst themselves for several long minutes. Philangelus turned back towards Genevria.

"Tell me sister," the monk asked with a humorless smile. "Does Athaniel ever speak of God in his visitations?"

Her face went slack, her righteous anger diminished. I could see she searched for the right answer.

"Well, no," she stammered. "He speaks of the glories of Heaven and of the—"

"But he does not speak of God?" Philangelus interrupted. Genevria's silence told him the answer. "If Athaniel, an angel, does not speak of God, how have you come to such conclusions about what God does or does not want you to know?"

Genevria's eyes glistened with tears as she struggled with confusion. She reached for the correct words, the words to put a stop to this inquiry that turned too quickly into a trial.

"But I performed miracles," she whispered softly.

"You performed miracles, sister?" he scoffed. "And what of your angel?"

"Whom do you worship, sister: God or angel?" voiced the red sister.

"Do you claim these miracles come from God," the nun in black intoned, "or do they all find source in this angel?" Genevria looked around in a panic, her eyes darting from one interrogator to another. She gazed out at the crowd. She searched for me among the dismayed throngs, familiar tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I know that Athaniel has appeared to me," she uttered. "I cannot say the same of God."

"You speak heresy. Will you recant?" Philangelus demanded.

Genevria's head snapped up and she locked eyes with the accusing monk. She spoke in a voice of thunder, imbued with a rolling resonance. I felt my own will, my own Name, echoed in her voice. "Athaniel comes to tell you all that a great storm brews on the horizon, a storm to wash away all those who doubt." In villages miles away, pots rattled on sills. In my prophet's immediate surroundings, all present could feel rainwater on their faces and thunder in their hearts.

Someone shrieked, people milled about the courtyard and Brother Philangelus pointed at Genevria, his face red like his robes. "Blasphemy!" he cried. The emissaries from Rome crossed themselves or touched their rosaries. The Dominican friar pushed through the delegates to stand at the forefront.

"Witchcraft," Brother Thomas spoke harshly, his words carrying divine rebuke. At his gesture someone produced a set of manacles and heavy chains, previously hidden under rich red robes.

"Witness this witch's heresy, and the price of heresy!" Brother Thomas roared to the gathered witnesses. "God condemns those who blaspheme His truth. Rome condemns her!" The manacles closed on Genevria's wrists in the deafening silence that followed, a clang of hopeless finality.

"Has the taint spread any further?" Brother Thomas roared to the gathered witnesses. My worshippers had the sense to look appalled by Genevria's outburst, and perhaps they were. I felt the torrent of faith begin to quiet in the face of such uncertainty. Fear pressed at me again and even my crawling skin seemed to mock me.

Heavy clouds hung over the abbey as red-robed men dragged my prophet off in chains.

I considered saving Genevria immediately and justifying her faith in me before all her detractors. I waited several hours before making my final decision. The delegates from Rome spread through the abbey like wildfire, interrogating every monk, nun and village

peasant they came across. Denied their holy voice of direction, my supposed faithful either pleaded ignorance or decried Genevria's heresy outright. Belief dwindled by the minute under the insistent surge of the Holy Mother Church. I did not know if I drowned or agonized in thirst, but I felt the pain of the loss.

Despite a dedicated search, the red monks found none of the reported miraculous icons to Athaniel of Storms. No unsanctioned prayer books or blasphemous literature materialized. Brothers and sisters of the Church reported, truthfully, that they had never seen Genevria's angel. Night seemed to stretch on indefinitely, but a cold, gray dawn finally broke. Satisfied that the scourge of impiety stopped with Genevria, the Romans loosened their hold on the weary abbey. Under the heavy hand of Rome I felt the shards of faith still pulsing. Even now, they wanted to believe.

I found her in an unused cell at the far end of the abbey, the door guarded by a red-clad young monk and two tired retainers. The monk dozed in his wooden chair as I approached respectfully.

"May I be allowed to visit the condemned?" I queried. "I wish only offer her a final chance to confess, to send her to God with a clear conscience." The weary monk acquiesced. Of course he did. I entered the cell.

Sister Genevria looked small and pitiful in her chains. Blood trickled from the corner of her swollen mouth, her face stained with filth. I knelt beside her in the straw and wiped her face with the corner of my robe. I reached within Octinellus for the right emotions, only to feel the tears already coming, unbidden.

"Genevria," I whispered, and her luminous eyes opened to me, stunned and accusing.

"You abandoned me," she whimpered, turning away, curling up into the matted straw again. I caught her fragile face in my hands, pulled her towards me.

"No, my faithful one," I insisted softly. "Do you disbelieve me now?" My form glowed with a soft light. I saw the spark within her rekindle. Her faith, at least, was not dead. It wanted to live again, a tiny breath of wind stirring against my taut skin. She glanced up at me hopefully.

"You have done so well in defending me," I spoke warmly to her, stroking her lovely hair. "All you must do now is believe. You must believe in me and know that I am watching over you."

"I would not deny you. I would not recant," she whispered fervently. "Brother Philangelus says he will burn me at sunset."

"Then at sunset when they light the pyre," I assured her, "pray to me and I will send the rain. Their fires can

not overtake you, Genevria. I will quench them with my fury and deliver you to sainthood. Believe in me."

I left her in the cell, sobbing with gratitude and rapturous certainty, twelve hours before sunset.

Brother Philangelus ordered Genevria's pyre built on the hilltop, and at sunset he and Brother Thomas tied her to the tall post. She looked beautiful in her simple linen shift, more beautiful than any living thing I remembered, more beautiful than an angel before the Fall. Impossible, I know, but such irrational idealization is a trait I learned from Brother Octinellus.

She closed her eyes. Her lips moved in prayer. She whispered my name over and over again in a litany of supplication.

"Athaniel," she whispered. "Blessed angel of God. Send a storm to cleanse these doubters. Send rain to drown their disbelief."

The abbey emptied, the brother and sisters all coming to watch and wait for a miracle. In the face of Genevria's unwavering faith those who denied her and her angel felt shame. Every time Genevria spoke my name I experienced a warm blush, as if from excitement or arousal. My skin tingled, and every movement of the air against it gave me thrills of pleasure. Genevria smelled the burning pitch now, as Brother Thomas brought forth the torch. Her lovely face broke into a smile.

Even when they lit the cordwood beneath her, Sister Genevria prayed. All the saints had suffered worse than she, and what was temporary suffering compared to the reward of vindicating her faith? An orange glow surrounded the base of the pyre.

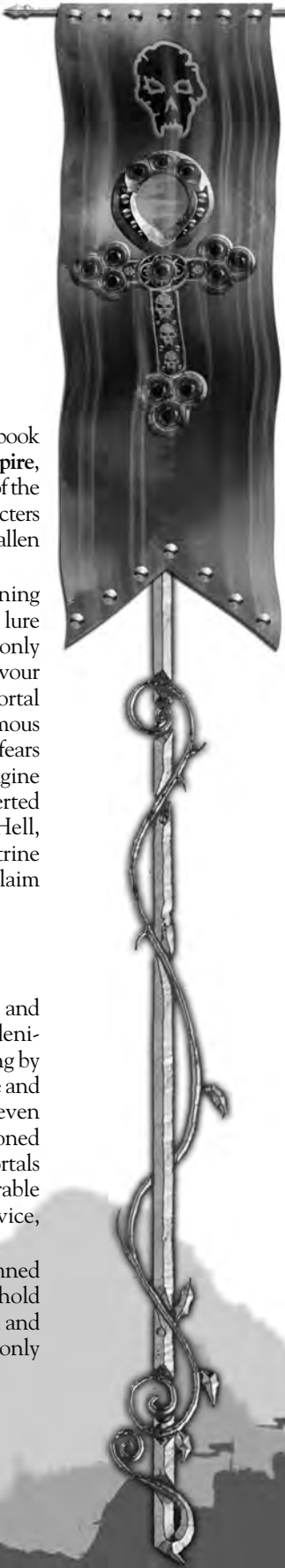
"Athaniel, Athaniel," she repeated in an ecstasy of belief. "Send a storm. Send the rain. I believe!"

The fire rose high around Genevria, but she only repeated my name. She surrendered, gave her faith over to me wholly, certain the sky would open up and shower her with my blessing. I breathed her gift in heavy draughts of wind, smoke and conviction.

She burned. She suffered. She died... but she believed. As the tongues of flame licked her perfect face and melted her devoted eyes, she believed.

Sated, at least for a time, I walk away from Genevria and towards the monastery that houses my loyal Brother Gratianus. I turn my back on Genevria with no more difficulty than God turned his back on me. After all, she only burned briefly. My burning never ceases for long.





INTRODUCTION

“You have not as yet estimated the great burden of sin.”

— St. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*

Devil's Due serves as the guide to demons and infernalists for the **Dark Ages** game line. This book expands upon and supersedes the brief information presented on pp. 292–293 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, presenting a close look at the host of Hell and their history stretching back to the very beginning of the universe. While the book serves as an excellent resource for integrating infernal supporting characters and antagonists into ongoing **Dark Ages** chronicles, it also presents the possibility of playing these fallen angels or their wretched slaves as the protagonists of their own stories.

Within the Dark Medieval, the Church strives to conquer and convert the remaining heathen cultures of Europe, decrying pagan deities as demons masquerading as false gods to lure humanity from the truth and salvation of the one true God. As in so much else, the Church is only partially right. Demons do exist, and they do tempt mortals into sin and debauchery or even devour them outright. Demons build cults to glorify themselves and glut their immortal hunger on mortal faith, turning that faith into tainted miracles aimed at recruiting more believers into blasphemous idolatry. Every demon is a cancer gnawing at the soul of the world, and the Church rightly fears and wages eternal war on the fallen host. What the Church does not know or think to imagine is that demons built the world as the hands of God, and that the fallen have insidiously subverted believers of almost every religion since before Christianity emerged. To the host of Hell, Christianity is no different; it holds no special place—it is simply another threat, another doctrine to destroy. Finally and most heretically, some precious few of the damned may repent and reclaim some vestige of their long-abandoned angelic grace.

Themes

Above all else, **Devil's Due** focuses on the mutually opposing themes of damnation and redemption. Damnation needs little explanation given the subject matter, since demons undeniably represent the greatest evils in or beyond the world, twisted beyond human understanding by their sin and the agony of exile. Demons float in the nothingness of the Abyss, indestructible and immutable save for their eternal dissolution into abomination. They are unable to escape or even peer into the world they made, for all their power. And yet some of the fallen *do* escape, summoned by mortals daring or foolish or arrogant enough to open a crack in the prison of Hell. Such mortals often end up playing host to these emergent demons, or becoming slaves of the incomparable horrors they unwisely called. The bravest and most fortunate actually bind demons to their service, turning the tables on the proud infernal host.

What then of redemption? Scripture does not even suggest the possibility that the damned would seek forgiveness and morality, let alone find divine grace. But then, scripture does not hold all of the truths of the Dark Medieval. The Church portrays a rather different story of Cain and Abel than the tale recounted by those claiming descent from the First Murderer. The Church only

privately acknowledges the existence of these self-titled Cainites, and then only to send forth the zealous hunters of the shadow Inquisition. Rome never dreams that the ashen priests of the undead pursue strange redemption in the night, hoping against hope to transcend their accursed hunger. Rome certainly never imagines that these penitent vampires somehow find a measure of sustaining grace and even sanctity of a sort. The Church does not teach many things, either because it does not know or because it dares not reveal what it knows, leaving the general populace of Europe to believe that monsters only seek the corruption and destruction of Christendom and the world. The truth is not so simple as that — not for vampires nor for true demons. The truth is rather more complicated, since the freed members of the infernal host reflect a spectrum of morality, from unspeakable depravity worse than any fables of the Church, to the rare and sad embers of angels looking for God.

Like demons, thralls of Hell live at the unlikely intersection of damnation and redemption. The former comes almost too easily. After all, infernalists choose their blasphemy just as Lucifer's angels chose rebellion against God. Demonologists hoard forgotten and forbidden lore seeded by demons to ensnare the haughty and the curious. Some compound this sin by violating the judgment of God and summoning demons from Hell, while others "merely" seek out those chthonic horrors already loose in the world. However they ultimately arrive before a demon, willing to trade away their service and souls for power and riches, thralls *all* arrive willingly in the end. Though demons may apply the persuasion of blackmail, deceit, pain and threats to recruit those few reluctant souls who catch their malefic attention, the fallen cannot actually compel submission. In the end, the prospective slave must deliberately choose to set aside the teachings of the Church and the cries of stifled conscience to accept the devil's bargain. They get what they pay for, for all the good it does them. Thralls must damn themselves. For all that they suffer terribly in service to yet more terrible monsters, thralls have only themselves to blame for their wretched state.

If demons may repent, then of course thralls may also seek the long and bitter path to freedom and grace. Like demons, however, most never bother. Once lost, grace proves elusive, and damnation affords its own glory. Those who choose enthrallment are seldom the sorts of people who dwell on moral consequences. Some thralls regret their choice almost immediately, and others regret later when they finally understand the price of their sin; but life is sweet and death bitter, and many ultimately rationalize that it is better to serve the evil than stand in its path.

How To Use This Book

While *Devil's Due* requires *Dark Ages: Vampire* for setting and basic rules, this book otherwise includes complete information for playing games about demons and those who consort with Hell. That being said, the fallen make difficult and often repugnant protagonists, so Storytellers may find more use for this book in creating antagonists. Likewise, we encourage Storytellers to modify the content of

A MEDIEVAL PROMETHEUS?

In the Dark Medieval, demons are not fashionable evils, nor are they fictional symbols of an outdated and fear-rooted mythology. They are not tortured, Promethean antiheroes railing against a tyrannical Creator, as literature will suggest many centuries later, nor are they misunderstood — except perhaps for being more hideous than humans imagine. In this era, demon worship is not a frowned-upon subculture of adolescent rebellion characterized by growling lyrics, pentacles and a propensity for wearing black. Here, infernalism represents deliberate and unforgivable treachery against God and humanity. Infernalists willingly serve monsters that seek nothing less than the destruction or enslavement of the entire world. For once, the often-oppressive Church is right to make war on the fallen and their slaves, using any means necessary to drive the ultimate evils back into the Pit. The stakes really are that high, and those individuals discovered or even strongly suspected of infernalism find themselves hunted down and pitilessly exterminated. While some demons and thralls come to repent their damnation and work toward atonement, these remarkable souls remain a tiny minority touched by inexplicable grace. Epics arise from such conflicted protagonists, which is why this book presents the slim possibility for penitent demons. Of course, epics seldom end happily, and fallen angels remain fallen first and angels a very distant second.

For the record, the obligatory disclaimer: This book and everything contained within is written and intended as *fiction*. White Wolf does not condone the perversities and malice of the characters and beings described in these pages. You are not a demon. You are not possessed. You do not serve Hell. You cannot summon an ancient Lovecraftian evil by sacrificing your neighbor's puppy while babbling gibberish in Latin. If you believe otherwise, put this book down *immediately* and seek professional help. And leave the poor puppy alone.

this book for their own games, adjusting the power level, motivations and even origins of their demons to better suit their stories. After all, demons most assuredly lie, and where does the lying stop?

Chapter One: Power and Principalities takes a look at demons, providing a brief overview of their history from Creation to the present, as well as the current agendas of the fallen and the ways that demons seek to subvert and reclaim the faith and dominion of the world.

Chapter Two: Slaves Enthroned addresses the spiritually bound servants of the fallen and the prices they pay to taste infernal glory. Most thralls enter into pacts with a crude understanding of the vile monsters they entreat. These fools and villains undoubtedly deserve their fate; but other thralls just want something immediate to believe in, and fall under the spell of demons hiding behind the guises of angels.

Chapter Three: The Host of Hell provides the rules and dread Arcana necessary to create playable demons and thralls for use as supporting cast and antagonists, or the central figures of their own stories.

Chapter Four: Chronicles of Sin looks at the ways Storytellers can create sagas of redemption and damnation featuring infernal characters as protagonists. This chapter also provides suggestions for incorporating demons and their thralls into any of the major **Dark Ages** games, as well as notable demons, thralls and infernalists abroad in the Dark Medieval.

Appendix: Other Damned Souls offers a glimpse at two other supernatural factions spreading the taint of Hell in the Dark Medieval: the dreaded Baali bloodline and the depraved mages of the Circle of Red.

Source Material and Inspirations

Demons find their way into the folklore, mythology and religions of most cultures; the relevant medieval depictions alone could fill a library. Nonetheless, the following books, short stories, plays and movies capture the spirit of demons and infernalists as **Devil's Due** presents them:

THE THREE FACES OF INFERNALISM

Infernalist is a generic term applied to all individuals who study, worship or interact with demons. In **Devil's Due** players could encounter three different types of infernalists, each of which plays a very different role.

Demonologist: One who studies demons. A demonologist is interested in the theoretical, spiritual or intellectual science of demons, and does not necessarily have any intention to ever invoke a demon or interact with one directly. When curiosity or thirst for power becomes overwhelming, however, demonology can act as a jumping-off point for diabolism. The shadow Inquisition's Red Order (see **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** p. 132) is an excellent example of the practical application of demonology.

Diabolist: One who summons demons and seeks to control them. This term may also be applied to one who worships demons. The diabolist ideally has a strong background in demonology, but not necessarily, though attempting to summon a powerful demon without the appropriate knowledge of how to bind it could have fatal results. The diabolic order of the Circle of Red (p. 73) revolves around the summoning and binding of demons.

Thrall: One who serves demons through a pact made directly with a specific demon. A thrall need not be a diabolist and rarely has any prior knowledge of demonology, though he may soon have an intimate, first-hand knowledge of the nature of demons.

Demon: the Fallen. Unsurprisingly, **Devil's Due** draws heavily on this modern World of Darkness game for setting inspiration, portrayal of demons and even some rules. In particular, the supplements **Earthbound** and **Damned and Deceived** provide other, detailed perspectives on monstrous demons and thralls respectively. Note that **Demon: the Fallen** is *not* required to make use of this book.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* should be required reading for anyone harboring delusions about happy endings for thralls. Ambition consumes and damns Macbeth, and even the blessing of his supernatural invulnerability comes with loopholes ensuring his ultimate downfall.

Doctor Faustus, by Christopher Marlowe. The other quintessential and far more direct treatise on thralls and why it is generally a bad idea to become one, this play has it all: demons, pacts, embodied sins and stirring scathing commentaries on the nature of Hell and damnation. The text of this play can be found online with only minimal searching, so there is really no excuse not to read Marlowe's exquisite work.

The Divine Comedy, by Dante Alighieri. The Abyss referenced in this book bears virtually no resemblance to the tiered Hell narrated by Dante, but this literary classic has much to offer in its depiction and categorization of sin. Online copies of this book exist for those uninterested in a trip to library.

Paradise Lost, by John Milton. A Torment-laden narrative highlighting the degeneration of fallen angels into demons, Milton's epic work stands the test of time alongside Dante as one of the most well-crafted visions of the infernal. Online copies of the text also exist.

Daemonologie, by King James I. While later period than the setting of **Dark Ages**, this fascinating treatise on infernalism showcases the differentiation of thrall versus diabolist. Modern readers may find the archaic language difficult, but it is well worth the read. Online copies of this text exist.

The Name of the Rose: Umberto Eco's book has found an intriguing, if sometimes slow, adaptation in the Jean-Jacques Annaud film by the same name. This movie shows the balance and conflict between faith and reason, and the power of secrets worth killing for. The appearance of the Inquisition and the accompanying liturgical paranoia also demonstrates the implacable and ruthless enemy demons find in the Church.

While hardly period, many of Neil Gaiman's prolific body of works include angels, demons, gods and stranger spirits living among humankind. The *Sandman* comics and the novel *American Gods* demonstrate the strange symbiosis that often emerges between demons and the cults of worshippers providing them with faith, and offer a commentary on the mortal condition from those beyond it. *Neverwhere* features a disturbingly likable pair of enigmatic evils and a truly magnificent fallen angel, and the short story "Murder Mysteries" from the anthology *Smoke and Mirrors* perfectly captures a host of angels fulfilling their uniquely ordained purposes to tragic consequence.

The Devil's Advocate: Completely out of period and sometimes over the top, this movie demonstrates enthrallment as a process of gradual seduction and keeps obvious supernatural events to a minimum. Al Pacino's devilish monologue at the end is classic.





CHAPTER ONE: POWERS AND PRINCIPALITIES

“For it is said: Even in His Angels He found sin.”

— *Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger,*
Malleus Maleficarum

To the priests and inquisitors of the Catholic Church, the peasants who work the fields, and the nobles in their keeps and castles, demons are the masters of Hell, dedicated to corrupting and stealing human souls from God’s embrace. Commanded by the Devil himself, demons are the enemies of all that is good and holy, tempting mortals into sin and tormenting the souls of the damned for all eternity.

A few theologians think demons are intermediary spirits, messengers who act as go-betweens between mortals and God, the material and the divine; in this belief, they follow the philosophy of Plato, still held in esteem more than 1,500 years after his death. Others theorize that demons, though evil, still work in God’s service; through their temptations, humanity is tempered and tested, so that only those truly deserving of God’s blessing pass through the gates of Heaven. Such beliefs, though, go against Church orthodoxy, and are generally shared only with like-minded religious philosophers.

The supernatural denizens of the Dark Medieval have their own opinions on demons, formed from their own encounters and mystical experiences. Cainites see demons as shadowy rivals, who prey upon the souls of the innocent but have little interest in the black spirits of vampires. To mages, demons are dangerous but controllable servants who can be summoned and bound by the

wise. The Garou believe demons to be spirits of purest evil, horrors in service to the Wyrms that exist to poison the world and all living things.

None of these beliefs is correct. All have a germ of truth to them, yes; but the true nature of demons is something unknown to mortals and monsters alike. Only a scant handful of beings in the 13th century have gleaned even part of the truth, and almost all those unfortunates are dead, completely insane, or in the direct service of a demonic master. Such knowledge is a terrible thing, and is better kept secret.

Demons are fallen angels, the rebellious Host that turned against Heaven and declared war against God Himself. Condemned to Hell, these arrogant spirits were locked away to rot in their prison forever. But pagan mages and primitive wizards defied God's will centuries ago, releasing some of the imprisoned demons and giving them entry into the mortal world once more. Now the demons work in darkness, surrounded by mortal puppets and worshippers, lusting after the souls of humanity and the destruction of God's creation.

These are not agents of a unified, scheming Hell, dedicated to the Devil's will, no matter what the Church believes. Hell is a howling void of black terror, and every demon is a solitary monster who cares only for its own depraved, filthy urges. In fact, demons fear Hell more than any mortal could, and will do anything to remain free from its appalling confines. This is no easy task, though, for the mere existence of a demon is anathema to Creation, and Hell's gravity pulls constantly at their foul souls. To remain in the mortal world, demons must bind themselves into physical hosts; but here their vast and corrupt power works against them.

Demons are simply too powerful to possess a human host for more than a short time; their black energies rip apart a mortal's body and soul within days or weeks, throwing them back into the Abyss. Demons must instead bind themselves into objects — graven idols and evil relics — leaving them confined in a new kind of prison. The only alternative is a sorcerous ritual that tears away a piece of a demon's soul and buries it within a human host; a useful trick, but a far cry from being able to walk the earth and crush your enemies directly.

The great enemies of a demon are not, in truth, God and His angels; they were once, but that was in a time before history. Demons war against each other far more than they war against God and His followers. These battles are fought over human faith, and victory is achieved only by stealing the souls of

mortals. Demons need the faith and worship of mortals to survive; they corrupt and condemn those souls merely as a side effect, albeit one that their spiteful and murderous spirits enjoy.

For centuries, demons have fought each other, struggling to gain more worshippers and expand their twisted cults. Some have fallen to their infernal foes, reduced to slumbering spirits trapped inside ancient idols. Others desperately corrupt and poison the souls of humanity, struggling to stay outside the walls of Hell. It has been a losing battle, until now. In this age of uncertainty and despair, something has changed, and the demons are aiming for more than simple survival. The sack of Constantinople, a city that symbolized a great defeat for demons, has filled them with renewed vigor; and they are making blasphemous schemes for the destruction and corruption of all that is good and holy. In this time, demons even work together to achieve their hideous goals — to pitch the whole of the Dark Medieval world into the torture chamber of Hell.

A History of Damnation

Demons have existed since the beginning of time, and before. In this, the teachings of the Church are correct. Demons were once angels, the servitors of God, and were present when He created Heaven and Earth. The vile beings that now poison the world helped to form it. But they are no longer the holy beings they once were, and the bleak consequences of their dire sins have changed them into forms unimaginable by mortal and angel alike.

The following information describes the origin and degradation of demons, mapping the downward spiral that leads from bright star of Heaven to blasphemous horror of Hell.

Dread Genesis

In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was God. This much the Bible gets right. From that point, the true history differs markedly from the Church's canon.

When God decided to create the world and all its wonders, He did not perform this task Himself. Instead He charged His angels, the Elohim, to both design a Creation that satisfied God's desires and to bring it into existence. It was a task monumental in scope, but the Elohim rose to it.

The angels toiled and strived for uncountable eons, though in an age before time itself existed,

BLACK GOSPELS

Few inhabitants of the Dark Medieval know the true history of demon-kind. Heretical documents that piece together secrets and rumors into half-understood, patchwork truths may exist, but are nearly as rare as fragments of the *Book of Nod*. But diabolic cults still exist in small and scattered groups across Europe, and the blasphemous books and writings of these sects are occasionally found.

The sacred writings of the Mithraic Heresy are such documents. Allegedly written thousands of years ago, these texts belong to a cult that originally worshipped a demon called Mithra or Mithras. While poorly written, incoherent and patchy, the texts (mostly written on old scrolls) tell of the fall of the rebel angels, the war between angels and demons, and the imprisonment of the defeated demons in Hell — all from the perspective of Mithra, who justifies his actions and atrocities to his worshippers. The texts also describe Mithra's escape from Hell, the formation of his cult in the Mediterranean region, and the efforts of his followers to pervert and corrupt the peoples of Greece and Rome before the birth of Christ. The Mithraic Heresy still survives, with handfuls of mad cultists worshipping their demon god and attempting to subvert the teachings of the Catholic Church.

(Some Christian scholars perceive traces of Mithraism within Catholicism; the timing of Christmas, the Virgin Birth and a number of other

similarities exist in both Mithraic and Christian doctrine. The Church's "official" view of this is that Mithraism deliberately mocks Christianity by aping it. The cult of the Mithraic Heresy, in any case, is a small sub-sect of Mithraism, divorced from the bulk of the religion, and its demonic lord is perhaps not the same god worshipped by the rest of the sect. The writings of the Heresy show little in common with Christian doctrine, and if Mithra has an opinion on the similarity between the two faiths it remains unknown.)

The *Gospel of the Consoler*, also known as the Gospel of Menahem, is even more appalling and blasphemous. Certain bishops and learned inquisitors know of this book, but only by reputation; it is believed (and hoped) that all copies of the text have been destroyed. The document told the story of Christ's sojourn in the desert, and his temptation by the Devil, as described in the New Testament. But in the Gospel of the Consoler, Satan does not tempt Jesus, but *teaches* the Son of God to aid Him in his holy work. Moreover, the book was written *from the perspective of Satan himself*, who casts himself as an enlightened angel seeking to uplift humanity. Such blasphemies were rejected by every Christian sect, even the outcast Albigenians. If a copy of the Gospel of Menahem were to surface anywhere in civilized Europe, good men and women of every faith would surely move to eradicate its heresy from the face of Creation.

"seven days" is as good a description as any. The Elohim spun the stars into the firmament and stitched together the laws of nature and physics; they constructed the very Earth itself and divided the sea from the land. They even breathed life into the world they had built, creating all the animals and beasts that walked and flew and swam across the face of Creation. Everything except humanity, for human beings had never been included in their divine plan for the world.

It was God Himself who proclaimed that humanity must be created, perfect inhabitants for the Eden He had planned. Following His instructions, the Elohim dedicated themselves to this new task, forming a man and woman from the clay and spirit of Creation. These first humans were unique in all Creation, for they possessed a piece of the divine spark, God's own essence

and image. Even the angels themselves, powerful though they were, were not so perfect and blessed as the humans they had given life, and that imperfection led some angels to damnation.

The Fall

After the creation of humanity, the first man and woman — Adam and Eve — dwelt in Eden, an idyllic retreat, where they spent their days communing with God. The Elohim were given stewardship of the Earth, charged with safeguarding it until humanity was ready to take control of its birthright. While they were also charged with protecting Adam and Eve, the angels were forbidden by God to interfere with them.

As unmeasured time went on, a number of Elohim became resentful of God's dictates, and jeal-

ous of humanity. Had they not produced a perfect Creation, exactly in line with their Lord's wishes? And what was their reward? The job of grooming and maintaining Creation, while God devoted His attention to humanity. And as for humanity, how could God share His divine holiness with these hairless apes but not with his devoted Elohim? Why should the angels be considered lesser in God's eyes than creatures they had *created* for him?

It was Lucifer, the angel held highest in God's regard, who finally rebelled against His rule, after Lucifer's pride and arrogance grew stronger than his devotion. Lucifer realized that while humanity *seemed* weak and foolish compared to the angels, their resonance with God's spirit gave them great potential for power. If the angels could siphon that power from Adam and Eve, then they too could draw from that infinite and holy source, and pit that strength *against* God to wrest away control of Creation. It was a vile and blasphemous plan, but many of the angels were so blinded by lust and resentment that they fell in line behind Lucifer.

And so Lucifer stole into Eden, and planted the seeds of doubt and corruption within the souls of Adam and Eve. The two innocents were innocent no longer, and in their ignorance they trusted in Lucifer's lies. Humanity lent its support to Lucifer; and hidden from view in the thickets of Eden, a full third of the Heavenly Host shared that support, that power, and rebelled against God's will. This was the Fall of the Righteous, the great schism in Heaven, and those rebel angels became known as *demons*.

War Across Paradise

Enraged by the corruption of humanity, God banished Adam and Eve into the wilds of Creation, along with their demonic masters. With a wave of His hand, He destroyed Eden, and the force of that destruction scarred Creation forever. In this new and unforgiving world, humanity quickly bred and multiplied, all the while offering up the power of the faith and devotion to the demons.

To the demons, this faith was meat and drink, the divine spark they needed not just to survive, but to give them the strength to combat the Heavenly Host. God withdrew from Creation following the destruction of Eden; His divine power was so great that had He directly engaged Lucifer's army, all of Creation might have been consumed in His inevitable victory. Instead, He sent His angels, led by Michael, to combat the forces of Lucifer the corrup-

tor and his rebels, and to save humanity from being used as demonic slaves.

At first, the war advanced slowly, as both sides learned the ways of violence and strategy. The demons built unholy cities and black cathedrals as redoubts, or as citadels to house their human worshippers. When angels and demons clashed, the battles were relatively bloodless affairs, either side retreating if they became disadvantaged or risked significant collateral damage. Rebellious as they were, demons still had to protect and nurture their human followers, and sought to leave Creation largely undamaged, if only to ensure a better reward for themselves after winning the war.

Then came Cain's great sin of murder, the first murder, and with it the entire spiritual and moral fabric of Creation was distorted. Suddenly demons awoke to the rewards and joys of depravity, sin and horror, and they set about turning Creation into a savage wilderness. Where once the demons had sought to win human love in order to reap the power of human faith, they now saw how to gain that faith through fear. The demonic cities became torture chambers and blasphemous arenas, as demons abused and murdered humanity in order to wrest faith from the terrified survivors. The war became a savage and bloody affair, as demonic armies inflicted terrible losses and atrocities on the angels who stood between them and the throne of Heaven.

Damned For Eternity

In the end, though, all the evil and corruption that the demons unleashed turned against them. Humanity slowly came to realize the true nature of the beings who ruled and tortured them, and steeled their souls against their oppressors. Mortals still bled and died under the lashes of demons, but more and more of them refused to worship their murderers. What had once been a flood of divine power became a river, then a trickle; and Lucifer and his fellows found themselves powerless before the Heavenly Host. Soon the demons were routed from their citadels and palaces, and those who were not slain outright by God's angels surrendered to the Host.

God's punishment for the demons was not destruction, but something far worse — banishment and imprisonment. God put forth His hand and opened a gate to Hell, a place of absolute nothingness, a blank prison in which the demons would be held for eternity. Powerless and alone, the demons would be left for all time to contemplate their sins and pay the price for their crimes. Stripping the

rebels of almost all their power, God withdrew again, and His Host banished the demon forces into Hell.

All save one, the most cunning and powerful of all. Whether he managed to escape the Host, was imprisoned separately as a greater punishment, or betrayed his followers in exchange for freedom is unknown — but Lucifer was never sent into Hell. His demonic legions were left leaderless and abandoned, alone in the darkness of the Abyss.

Evil Unbound

In the black emptiness of Hell, the demons became even fouler and more corrupt than they were before. Faced with an eternity of desolation and nothingness, the creatures grew mad and vicious, and fought over meaningless territories and power. As centuries and millennia and eons drew on, the demons became even more spiritually deformed.

If the divine plan had not been corrupted by Lucifer's machinations, the demons would have been left to molder and rot until the end of time. But the Adversary had other plans.

Release of the Archdukes

Centuries after God banished the rebel demons into the Abyss, Lucifer returned to Creation; the story of his fate and whereabouts in the intervening years remains a mystery to this day. In those centuries, humanity began to grow and advance, throwing off the yoke of demonic oppression and forgetting the atrocities their ancestors had suffered. God and His angels withdrew to Heaven, preferring to leave Creation in the hands of humanity.

In the rich and fertile lands of Asia and Africa, civilizations appeared and prospered. As civilization grew, so did religion, with the worship of what the Church of the Dark Medieval would call pagan gods. Across the world, sects and cults arose to venerate these gods, led by priests and sorcerers — mortals who had learned to harness some small part of God's divine spark, the limitless spiritual potential inside every human soul.

Lucifer saw this burgeoning power, power that could conceivably counter the will of God (since it also possessed God's divine nature); and he developed a plan to break open the walls of Hell and free his damned brethren once more. Using his own infernal gifts, he infiltrated the dreams of mortals around the world, mortals with strong abilities to control their spiritual potentials. In these dreams, he whispered of gods truly worthy of worship, gods who

could guide humanity to new heights. Gods who needed to be brought into this world from the dark dimension where they languished.

The slow corruption and temptation of the mortal sorcerers took many years, but in the end even the wisest of them succumbed to Lucifer's wiles. In five different locations around the world, the misguided priests gathered with their followers and bent their faith to liberating their gods. This focused application of faith, so like the divine will of the Creator, was able to pierce the walls of Hell, to counteract the very will of God himself. And five archdukes of Hell, five demons of great power who had served Lucifer during the war with Heaven — Abaddon, Dagon, Asmodeus, Belial and Azrael — were pulled from their prison and set free upon the face of Creation once more.

Creation had changed in the intervening centuries, however, and so had the archdukes. Where once they had been beings of spirit made flesh, now they were spirit alone, bodiless and without substance. Hell's influence pulled at them, a spiritual gravity that could not be denied by will alone. In order to remain free, the demons needed bodies — and not frail, weak human frames, but physical forms strong enough to contain their Hell-born power. Anticipating this, Lucifer had led his mortal dupes to create special objects and statues, called *reliquaries*. To anchor themselves in Creation, the archdukes bound themselves into these graven idols, forever altering their souls to dwell inside these static, artificial bodies.

With his lieutenants free, Lucifer looked forward to their return to his service to take up arms against Heaven once more. In this, though, he was bitterly disappointed. Hell had left the archdukes mad and warped; they harbored great hostility towards their former leader, the only demon who had escaped God's punishment. Utterly selfish and depraved, the archdukes now cared only about gaining power for *themselves*. Each of them denied Lucifer, and attempted to destroy him. When they failed in this, they focused their attentions on expanding their cults, draining faith from their worshippers, and satisfying their lusts for atrocity.

Darkness Grows

Rebuked by his hoped-for allies and followers, Lucifer retreated to make new plans. In his absence, the archdukes grew in power, driving their worshippers to new depths of sin. The demons ruled their followers through terror and indulgence; fear made



mortals desperate to please their “gods,” and they were rewarded with obscene pleasures. Cults sprang up across the world to serve the archdukes, who took on many names and guises. Kybele and Mithra, Nergal and Apep; whatever names mortals gave them, whatever sick rites the cults developed to placate and worship them, the demon lords found a way to gather mortal faith for their own ends.

If humanity had stopped there, if they had contented themselves with worshipping only five demon lords, then the cults would perhaps have faded away after a few centuries. But Lucifer had opened Pandora’s box, and mortals had learned a new way to make their marks upon Creation. Some sorcerers looked for their own gods — ones who would demand different and more palatable sacrifices, or might act against the excesses and sins of the extant demon gods. Here, too, was Lucifer’s invisible hand, encouraging mortals to further develop the rituals he had taught them, in the hope that he could find the allies he needed to battle not just Heaven but his own rebellious archdukes.

So as the years wore on, humans continued to summon demons from the Abyss, and to bind them into reliquaries. Dozens, *hundreds*, of demons were liberated from Hell, given new bodies of obsidian and black iron, and worshipped as gods. None were as strong as the five archdukes, but even the least of them was a corrupt entity of monstrous spiritual power. Like the archdukes, these demons were desperate for worshippers and followers, and sought to control mortals through fear and corruption.

Like the archdukes, each of these demon gods sought nothing more than its own gratification, its own power, its own dominance. Alliances were impossible, whether with Lucifer or any other demon. Each and every demon loose upon Creation demanded power and faith, and refused to cooperate with its erstwhile fellows. Lucifer’s plans to defy God were dashed, and again he withdrew, hoping to find a new way to rally the forces of Hell to his side.

The Light in the Shadows

While demons and their false cults raged across Creation, God had not turned His back upon His children. While He could have sent the Host to again wage war on the demons, or even intervened directly to banish them again, the Creator knew that such acts would wreak terrible damage upon the world and the human race. Similarly, He could have prevented mortals from summoning demons, but only by removing His own divine spark from the

human soul, destroying that which made humanity so unique.

But while God did not act directly against the demons and their cults, He did do so indirectly, by inspiring and aiding humans who took up arms to resist the demons. He sent angels to guide and protect a Semitic tribe, the Hebrews, and to teach them of His holy truth. Armed with this wisdom, the Hebrews began to prosper and grow, and to pose a threat to the power of the demons. When the arch-duke Abaddon became aware of them, he attempted to destroy them, using the power of the Egyptian empire that worshipped him in the guise of their gods. To defend the Hebrews, God imparted further wisdom and teaching to Moses, who learned to use the divine spark within himself to work miracles. It was Moses who struck down the demon lordling Baal, whose reliquary was a statue of a golden calf; and it was Moses, drawing on God's teachings, who warned his people against the power of demons, forbidding them to worship the graven idols that were the reliquaries of the unholy monsters.

Moses was not the only Hebrew leader to fight demons with God's aid. King Solomon also battled the forces of Hell, again using his own divine power as the source of his mystical abilities. Solomon built the Ark of the Covenant, a relic of holy power that he used to imprison and contain the spirits of demons. Drawing those imprisoned spirits into an iron urn, he dropped it into the Dead Sea, where it remains today; under leagues of black water, the imprisoned demons tear at each other in a prison smaller and even more hopeless than Hell itself.

With God's guidance, the Hebrews (who became known as the Jews) took control of the great city of Jerusalem. The city suffered many attacks over the centuries from the forces of demon-kind, both subtle attempts at corruption and overt sackings by the armies of demon-ruled empires. Jerusalem weathered them all. As the centuries passed, and the demons fought among themselves for faith and territory, Jerusalem stood as an island of divine hope and calm, a place where humanity might stand to take back Creation from the demonic invaders.

Such did not come to pass.

The Corruption of Europe

When demons first returned to Creation, they clustered around Africa, Asia Minor and the Middle East. They were certainly not confined to this region exclusively, and could (and did) appear and form

cults anywhere foolish mortals gathered to summon dread powers from beyond this world. Europe saw little demonic activity, since it had few large civilizations from which sorcerers and cults could arise.

Eventually, though, this began to change. And as Europe began to play a larger part in Creation, demons flocked to this new world of primitive faith.

Greece

Centuries before the birth of Christ, Greece arose as the preeminent power in Bronze Age Europe. In the various city-states of Athens, Sparta and Thebes (among others), a shared culture developed, one that emphasized stability and knowledge over chaos and ignorance. While the various city-states warred and schemed against each other, they possessed at least as many similarities as differences, not the least of which was their pantheon of gods, goddesses and heroes.

When the learned wizards and mad cultists of Greece succeeded in releasing demons from Hell, the monsters found the Greek gods to be perfect disguises and identities. Far easier to co-opt an existing belief system and wellspring of faith than to create a new one from scratch, after all. The many demons who infiltrated the Greek pantheon rediscovered something they had forgotten—cooperation and competition. Demons would normally battle ferociously over exclusive access to worshippers and resources, because mortals rarely showed the same amount of devotion to multiple masters. But in Greece, humans worshipped the whole pantheon, not just a single member. Even if a mortal elevated one god above others, that didn't deny faith to the other gods.

With the imperative for open warfare lessened, the demons focused on subtlety and competition. It was still better to dominate than submit, to rule other demons than to co-operate with them, but now there were further options, other possibilities than outright battle. A loose cluster of demons gravitated around Greece; not an *alliance*, by any means, but a more-or-less stable group of demons who competed for faith and political gains within the city-states.

As the demons controlling the co-opted Greek pantheon began to prosper, other demons were left on the outside, unable to wrest faith and power from the claws of their rivals. These demons were dismissed by the Greeks as monsters and evil spirits—or worse still, simply not acknowledged at all. These outsiders needed to find their own nexus of worship, their own base of

control: a mortal civilization that could provide both spiritual power and the temporal might to destroy the demonic cults controlling the Greeks.

That nexus was Rome.

MASKS OF DIVINITY

Some modern inquisitors might preach that *all* the pagan gods are truly demons, attempting to steal souls from God and the Church. That's not the case. In truth, most pagan gods are... something else — spirits and forces the Church can't comprehend, and that follow their own agendas. But the average inhabitant of the Dark Medieval can't tell a demon from a god, and thus many of the denizens of Hell have adopted a useful tactic — masquerading as gods who are already worshipped by mortals.

A demon who practices this deceit infiltrates the cults and sects worshipping a god, and uses its supernatural powers to convince mortals that it is an avatar or incarnation of Loki, Set, Kali or some other deity. While some worshippers refuse to accept this (and are likely killed for their skepticism), most believe the lies and begin channeling their faith to the invading pretender.

It's important to remember, though, that demons *aren't* gods, and that gods aren't "really" demons. Demonic claims of divine status are lies. Most people who worship the pagan gods actually *do* worship their gods directly; it's only individual cults, corrupted by demons, that mistakenly revere a Hell-born monster.

Many **Dark Ages** characters believe in non-Christian deities, and some even draw power from their faith. Almost without exception, such characters are *not* demon worshippers; their gifts are very different from those of demonic thralls, and their souls are (hopefully) not corrupted by madness and sin. Your Valdaerman rune mage isn't actually an insane, evil demonic thrall — well, not unless you *want* him to be.

There's certainly great story potential in a character finding out that some of her god's worshippers are actually deluded diabolists. And there's even more potential in that character developing doubts about her own faith, considering what parts of her belief system might be untrue or influenced by demons. Telling a player "your character is actually a crazy demon cultist" is usually *not* fun, though, and Storytellers should resist the urge to do so.

An Alliance of Monsters

Two of the demons denied access to the faith of the Greeks were two of the most powerful, the archdukes Abaddon and Asmodeus. While they had a presence in Greek myth, it was as figures of evil; this provided them with a tiny amount of faith, but nowhere near enough to satisfy them. The two monsters wanted a flood of power, not a trickle, and they wanted to dominate or destroy the demons who had come to lurk in Greece. United in their desires (as well as their mutual hatred and distrust of each other), the archdukes were able to come to an agreement — to set aside their differences and ally to bring down the Greek city-states and the demons behind the scenes. It was the first true alliance between demons since the War with the Host, the first time the monsters were able to work together rather than turn on each other out of hate and torment.

The two archdukes waited with inhuman patience for an opportunity to bring down Greek civilization. Centuries passed before they noticed a growing culture not far from Greece, a burgeoning empire with both military and intellectual might. That culture was Rome, circa 400 BC. Like Greek civilization, the Romans possessed a pantheon of gods and spirits that could be co-opted and controlled by demons. Indeed, some demons had already begun to exert influence on the growing empire, although it was not as heavily corrupted as that of the Greeks.

The two archdukes moved swiftly to take control of Rome. Established demons in the region either stood aside for the invaders or were destroyed, as Asmodeus and Abaddon began dominating the cults and mystical sects of Rome. Again, this was a long process, but time means little to demons who have spent untold eons in Hell's empty wastelands.

Of course, it wasn't enough to simply influence Rome. The archdukes wanted to destroy Greece, and to feast upon its ashes. Using their dread powers and Roman instigators, the archdukes orchestrated a conflict between Athens and Sparta, the Peloponnesian Wars. (More subtle manipulation would have been difficult, due to the strength of the demons inhabiting Greece, but the archdukes had a talent for war.) The struggle ripped the city-states to pieces, with a ragged and weary Athens emerging triumphant only to be savaged and defeated by the invading Macedonians — again, guided by the archdukes. Greece lay in ruins, and Rome moved to take political control of the region. Behind the scenes, the archdukes destroyed the weakened demons of

the Greek pantheon and annexed their cults, taking the faith of the believers for their own.

Now Abaddon and Asmodeus had control of the single greatest power in Europe — a new world, far from the established demonic power bases of Africa and Asia Minor, that could be ravaged for faith and become Hell on Earth. The archdukes set about cementing their control over Rome and its republic. The Roman senate proved to be problematic, because it left too much power in the hands of the people (well, the rich, educated senators anyway) and not enough in the hands of the priesthood. So the archdukes set about corrupting the senate and orchestrating civil war. Soon the republic collapsed, and Octavian became the first Roman Emperor, a puppet dancing to the archdukes' wishes.

Where the republic had been a (comparatively) stable and non-expansionist power, the Empire was a greedy juggernaut that cannibalized Europe. It sent its armies across the continent, and into neighboring Africa and Asia Minor, in search of land and slaves — and mortals to join demon-worshipping cults. Early victims of the expansion were the Jews, whom the archdukes hated because of their links to God the Creator; they were persecuted and tormented, sold into slavery while Jerusalem was sacked. As the empire expanded, other demons began to infiltrate it, latching onto the existing structure of worship to siphon off faith and followers. The archdukes tolerated these parasites; it would have taken more work and faith to destroy them than was lost to their petty thievery.

Under the influence of the archdukes, Rome became a decadent, voracious empire, ruled by madmen and cultists. Would the Romans have sinned without demonic encouragement? Perhaps. Demons corrupt and taint, but they did not *create* sin; that invention was humanity's own. But certainly the archdukes hastened the process. Gladiatorial games and frenzied excesses became rites of worship, where mortals could debase and corrupt themselves while channeling faith to the beings who encouraged and rewarded their sins. Graven idols to the pagan gods sat in every home, temple and public place; not reliquaries, but proxies through which demons could observe their mortal thralls and exert their wills.

As Rome spread and festered, more demons congregated around the city and the Empire, taking their places behind the masks of the pantheon and feeding on the faith of the citizens. The demons of Rome existed in an uneasy truce for several years, occasionally clashing over territory and worship-

pers; on a number of occasions, the archdukes were forced to destroy an upstart demon who took too much faith or made itself too visible. Eventually, though, the demons fell into a hierarchy, a social order of blood, fear and iron similar to that which had existed in Hell. They still hated each other, of course, but it became to the advantage of the Roman demons to cooperate, in much the same way that their dread kings, the archdukes, did.

This level of demonic cooperation and interaction led to further gains — more faith from corrupt worshippers and more opportunities for the monsters to slake their inhuman desires. If the demons of Rome had continued to work together to expand their Empire, Creation might have become a wasteland in a few centuries.

The Coming of Christianity

From the ranks of the oppressed Jewish faith came a new heresy, a new human religion. The followers of the prophet who some called Jesus Christ didn't just preach rebellion against the Roman Empire, which would have been bad enough. Far worse was their denouncement of the Roman gods — not simply as evil enemies of their god, but as lies and delusions, as *false* gods. For demons, this was dangerous, as was the Christian belief in human divinity and the connection between humanity and God; it denied the beliefs that they had beaten into their worshippers, that the gods were intrinsically different and superior to humanity and must be worshipped and venerated above anything else in Creation.

The demons attempted to stamp out the rising heresy of Christianity, slaughtering each new congregation as it arose, but it proved impossible; the stories of Christ and his disciples continued to spread across civilized Europe. No matter how many Christians died in the arenas or at the hands of Roman soldiers, more people embraced the faith elsewhere. The demons looked at the rise of this faith, this belief system that seemed designed to stand against their rise, and they saw the hand and plan of God behind it; and they were afraid. They lashed out more and more viciously at the rising sect, devoting centuries to fighting its influence across the decaying Roman Empire — until God's plan took an unexpected turn.

In AD 310, Rome was governed by a council of four emperors, all the puppets of various demons, who used their human pawns to advance their own desires. One of the emperors was Constantine, a devotee of Asmodeus; the archduke wanted to disband the council and give all power to his pawn.

DEMONIC HISTORY

Any demon currently active in Europe today, if asked (and compelled to be truthful) would give an account of history roughly commensurate with the one provided in this chapter. But as any diabolist knows, demons do not compel, control or otherwise guide world-shaping events; they can't even influence human lives unless given permission somewhere along the way.

And that, of course, is the point.

Yes, various demons have nudged the course of human history. That does not mean that humanity had no control — far from it. It simply means that somewhere in that history, some person or persons granted power to a demon or a demon's servant, possibly to perform one very specific task that had nothing to do with wars or nation-changing politics. But one small stone can start an avalanche....

Abaddon and his demonic subordinates wished to prevent this, so they pushed the other three emperors to send Constantine to the primitive Roman settlements in Britain. This enraged Asmodeus, who became impatient with the politicking and compromise of his arrangement with Abaddon; he recalled Constantine, and directed him into civil war with the ruling triumvirate and the Roman legions. Constantine's followers fought a bitter war with the established powers of Rome, supported in secret by Asmodeus and his demonic followers — but Abaddon had his own powers and allies, along with a greater force of mundane worshippers and soldiers. Constantine was losing the war.

But then God appeared to Constantine in a dream, and promised the rebel emperor victory; victory, but only in the name of a just cause. Constantine converted to Christianity on the spot, and his soldiers followed suit. With holy determination in their hearts, they threw themselves against the walls of Rome one more time, and this time broke through. Constantine stormed the city of the demons, threw down the pretender emperor, and became the first Christian ruler of the Roman empire. By his command, Christianity became the official religion of Rome, and the worship of the pagan gods — of demons — became a criminal offense. Altars were destroyed, temples torn down, and demons found their supply of faith drying up.

The process was not instantaneous; many Romans still venerated the old gods, but their numbers grew fewer each day. Starving for faith, their social order collapsing, the demons turned on each other.

A Dark Age

Within a matter of years, even the greatest demons were reduced to pathetic states, surviving on trickles of faith from tiny suppressed cults, watching as Christianity took hold across the face of Europe. When Constantine established Constantinople, the holy city of God, it seemed that Lucifer's second attempt to steal Creation from God was an even greater failure than the first.

Rome did not stand, even bulwarked by the Christian faith. The strength and aid of its demonic patrons had protected it from its external enemies, and now it was vulnerable. The Byzantine Empire took control of much of the crumbling Roman Empire, while Goths, Huns and other tribes tore its armies to pieces. This was the beginning of the true Dark Ages, as Europe became balkanized and fragmented, chaos replacing the regimented order of Rome's influence.

Under other circumstances, such chaos would have provided demons with countless opportunities for creating new cults and gaining followers, mortals desperate for the protection and guidance of a (supposedly) divine entity. But this was a new era, and the demons made mistakes that once they would have been too wise, too patient and inhumanly calm, to commit. Because they had found fear and greed more effective tools for gaining worship than love or hope, the demons attempted to gather worshippers in that fashion. They would destroy villages or slaughter mortals, then demand worship to appease their wrath; they assembled tiny cults and pushed them to gain temporal power and resources.

But in the Dark Ages, mortals no longer saw demons as gods; they saw them as monsters — creatures to fear and run from in terror, but not to *worship*. All the atrocities the demons committed simply pushed mortals further away, back into the protection of Christianity, a religion that preached a gospel of rejecting evil rather than serving it. Mortals continued to believe in demons, but belief without faith and worship was worse than useless.

Deprived of faith, many demons began to fade from existence. They did not die, but many became dormant or inactive, fading into a kind of sleep deep inside their reliquaries. As the number of active



demons dwindled, those remaining had more room to move, more chances to find worshippers before their rivals. In their hunger and desperation, however, they still drove away more followers than they gained. Those few demons who stayed active through the Dark Ages drew from small, fragmented cults, worshipped by scant handfuls of deeply insane fanatics. But as the centuries wore on, and Islam joined Christianity and Judaism in drawing together mortals to venerate God and reject the worship of demons, such cults became rarer and weaker than ever before.

The archdukes were among those demons still active in Creation; and they fought against God's plans with all their inhuman strength, still an order of magnitude greater than any demon save Satan himself. Abaddon focused on Germany, and drew to himself several cults of depraved Viking berserkers. Dagon and Asmodeus retreated into Asia, where the Abrahamic faiths had far less influence, while Azrael corrupted the similarly isolated peoples of the Americas.

Belial, however, was not content to hide from the face of God; he sent his thralls across Europe, searching for weapons and advantages he could use in his rebellion. He found such a weapon in the most unlikely place — the Christian faith. As Christianity spread, it continued to clash with Islam and Judaism for social and political control over parts of Europe. Belial saw an opportunity to set God's followers against each other, and set his thralls the task of manipulating the three religions into prolonged conflict; in the meantime, his reliquary was buried in the holy soil of Jerusalem itself. It was Jerusalem that became the battleground between Christianity and Islam, in the form of the Crusades.

But while demons gloried in seeing God's worshippers slaughter each other, it did them little good; mortals remained faithful to the true covenant, rather than rejecting God and turning to demonic patrons. Some demons were able to subvert and corrupt the priests of the Church itself, tempting priests away from God with promises of temporal power and pleasure. But while individual members of the Church supported demons, the monsters were unable to corrupt the faith to the point where believers deserted in droves; and that was what was truly needed.

As the Dark Medieval era dawned, most demons were pitiful wretches, clinging to existence by the barest of margins. Their cults were small and isolated, their powers ebbing; mortal faith in God remained strong, even despite the excesses of those

priests and Church power-mongers who had been corrupted. The end seemed inevitable: Demons would fade from Creation, and be drawn back to Hell and an eternity of God's punishment.

And then Lucifer reappeared.

The Fall of Constantinople

In AD 1204, the Fourth Crusade sacked Constantinople; Christian warriors destroyed the first Christian city. Demons across Europe took a mirthless joy in this act, in seeing Constantine's work undone by his own followers. But as the dust settled from the city's desecration, it became clear that this was more than simple human weakness; the work of Satan was visible in the ruins. In the aftermath of Constantinople's invasion, every demon in Christendom received a vision sent by Lucifer, calling his warped brethren to action. *The symbol of God's victory is dust, he said, yet we are still here.*

Almost 30 years after the fall of Constantinople, the demons are experiencing a new golden age — tarnished gold, a false sheen on a coin of base lead, but gold nonetheless. They know that this is their last chance to take revenge on God, and to enslave

humanity for their faith and the amusements of their pain. Over nearly three decades, demons have wormed tendrils of control into the power structures of Europe and Asia, attempting to corrupt all of human civilization. They are few in number but mighty in power; their worshippers are scattered madmen, but they are influential and fanatical.

And they have vowed to tear the stars from the sky, burn all of Creation to cinders and throw the ashes into the face of God.

The Nature of Evil

While humans and supernatural beings might debate the nature of demons, their moral and spiritual dimensions and purpose, demons themselves are beings of certainty — the certainty of absolute evil and absolute corruption. Let the mortals chatter, with their theories and their theologies. Demons know their own nature, and their own history; after all, they were present for the birth of all Creation, and no one knows this world like they do.

The following information on demons contradicts not only some of the beliefs held by the

THE WARDERS' PROPHECY

Thirty years ago, a Theurge called Songs of Shadows delivered ten prophecies to the tribes of the Garou. Few among the Garou took the Prophecies of Shadow seriously — until the sack of Constantinople just a few years later. The fall of the great city fulfilled the Warders' Prophecy, the first of the ten visions of Songs of Shadows.

The fall of Constantinople also galvanized the legions of Hell and united many demons under Lucifer's leadership once more. Is this just a coincidence, or did Songs of Shadows foretell the rise of the Hell-born? Perhaps, perhaps not; it's the nature of prophecies to encompass multiple possibilities, and for different meanings to spring forth from one event. What matters is that for thirty years, the Garou have been anticipating Armageddon, and that for thirty years demons have been working to bring Hell to Earth. Inevitably, these two races of beings have become aware of each other, and they are *not* friends.

The Garou see demons as particularly powerful, depraved Banes, and their mortal thralls and followers as fomori. Unlike most Banes, though, demons

have little presence within the Umbra, and focus on altering and corrupting mortal society far more than on tearing apart Gaia's vital energies. This means that the Garou must develop new strategies against the lords of Hell, rather than the tactics they have employed against Banes for millennia. But such a change is needed, for if the werewolves do not stand in the demons' path then surely they will usher in the Apocalypse.

The Garou puzzle demons, for such beings simply *did not exist* during the time of the War with Heaven. They are a new and dangerous mystery — and one that must be destroyed, for the upstart wolf-men would dare to defy the will of Hell. This is easier said than done, though, for the physical might of a werewolf outstrips that of even the most warped and powerful thrall. To battle the Garou, demons must intervene directly, with all the risk that entails. Thanks to these differences in methods and outlook, Garou and demons clash only rarely — but when they do, the result is chaos and bloodshed on a scale to make God Himself turn away in horror.

inhabitants of the Dark Medieval world, it contradicts some material found in other **Dark Ages** sourcebooks. This contradiction is due to the flawed understanding other beings have of demons and the erroneous assumptions they make from those false premises; the material in those other books reflects those *beliefs*, rather than the reality.

(And, of course, that material is designed to mesh with the themes and moods of specific **Dark Ages** games. Demons in **Dark Ages: Mage** don't behave like or follow the same rules as demons in **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, because the two games require different things from demonic Storyteller characters.)

The demons of **Devil's Due** differ in many significant ways from those developed in other sourcebooks, and might not fit in with the feel of an established chronicle. As always, this book exists to help Storytellers and give them ideas, not strait-jacket them with restrictions that *must* be followed. If you don't like some of the details that follow, change them or ignore them.

Tainted Spirit

The key to understanding demons is to always remember that they are beings of pure spirit. Withered, foul and hideous, but pure spirit nonetheless. While those who exist in the Dark Medieval wear some kind of body (see *Corrupt Flesh*, p. 34), that is something a demon acquires only *after* it returns to Creation.

As a creature of spirit, demons are affected little by physical laws like gravity, or by the swords and arrows of mundane opponents. The laws that govern these spirits are the laws of God Himself, as well as the dictates of the foul emotions and desires that reverberate through the demons' souls. Demons have abilities and qualities that no other denizens of the Dark Medieval possess, but are also bound by restrictions that other beings do not even perceive.

On Wings of Song

The Elohim, the angels, were God's first creation, molded from nothingness before time even existed. Invested with immense power (although not God's own divine essence), the angels crafted Creation through will and dedication alone, setting down the building blocks of matter, spirit and reality. This is not to say that angels could do *anything* — omnipotence is solely the province of God. The Elohim were defined by their own spheres of expertise, and could only affect miracles of lesser potency

LABELS OF CONVENIENCE

As beings of spirit, angels and demons don't have genders in the way that mortals do. Nonetheless, most demons do identify themselves as being male or female (although some monsters are sexless, multi-sexed, or simply indescribably gendered). This is a statement of personality and attitude, rather than biology; and demons can change their seeming gender at will.

outside that sphere. An angel of the earth, charged with crafting mountains and valleys, could also create celestial music or breathe life into animals, but her creations would be less complex and elegant than an angel who specialized in such matters.

As beings who stood outside Creation, who indeed *built* Creation, angels possessed many divine properties. They were bodiless beings of essence, pure mind and holy spirit that could travel through solid stone or the ocean depths without being in any way affected by their surroundings. Their spiritual bodies were visible to other angels as beautiful humanoid figures (often winged), sometimes naked, sometimes clad in simple but impossibly elegant finery, depending on the angel's wishes. Mortal concepts of thought and intelligence did not apply to the angels; their minds were unique and perfect, unhampered by the limitations of fleshy brains. Similarly, angels were beings of perfect emotion, of love and beauty. Without bodies and chemical processes to beget emotions, their feelings rose directly from their souls, unsullied by mortal failings or weaknesses.

After the rebellion, angels and demons clashed not only in the invisible realms of the spirit, but also in the material plane of Creation; in fact, the vast majority of the War took place in this world, and the sites and scars of long-past battles can still be found in the hidden depths of the Dark Medieval period. Angels and demons alike learned to create bodies for themselves, perfect vessels to inhabit while incarnate in Creation. Like their souls, such bodies generally appeared as radiantly beautiful humanoids, although some demons (and a few angels) had inhuman or even monstrous countenances. These bodies were not flesh and blood, but soul made substance, reflecting an angel's or demon's nature; a demon of the oceans, for instance, might have worn a body crafted from water and sea spray, while an angel of stone might appear like a perfect statue of gold and burnished steel. In these bodies, angels and demons were impervious to mortal concerns like

age, disease or pain, and could still work their wills upon the fabric of Creation.

While both sides would deny the charge, angels and demons were very similar beings at this time. Their moralities and spiritual natures were utterly different, but their physical and spiritual abilities were almost identical; anything an angel could do, a demon could do as well. Demons *did* learn a number of tricks and ploys that their counterparts did not possess, due to their foul experiments and willingness to act without honor or decency in battle. For their part, the Host drew upon God's boundless will and energy to carry them forward, rather than wrestling spiritual energy second-hand from enslaved humans; and this made them stronger than demons.

It was only after the rebels were punished with exile to Hell that angels and demons became *fundamentally* different entities.

Chained to the Abyss

Hell is a place of utter emptiness, a void that exists outside Creation. While demons also originated outside Creation's boundaries, they came from Heaven — and Hell was in all ways different from God's demesne. The absolute negation of Hell was completely inimical to angelic and demonic nature; in order to exist in that place, demons had to change their very essences. Some of those changes were put into place by God Himself, as part of His punishment upon the rebel angels, while others were made by the demons themselves to survive.

THE POWER OF NAMES

The divine act of creation is more than simply crafting something in matter or spirit, it is giving it a *name*. After all, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God; that word, that holy name, is the true spiritual core of every entity, object and concept in Creation. God created His Elohim by giving each a *True Name* that contained the angel's true essence, identity and purpose. When the rebel angels turned against God, they turned against the purpose in their True Names, and thus those names changed in turn. When the rebels were locked into Hell, the True Name of each was recorded for the divine record — and while that record was never meant for human eyes, random chance and Lucifer's scheming have seen fragments of it pass into the hands of mortals over the millennia.

A demon's True Name is the key to its identity. It is far more than a collection of sounds or letters; a True Name also incorporates gestures, thoughts and even the emotional states felt while speaking or communicating that Name. While demons can speak True Names with ease, humans cannot; mortals can barely comprehend a fraction of the information buried within. But even a fraction of a Name has power, and mortal sorcerers use syllables and fractions of True Names as integral parts of the rituals used to summon demons from Hell.

Demons jealously guard their True Names, and with good reason. A demon can force obedi-

ence from another with the use of its rival's True Name, or even return it to the empty horrors of Hell. Because the Name can be compiled from fragments, mortals who use such fragments to summon demons rarely survive to pass that information on to others.

When dealing with mortals and other demons, the Hell-born use their secondary or *Celestial Names*. These simple names are more like the names of mortals, with only a small amount of spiritual depth. While a dedicated demon can use a rival's Celestial Name as a clue to its True Name, the Celestial Name isn't sufficient to give the demon power over the rival. A demon can communicate over vast distances with another demon by invoking or speaking its Celestial Name. This can even happen by accident; if a mortal speaks the Celestial Name of a demon, the demon may possibly "hear" the speaker and choose to reply. This is rarely a good thing.

While records of True Names are rare, lists of demonic Celestial Names can be found all over Europe. The Church maintains comprehensive lists of such names in its archives, while the grimoires of mages may contain even more examples. Some names have even passed into common folklore; no peasant knows the True Name of Lucifer, but the Devil's Celestial Name is invoked hundreds of times each day. Wise sorcerers and inquisitors refer to demons by honorifics and appellations, rather than Celestial Names; foolish ones who mention the name "Belial" or "Asmodeus" in a conversation rarely survive long.

After their exile, demons were truly creatures of Hell, *not* of Creation. And when some of them finally returned to Creation after eons of exile, they found that their changed natures also involved massive changes to their abilities.

By God's will, demons are barred from Creation and locked into Hell. They *cannot* leave Hell by their own devices, or through any exercise of their spiritual powers; the lock upon the Abyss is charged with God's own divine essence, and will stand fast until Judgment Day. Mortals can draw demons out of Hell, however, because of the spark of divine essence that lies in every mortal soul. The will of a human being, focused and directed through prayer, ritual and possibly madness, can momentarily pierce the walls of Hell, just long enough to draw out a specific demon. The creature vanishes from Hell and appears on Earth, the wards of the Abyss slamming back into place the moment after it escapes.

Even once a demon is freed, though, Hell still calls to its soul, and Creation still rejects its tainted spirit. A terrible spiritual gravity constantly pulls at the demon's essence, dragging it back down into the Abyss. To stay in Creation for more than a heartbeat, the demon needs a physical body in which to anchor its spirit, whether that body is a living human or an inanimate object. For more information on a demon's body, see p. 34.

The summoning rituals used to pull demons into Creation are designed to mitigate the pull of Hell, at least in the short term. Many rituals are built around a focal vessel, such as an obsidian statue or a drugged sacrifice; the demon can shelter within this vessel and anchor itself to Creation before Hell can claim it. Other rituals use a protective circle or sigil, imbued with the spiritual energy of the summoner, in which the demon appears. Popular folklore has it that these circles protect the summoner from the demon's wrath, but popular folklore is completely wrong. The circle protects the *demon*, not the mortals; it shields the creature from Hell's spiritual gravity, allowing it to remain in Creation for as long as it stays inside. Inexperienced sorcerers and hedge wizards who believe themselves safe from a demon summoned inside a circle learn a harsh (and often fatal) lesson about putting too much faith in common knowledge.

When a demon is summoned to Creation, it appears in its spiritual form. This form may be visible or invisible, or even both at once — visible to worshippers or the spiritually gifted, invisible or only partially visible to other mortals. While demons

were once beautiful beyond words, that was before their rebellion and imprisonment. Hell has changed them, and they display their sins and blasphemies in their very forms. All demons are monstrous, horrific beings, and a mere glimpse of a demon's true spiritual form is enough to drive some mortals completely insane. Many demons resemble the popular image of their kind — winged, horned humanoids, covered in scales and ichor. Others are even more monstrous, creatures of nightmare; mountains of tumors and eyes, snarled nests of bleeding tentacles, pools of burning blackness that hover in mid-air... each is unique, and uniquely horrible. Some rare demons even have something of an angelic appearance, with a human face and feathered wings; but those with the will to look past the disguise see the pus oozing from between the burnt feathers, the blood trickling from the insane eyes and the evil staining the stolen finery of splendor.

If a demon is not sent screaming back to Hell scant seconds after arriving in Creation, if its summoners do not botch the ritual, or run screaming upon seeing what they have unleashed, then it has another problem to deal with; its burning, all-consuming need for worship and mortal faith.

The Need for Faith

The power that made rebellion against God possible lies not within demons, but within mortals. Human beings are made in God's image, specifically His spiritual image; they possess a spark of the Divine in their souls, no matter how vile and debased they become. It is this divine power that allows some mortals to command spirits, learn magic or summon demons from Hell. Most commonly, though, mortals only unleash a small portion of this divine nature, in the form of faith — belief, willpower and dedication, whether to God, Allah, a pagan god or a demon.

Angels do not possess this divine radiance themselves. Instead, they channel God's power and will, and can use it in ways that mortals cannot; they are the divine lenses that focus and direct the incandescent light of the Creator. When the demons rebelled, God turned His face from them and denied them His power. To maintain their strength, the rebels drew upon the divine power of humanity instead, an energy that could be unlocked via the worship and belief of mortals. While an individual mortal has only a minuscule fraction of God's power, a moderate-sized group of dedicated mortals could supply enough faith to a demon to allow it to not just survive, but to thrive and wage war against Heaven. Demons tapped the faith of mortals during

their War against the angels, and it was when humanity finally rejected the lies and horrors of the demons that the Host were able to defeat them and condemn them to Hell.

When the archdukes escaped Hell, they immediately began to draw upon the faith and will of the mortals who had summoned them, as well as the congregations of deluded or terrified mortals that worshipped them.

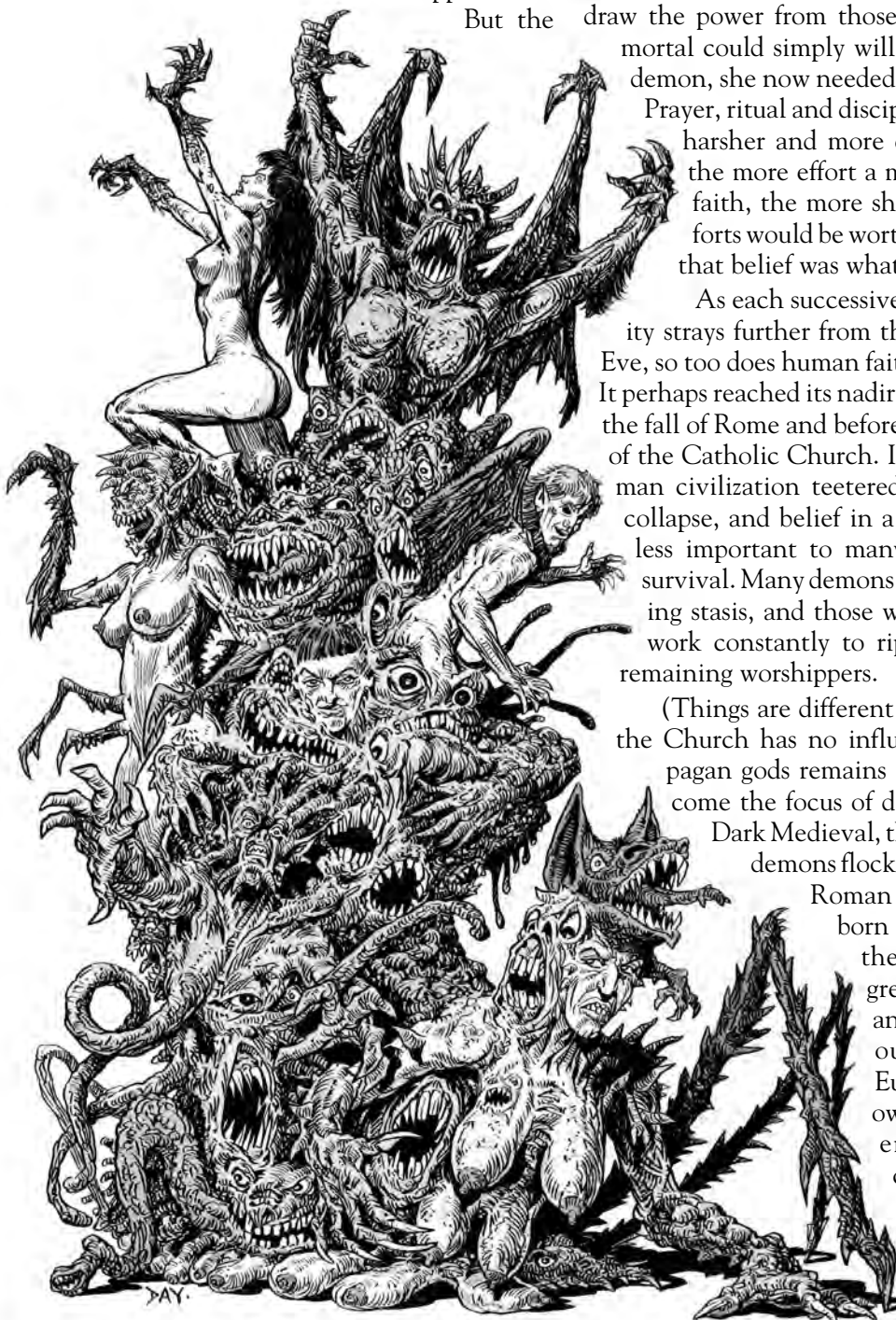
But the

world had moved on, and humanity was no longer as worthy or as close to God as Adam and Eve had been. Humans still possessed the divine spark, but it was weaker than before; God had distanced Himself and His angels from Creation in order to allow humanity to grow, and that distance had affected the human soul. Mortals still provided faith and power to demons; but the archdukes required large flocks to meet their needs, and had to go to greater efforts to draw the power from those flocks. When once a mortal could simply will her divine power to a demon, she now needed help to focus that will.

Prayer, ritual and discipline were required, the harsher and more demanding the better; the more effort a mortal dedicated to her faith, the more she believed that her efforts would be worthy of her master — and that belief was what her master craved.

As each successive generation of humanity strays further from the purity of Adam and Eve, so too does human faith continue to weaken. It perhaps reached its nadir in the Dark Ages, after the fall of Rome and before the rise to dominance of the Catholic Church. In these dark years, human civilization teetered on the edge of total collapse, and belief in a greater power became less important to many mortals than simple survival. Many demons retreated into slumbering stasis, and those who were active had to work constantly to rip the faith from their remaining worshippers.

(Things are different outside Europe, where the Church has no influence and faith in the pagan gods remains strong. Europe has become the focus of demonic activity in the Dark Medieval, the place where so many demons flocked during the rise of the Roman Empire. Those Hell-born who infest the rest of the world can draw on greater reserves of faith and power, but are badly outnumbered by their European rivals. For their own safety, these outsiders keep their own council and rarely interfere with events in Europe, lest their desperate brethren tear them apart for their



precious spiritual power.)

In the last few centuries, though, the pendulum has reversed its course. The Church is ascendant and powerful, and belief in God is widespread. Even the common folk, impious and base as they are, believe in the Almighty, and can hope for a final reward in Heaven after a lifetime of toil on Earth. While this conceptually makes it easier for demons to gain the spiritual power they need, it remains difficult in practice. Faith in God does *not* equal faith in a demonic master; people are far more reluctant now to serve such an abhorrent being than in the past, valuing their immortal souls more than temporal gains. The desperation of the surviving demons continued throughout the 12th century, and some feared that God Himself would soon return to embrace His mortal children and return the demons to Hell.

Lucifer's patient corruption of the Church has changed things, and given demon-kind a new opportunity. People still believe, still have faith in God — but they have less faith in the *Church* than before. The visible corruption of many priests, the rise of heresy and doubt, the depredations of monsters and the supernatural upon innocent mortals: These things leave many people looking for new answers, for something to believe in and to protect them, even if that “something” is an inhuman entity of pure evil.

For demons, mortal faith is air and food, money and riches; it provides not just survival, but *power*. A demon fed a regular stream of belief can use it to empower its black arts, to conjure profane miracles of inconceivable power. A demon with absolutely no faith to draw upon can no longer function, and retreats into stasis; only if its cult awakens at some distant time can the monster even regain consciousness, let alone reward its worshippers. A demon can never have *enough* faith to satiate its hunger; it can always use more, can always do more with a greater supply of energy. But human faith is limited by the number of human beings, and more particularly those prepared to worship demons. It is a renewable resource, but there is only a limited amount available at any one time, and every demon in Creation wants *all* of it.

For this reason, demons have always hated each other, and fought atrocious wars over their followers. At the moment, a nominal truce exists among the Hell-born, brokered by Lucifer in the wake of the fall of Constantinople. The Devil has promised his erstwhile brethren a land of milk and honey (or at least blood and souls), the possibility of wrenching away all of God's divine power and taking control of

Creation. If this were to happen, demons would no longer need followers, instead taking power directly from God and using it to indulge every blasphemous desire. Before that black day, though, demons need humanity's belief and faith, their fear and greed. Demons are cooperating, but tentatively, and outright battles over flocks and worshippers have been mostly replaced by intriguing and jockeying for power. Open war over faith is not unheard of, though, even in Europe; and mortals unfortunate enough to be caught in the middle of such a clash will think Judgment Day has come at last.

Tormented Souls

Even before their imprisonment in Hell, demons were wicked and evil creatures, prepared to defy God and steal His power for no more than their own glory. The utter void of Hell did nothing to lessen that evil; in fact, it made it far, far worse. Faced with nothing but emptiness, solitude and a boredom so profound it surpasses human imagination, many demons went insane, while others turned against their fellows just so they could be doing *something*. Already base and depraved at the time of their imprisonment, demons sank even lower after eons in Hell. Like angels, demons are beings of pure spirit, of thought, emotion and morality. But their thoughts are fragmented, their emotions are sick and twisted, and their morality is *irredeemably* evil.

Demons have a lust for depravity that few can control, or *want* to control. They gain whatever passes for pleasure in their souls by inflicting pain and suffering on the innocent, by destroying the works of God and humanity, and by watching their worshippers destroy themselves in service. Demons corrupt mortals because they want mortals to serve or worship them, but many also do it just because they *enjoy* it.

Such wickedness has drawbacks, though, and one of them is a lack of self-control. Demons are constantly furious, lusting, bloodthirsty and paranoid, to an extent that cannot be controlled. A wrathful mortal can work through her anger and calm down; and a gluttonous mortal can decide not to eat the last of the roast goose and give it to his wife, even if he really wants it himself. But human emotions are things of the body and mind, and these are at the service of the higher soul. Demonic emotions are entirely matters of the soul, and they cannot be ignored or put aside. A demon can no more decide to ignore his lust for atrocity than a mortal can decide not to grow old. The demon can minimize his desire

for blood for a time, just as a mortal can minimize the effects of age with a healthy diet, sensible living or willing assistants. Eventually the mortal will succumb to old age, though, and the demon will succumb to its desire for atrocity.

This need for sin affects a demon's actions and its ability to interact with mortals and other demons. Demons prefer to wrest faith from their worshippers with fear and punishment, for example, rather than love or protection — not just because mortals will worship what they fear, but because demons *want* to be feared and *need* to punish and hurt their followers.

Another effect of this need is the degradation of the demons' supernatural powers over Creation. When they were angels, they could work all manner of wonders, with a particular gift for controlling or altering one facet of reality. But demons' souls are damaged beyond repair, and that damage affects their miraculous evocations. Overwhelmed by hate and torment, demons can only work twisted miracles that inflict some kind of damage upon Creation, whether physical or spiritual. A demon of the earth can easily cause an earthquake, but sculpting stone into a beautiful statue is difficult; making a field sprout poisonous weeds is simple, but making untainted wheat grow from the same earth is impossible. A demon can heal a mortal follower's injuries, but might cause her permanent pain or taint her organs with tumors in the process.

Corrupt Flesh

A physical body is not a natural thing for a demon to possess. Before the fall, angels existed solely as spirits, and never needed to assume physical forms. During the War, demons and angels both assembled physical bodies out of raw spiritual energy — forms that allowed them to interact with mortals and the physical world but that had none of the limitations of matter, and could be dissipated back into spiritual essence when desired.

The demons of the Dark Medieval are hostile invaders in a world that now rejects them, and they cannot resist the black gravity of Hell through will and spiritual power alone. In order to remain in Creation, a demon must inhabit a physical vessel of some kind. Demons hate their vessels, the shells they must hide inside in God's worthless world; while better than the inescapable nothingness of the Abyss, a vessel is still a prison of sorts, and every moment spent anchored in a physical body is another reason to loathe God. They look forward to the time when

they can set the entire world of the material aflame, watching the glorious destruction from the comfort of their abhorrent spiritual kingdom.

Prisons of Stone

The majority of demons loose in Creation are contained within reliquaries, inanimate objects created by their worshippers for them to inhabit. When a demon is summoned, the ritual is focused on the reliquary; the demon appears within it, its spirit melding into the physical substance of the item. These demons, along with the few bound to specific locations instead of relics, are known as the Earthbound.

The process of making a suitable reliquary for a demon is long, difficult and expensive, but these obstacles mean little to sufficiently dedicated (or fanatical) worshippers. A reliquary must be created for that specific purpose, built from scratch using raw materials and ritual methods. An existing item, no matter how fine or valuable, cannot be used as a reliquary, because it lacks the essential spiritual component — the faith and devotion invested by the demon's followers during its creation.

The first requirement for a reliquary's design is the material from which it is crafted. Specific demons have an affinity for specific substances, reflecting the role they played in the creation of the world before the Fall. A demon who was once an angel of fire still possesses an affinity for flame, and requires a reliquary that speaks to that affinity — one crafted from rubies and stone taken from a dormant volcano, perhaps. The form of the reliquary is also important, and should resonate with the demon's own specialties and purpose. A demon of slaughter and violence can inhabit a sword or battleaxe far more comfortably than a throne, which is better suited to a demon of lies with a taste for commanding lesser entities. The reliquary's size is rarely significant to the demon inhabiting it, which is a spirit unbounded by human notions of space and dimensions; the archduke Belial, one of the most powerful demons in Creation, inhabits a tiny statue less than a foot tall.

Size may matter to the mortals making the reliquary, though, and in the end it is their faith and belief in the item's power that makes it effective. The key component of a reliquary is the faith of its maker or makers, who alter the object's spiritual properties through ritualized applications of their own divine potential. Such rituals lend significance to the reliquary, as does the amount of effort and pain required for its creation. Blood, suffering, human sacrifice,

self-mutilation — these are the prices required for a reliquary's creation, because these things whip a mortal worshipper into the ecstatic heights required for her to focus and direct her faith. (The same principle applies to the painful, demanding rituals devotees use to worship their demonic masters.)

A demon incarnate inside a reliquary is bound to that object, and its spirit remains anchored to that specific item as long as it remains in Creation. Should a reliquary be destroyed, the demon within would be instantly drawn back into Hell, a fate worse than destruction. For this reason, reliquaries are always well guarded by fanatical worshippers, willing and even eager to die protecting their masters; many demons erect further traps and even magical defenses around their reliquaries. Even if a determined adversary should reach a reliquary, he would find it nearly impossible to destroy, because the demon's essence lends its body a preternatural resilience far beyond that of its mundane substance. The reliquary of even a comparatively minor demon is tough enough to withstand a battering ram, the pressure of the ocean depths, or the heat of a volcano; those of the archdukes may be completely indestructible. The only weapon that might potentially destroy a reliquary is one imbued with holy might, such as a blessed sword in the hands of a dedicated inquisitor; alternatively, powerful magic or the profane power of an equally powerful demon may be effective.

In return for the protection and durability of a reliquary, the demon pays a heavy price. Reliquaries are inanimate objects, after all, and the presence of a demonic soul within does not allow a statue to walk and talk, or an obsidian plinth to float through the air. The demon within is hardly helpless, of course, because it still possesses immense supernatural power — if it wants to levitate its reliquary through the air, it can do so. But such an act consumes precious spiritual energy, draining away purloined faith the demon may need for other purposes.

A demon within a reliquary possesses a number of abilities that do not consume faith, or require only insignificant amounts. It can perceive things occurring around it with spiritual senses that mimic the mundane sight and hearing of mortals, but are less fallible and difficult to fool: It can see through darkness, hear through noise, and easily penetrate the lies of illusions and magic. It can also sense magic at play for many miles around, including those of the other supernatural inhabitants of the Dark Medieval (vampires, werewolves, mages and even the fae). The demon can mentally communicate with its thralls, as well as with other

demons if it knows their Celestial or True Names. Unsurprisingly, the demon is also unaffected by hunger, fatigue, heat and cold, or any other conditions that plague mortals.

Possession

The only alternative to inhabiting a reliquary is to possess a human host — and until recently, this was a very poor alternative indeed. Demons can possess humans for a time, but not permanently, because the act of possession dooms the mortal to an unavoidable and hideous death within a short time. Nonetheless, a demon may be summoned from Hell to inhabit a mortal body rather than a reliquary. This may occur because the summoners lack the resources required to build an appropriate vessel for their lord. Other times, the summoners want to make use of the demon's power and then return it to Hell — which is difficult if the demon has found a permanent anchor on Earth. A demon inhabiting a reliquary can also deliberately possess one of its willing thralls for a time, sliding its spirit from its normal home into a temporary vessel.

Summoning a demon into a mortal vessel requires a ritual that is just as long as one focused on a reliquary, but it is far easier and faster to prepare a living vessel than to craft an item from raw materials. All that usually matters is that the mortal will not resist being possessed. If the mortal puts up resistance, he becomes extremely difficult (if not impossible) to possess, because he bends the divine potential in his soul to holding back the demon. Obviously, a willing thrall is the easiest subject to work with, but a drugged sacrifice will also suffice; such drugs must affect the subject's willpower, not just knock him out, because even an unconscious mortal can potentially fight off demonic possession.

When a demon possesses a mortal, it floods into his body and mind like a tidal wave. The demon gains full control of the host's body, mind and memories; it knows everything he knows, and can perform any task the host could with the same degree of skill. The mortal's soul is not destroyed, but "submerged" within the demon's spirit, unable to reclaim control until the demon's spirit leaves (if it ever does).

Although in a mortal body, a demon has far more than mortal power and only a few mortal limitations. It can channel its own spiritual might into the mortal's frame, allowing for feats of superhuman strength, resilience or intellect. It can evoke any kind of miracle it knows, and can also

heal any injuries if the host becomes damaged; such effects draw upon its precious reserves of mortal faith, however. Like a demon in a reliquary, it can detect supernatural energies for miles around.

Such a vessel would be a perfect body for a demon, save for one fatal drawback. A mortal soul may be created in God's image, proof against the power of demon-kind, but a mortal's *body* is just meat and bone. A demon's soul is a staggering nexus of supernatural energy, and the human body simply cannot channel such power and survive. Even if the demon exits its vessel seconds after possessing it, its spiritual taint has already permeated every fiber of the mortal's body; the mortal *will* die, and no force short of divine intervention can prevent his end.

The exact span of time left to a possessed body depends on the Torment of the demon in question. The more of the pain of the Abyss the demon retains, the faster the body it possesses dies. That death is always hideous in the extreme to behold, and often reflects the propensities and power of the possessing demon. Bodies crumble into dust, explode in a shower of blood and tumors, burst into flame, or meet any number of grisly fates. This effect is called Consumption, and is described in game terms on p. 96.

When a vessel dies, the demon returns to its spiritual form, and must find some way to protect itself from the call of the Abyss once more. Demons who normally reside in a reliquary are instantly drawn back to that object's protection. Otherwise, the demon must move into a new temporary vessel, or else lose its grip upon Creation and return to Hell.

The Ritual of the Sundered Soul

In the millennia that demons have plagued Creation, they have never been able to possess a mortal body without guaranteeing its destruction. But things change.

One of the bargaining tools Lucifer has used to bring demon-kind back into his service is a powerful variant of a summoning ritual, the Ritual of the Sundered Soul. No one knows how he developed such a thing. What matters is that it exists, and that demons can use it to attack Creation in an entirely new way.

The Ritual of the Sundered Soul's original intent was to allow a demon to separate a small portion of its own soul from the rest of its spiritual

substance. Like a drop of water taken from a blighted, poisoned pond, this sliver of soul, the demon's spirit in miniature, would contain a fraction of its power and consciousness. This sliver then possessed the body of an unresisting mortal vessel, and attached itself to the mortal's soul. The

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS BUT ONCE

Players and Storytellers familiar with **Demon: the Fallen** may be looking at the Ritual of the Sundered Soul and thinking "Hey, I didn't see anything about that in **Demon!**" That's because the ritual doesn't exist in the modern World of Darkness. Or rather, that it doesn't *work* by that time.

The Dark Medieval era is notable both for the high "background level" of mortal faith and for the diminished power of those demons free in Creation. Mortals in the 13th century have far more belief in God and demons, good and evil, than they will in the 21st century. That greater presence of faith makes it possible for demons to evoke miracles that become impossible in the future, just as some things demons could do easily during the War with Heaven are impossible in the Dark Medieval era.

Conversely, demons have been on the wane for centuries in the 13th century, their flocks dwindling as the Church becomes dominant. The current "last hurrah" notwithstanding, demons are losing their grip on Creation; in the canon **Demon** timeline, most of them retreat into stasis over the next few centuries. It's only when the gates of Hell burst open, changing the very nature of Creation, that these Earthbound demons resurface; and they do so with greatly renewed power, significantly stronger than they were in the Dark Medieval

The Ritual of the Sundered Soul only functions due to these two factors. The prevalence of mortal faith in the Dark Medieval makes such a ritual possible; the relative weakness of demon-kind at this time makes it possible for them to partially possess a mortal host without destroying him within days. It's a unique conjunction of factors, and it won't last. By the 21st century, the Ritual of the Sundered Soul does not function, and those Earthbound who know it rightfully dismiss it as no more than a historical curiosity.

two souls were meant to fuse together, the black energy of the invading demon soul driving out the divine spark of God's essence from the mortal.

The ritual didn't work quite the way Lucifer planned, or at least, it didn't work the way other demons understood it would work.

Instead of allowing true possession, the ritual instead achieves a merger between human and demon, drastically reducing the power of the fallen angel who attempts it. Worse, the demon sees itself as God and God's Creation sees it — a monster, a mockery of all God created it to be. This perspective can drive a demon mad, and the ritual itself has the potential to destroy the demon forever if performed incorrectly.

A mortal possessed in this fashion is a strange being, combining some of the power and consciousness of the demon with the memories and personalities of the host. Far less powerful than her demonic "parent," these beings are nonetheless powerful agents, demi-demons who understand the desires of their parents and can draw upon both mortal and demonic understandings of Creation.

Systems for the Ritual of the Sundered Soul can be found in Chapter Four.

Bound to the Earth

The vast majority of demons loose upon the earth are confined to reliquaries, while a few others hop from mortal host to mortal host. A third way exists, however, practiced rarely and only in the darkest corners of Creation — binding a demon not into a person or object, but into the Earth itself. By sanctifying a mountain, a pool, a temple or some other large area, mortal sorcerers make the entire location into a kind of reliquary, and fix the demon's spirit into the very fabric of the world.

Only a handful of demons have been bound this way, for it is a long and difficult process, far more complex than simply creating a reliquary. The entire region must be spiritually charged by mortal followers, and a large cult is required to maintain and protect the location during the summoning process. Like a reliquary, the location must have a certain resonance with the demon being summoned. A warrior demon might be bound into a battlefield, while a corrupt demon of nature could inhabit a giant tree or even an entire forest.

Demons bound into locations are similar to those inhabiting reliquaries, except that the ad-

vantages and drawbacks of the vessels are even more pronounced. A location is more than simply inanimate, it is *immobile*, and any enemy that learns of its whereabouts can attack at his leisure. While a small force of worshippers can defend a reliquary, it takes a larger force to continually patrol and defend an entire location. On the other hand, a location is even more resilient to attack than a reliquary. Destroying an entire forest, mountain or temple is no easy feat — and far harder when every element of that location boasts supernatural resistance to attack. A band of dedicated inquisitors might pose a threat to a single reliquary, but it would take an *army* of such warriors to put a location-bound demon in danger. Demons bound to locations can perceive everything that happens within that location; their senses are omnipresent, and are unaffected by things like walls and darkness. Similarly, the demon can focus its attentions and powers anywhere within its boundaries.

While the binding process causes only minimal changes to the demon's nature, the practicalities of being a vast but immobile entity necessitate a certain change in focus. A demon inhabiting a location tends to draw inwards on itself, to focus its vision and plans on its own boundaries. A demon in a reliquary thinks about how to move its reliquary to a new center of influence; a demon in a location tries to make *itself* a center of influence, to bring new sources of power and faith within its own substance. Few of these truly Earthbound demons, if any, have joined Lucifer's cause, since it focuses on interaction with humanity across Europe rather than in one specific, demonic location. Instead, their agents and thralls work on their own, scheming to send followers, resources and sacrifices back to their dread masters.

Abhorrent Power

Before their Fall, demons built all of *reality*. No power short of God Himself could possibly compare to that absolute mastery of Creation.

Fortunately for Creation, demons are no longer the beings they once were — not since God stripped away their authority and power before banishing them. The denizens of Hell are incredibly powerful, yes; but they have limits on their power now, limits that prevent them from simply *hating* Creation out of existence. Their dependence on human faith, the need to protect themselves from Hell's

KUPALA'S DEMESNE

Of the handful of demons bound into the earth itself, Kupala is the oldest and most powerful. In fact, Kupala was the first demon ever to be bound in such a fashion, and he may even have invented the technique with the aid of his priests and followers. No matter how the binding occurred, it allowed Kupala to anchor his essence into the soil of the Carpathian mountains, deep in the heart of what would become Transylvania. Kupala inhabits not just a single mountain, but the entire *range*; his essence lies within every handful of soil in the coffins of those Tzimisce who worship him.

The demon lord's "body" is so large that even he cannot keep track of *everything* within his boundaries. He can certainly sense large or significant events, and bring his powers to bear upon them, but individuals often escape his attention. Even other demons can, upon occasion, pass through his border without being destroyed. Those demons and thralls who have survived such passage tell of a wilderness of brooding evil and darkness, where the constant presence of demonic power throbs in the soil like the beat of a giant and tainted heart. Within the region, power comes easily, and the energies of the demonic soul are always at hand — but that soul rages and snarls, barely controllable, lusting for destruction like a separate entity.

If mortal characters possessing demonic powers (i.e. thralls or demons with human hosts) enter Kupala's boundaries, all Arcana rolls (see Chapter Three) enjoy a -1 difficulty. Rolls to avoid gaining Torment are at +1 difficulty, however, making it harder for characters to control and withstand the horrors of their powers. With a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8), characters can detect the presence of taint in the very land they travel through. A subsequent Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 9) allows a character to realize just what those energies are, and what kind of place — what kind of *being* — they have entered. Hopefully they can escape before gaining Kupala's attention; the elder demon has no love for any of his kind, and his worshippers are hungry for the taste of demonic blood.

embrace, the uncontrollable impulses of their tormented souls: Thanks to these limitations, humanity has *some* chance of surviving the current resurgence of demonic activity. Just how great a chance remains to be seen.



DEFINING DEMONIC POWER

For the most part, a demon can do what ever the Storyteller thinks would be interesting and good for the story. The guidelines here are meant to spark ideas, not discourage them. If you think of something different that better suits your chronicle, go with that. When in doubt, look at the Arcana in Chapter Three and extend those effects as far as you like.

The following abilities draw upon the faith and belief of a demon's mortal followers. The more faith a demon can harvest from mortals, the more powerful it becomes, and the more it can do with its abilities.

Arcana

An Arcana is a feat of "spiritual magic"; tampering with Creation itself to directly change the world. When a demon performs such a miracle, it focuses its will directly upon the spiritual fabric of reality, just as it did when it still served God and used its divine powers to help create the universe. Almost any effect imaginable can be evoked through Arcana, from divining the future to calling down a rain of brimstone upon an entire city. Even the spells of a master mage pale beside the potential power of a demon's black miracles. Limits exist on what Arcana can achieve, however, as well as to what miracles an individual demon can evoke.

Every demon has a specific area of expertise, a particular suite of Arcana that it can perform most skillfully. Almost any concept and feature of Creation can be the focus of a demon's skills — from fire to deception, controlling ghosts to crafting weapons of war. In that one area, even a demon of moderate power can evoke exceptional miracles. Outside of that focus area, the skills of many demons fall off sharply. A demon might have two or three areas of secondary expertise in which it could evoke Arcana of significant but not extraordinary complexity. When using any other kind of Arcana, demons are limited to straightforward effects — and some minor demons may be completely unable to evoke some effects.

The Face of Evil

During the War, angels and demons alike created physical bodies for themselves out of pure

faith. It is still possible for demons to assume such forms, but only for a short time, and through expending a great deal of power. This Apocalyptic Form is a work of absolute horror, the demon's hideous spiritual form made flesh. Most people who look upon a demon's blasphemous form go mad with fear and revulsion, and even exceptionally resolute beings must struggle against the urge to panic.

While in its blasphemous form, a demon possesses immense physical power, more than a match for a legion of crusaders or an elder Cainite in the grip of frenzy. Its armored hide can withstand swords and flames, and it possesses claws, fangs, horns or other weaponry that can tear a man to shreds in a single blow. The more powerful a demon, the larger and more ferocious its blasphemous form, and the more terrible the devastation it leaves in its wake.

Compared to the power of a black miracle, a demon's blasphemous form is a less useful and flexible ability, and most demons only assume it in times of crisis. A demon in a reliquary might build a body from faith to defend itself, or to carry its reliquary from danger; one possessing a mortal form might assume blasphemous form to murder an enemy or fight its way past a regiment. For the most part, though, demons prefer to stay well away from danger, letting their thralls risk their meaningless mortal lives. The appearance of a demon in its monstrous form is a sure sign that great calamity is afoot, and few witnesses will be lucky enough to survive the encounter.

Tainted Investment

The other major ability of demons is the one they use most often — the ability to bestow gifts upon a loyal worshipper. Imbuing a thrall does take effort and energy on the part of the demon, but the potential return on that effort is high. A thrall can act openly within mortal society, putting into effect plans that draw more worshippers and power to his master's embrace. By spending a little power, a demon can hopefully gain far more.

The drawback to this equation is the thrall himself. The touch of his demonic master gives him power, it's true, but that power has a cost — usually the cost far outstrips the prize. A thrall is driven mad by his master's tormented thoughts, his body becomes deformed by horrific afflictions (or Taints), and his soul is barred from Heaven forever as a consequence of his sins.

None of this matters greatly, if at all, to a demon. It's unfortunate that thralls are not more dependable, that they are fallible and can fall apart under the strain of channeling infernal power, but that flaw lies in humanity itself. The demon can always imbue another worshipper with power.

Chapter Three has full details on the powers and abilities of thralls.

A Blight Upon Creation

While the average peasant might believe demons are responsible for every miscarriage and failed harvest, the truth is that demons are very rare entities in the Dark Medieval. Since the rebel angels were thrown into Hell, only 666 demons have escaped from Hell (others have been summoned, but only for short periods). Of those 666, many were destroyed by their rivals and enemies, exiled to Hell or even devoured by other demons during the Dark Ages. Some lie in stasis within their reliquaries, dreaming of a future when worshippers will rescue them once more. Those still awake and free are scattered across the face of the Earth, taking faith from whoever will offer it.

In AD 1230, only a comparative handful of demons are at large in Europe, perhaps less than a hundred in total. Of course, that handful includes a number of exceptionally powerful demons, not to mention two archdukes and Lucifer himself (although the Devil still prefers to stay hidden from view). Among them, they could destroy all of Europe within months, enslaving nations and reducing the continent to ashes.

These things do not happen, because in the long term such destruction, while enjoyable, would do nothing to help the demons achieve their ultimate goals — to destroy all their rivals, cast God and His angels from Heaven, and spend eternity gorging themselves on divine power while punishing humanity for the crime of existence. Demons are long-term thinkers, more so even than vampires. These are the oldest creatures in existence, whose memories stretch back to the creation of the universe. A century, a *millennium*, is as nothing by comparison to their immortal lives. And because they are immortal, they are loathe beyond measure to risk destruction with ill-considered actions. So they wait, and conserve their precious hoards of faith and power, and make

the least possible effort for the greatest possible return.

And yet, these are the same demons who lashed out in mindless destruction during the Dark Ages, who engaged in appalling wars over followers and territory, who gloried in the excesses and depravities of Rome. For all their intellect and experience, demons are contradictory creatures ravaged by excessive emotions. Save Lucifer, all of them have been driven to a kind of madness by imprisonment in Hell, a place where time has no meaning, where there is nothing to do but dream and hate and scream for eternity. All demons are damaged, maddened creatures, although some can control and direct that madness better than others. They *want* to destroy and ravage the world, to corrupt humans simply for the joy of it, to devour their rival brethren and claim the fallen rivals' cultists as their own. Tormented by these emotions and conflicts, demons lose self-control and indulge their inhuman appetites, not caring for the consequences until it's too late.

For the moment, even those demons aching to wreak destruction are holding back. Now that Lucifer has reappeared, the possibility of finally *winning* the War, of tearing down Heaven and murdering God, no longer seems unattainable. The failures and frustrations of the Dark Ages are behind them now, and those demons prepared to work with Lucifer feel hope surge in their twisted souls. If they can take control of human civilization once more, as they did during the War, all mortal faith might be theirs for the taking, and that is a prize and a weapon worth a little patience and self-control.

Less than thirty years after the fall of Constantinople — less than a heartbeat to a demon — that prize is within reach.

All the Ways of Hell

Many **Dark Ages** chronicles include the *possibility* of demonic activity, but that doesn't mean demons will personally interact or engage with the players' characters. Demons shun the light and stay to the shadows, working through pawns and thralls whenever possible. For a demon to visibly act to further its plans, or against its rivals, is generally counterproductive, due to the widespread belief and fear of demons in the Dark Medieval. Drawing attention to one's activities,

to one's *existence*, is to invite attack from other demons, or from the agents of God who still seek to protect humanity.

Instead, demons rely on mortal agents: worshippers and cultists willing to do anything for their dark masters; or venal fools who damn their souls to eternal darkness in exchange for fleeting, temporary pleasures. Like spiders in the middle of vast, decaying webs, demons work patiently towards their goals, protecting themselves from danger with multiple layers of thralls.

While the methods demons employ are often Byzantine in complexity and subtlety, the goals they work towards are usually very simple. Demons want to be worshipped, they want to destroy their enemies, and they want to indulge their need for corruption and sin. The following information shows just how demons pursue those ends.

Sin

Demons are sins made flesh, the embodiment of all that is wicked and evil in Creation. This was not always the case, though, even after the rebel angels fell from grace. While demons were attracted to certain sins and evils even in the early days of the War, that attraction did not consume them or break their self-control. As the War raged on, and the demons learned of the vast and untapped potential for evil in Creation, attraction turned into desire, and the ability to control those desires weakened. In Hell, forever locked into empty nothingness, desire turned into obsession; and the torments of the Abyss shredded whatever self-control the demons might have possessed.

When demons finally returned to Creation, they flew into horrific frenzies, indulging every desire that had gone unfulfilled for eons. Every demon to escape from Hell has gone through a period of unfettered, unthinking indulgence, an insane scramble to finally address the obsessions that consumed it. Eventually the demon's needs are blunted and it can regain self-control, but the obsession always remains. Only the most iron-willed of demons can resist the need to indulge its obsessions for more than a century or two, and some are already chafing under Lucifer's call for patience and restraint.

Every demon has a barely controllable obsession with a particular sin, and it passes this obsession on to its followers. Demonic cults revere

a particular sin, holding it up as the One Great Truth. By building cults on a foundation of sin, demons are able to attract followers with their own established vices, who are easy to convert and fervent suppliers of faith.

Demons also use their beloved sins as tools and weapons. They understand their favored sin's nature, the attraction it holds for mortal and demon alike, and the ways in which it can affect a mortal's behavior and morality. By holding out the possibility of sin as a reward, demons can tempt humans and control their actions; by using the repercussions of indulgence as a weapon, demons can destroy mortals and set them up to be destroyed by their own kind.

There are seven deadly sins, according to folklore.

Avarice

Demons of greed want to possess everything, to control all they see and deny it to others. Unlike gluttons, greedy demons don't want to *consume* the things they covet, they want to keep those things forever, long after they have crumbled into uselessness. Demons of greed tend to be subtle and sly, keeping an eye on long-term gains; for an immortal being, it's no great effort to spend three centuries gaining influence over a country or cult, as long as you have *total control* of it in the end.

Greedy mortals tend to want temporal power and wealth, not spiritual riches, and so greed cults are often small. But what they lack in size, they make up for in power; for the members of these cults are the wealthy and powerful who will worship anything that can make them richer and more powerful. Such cults gather massive temporal power for their demon masters, using bribes and rewards to control society's power structures.

Envy

Demons of envy seek to destroy those who possess what demons lack — freedom, love, hope and the comfort of God's blessing. Such demons do not *want* such things for themselves; what they want is to punish those who have the audacity to possess such things, who feel themselves superior for having such blessings. Only after dragging everyone else down into the mud can these demons be satisfied, knowing that no one else in Creation is happier than they are.

In the Dark Medieval era, the primary targets of envy are those who rule and lead; kings and

noblemen, priests and wealthy merchants. Cults founded on envy point at such people and demand to know why they should be warm and well fed, healthy and happy, when the common people starve and die in the cold. This is not a message of democracy, but anarchy; such cults focus on destroying the fortunate and powerful, not replacing them with the “more deserving.” It’s a message that attracts the disenfranchised, the angry and the poor, but also those rich and privileged persons who are unhappy and unloved, who hate their equally powerful but happy rivals.

Gluttony

Demons of gluttony crave sensation, to indulge every appetite and desire past the point of satiation and to keep going. Mortals usually associate gluttony with a desire for food, but truly it is simply the desire to *consume*, to use more resources than necessary. A demon on a gluttonous rampage chooses a particular resource — food, faith, human lives — and takes obscene joy not just in using up or destroying that thing, but flaunting the destruction and consumption to those now forced to go without.

Gluttony cults are perhaps the largest and most prevalent in the Dark Medieval, because gluttonous demons want to consume faith and worship more than anything. To attract followers, these cults often preach a doctrine of worthy indulgence — that it is right and proper to consume the bounty provided for you today, rather than deny that appetite in the hopes of a reward in the next life. Mortals who have been denied what they want one time too often flock to these cults, craving validation for the desires they want so badly to indulge.

Lust

Demons of lust become lost in the urges and sensations of the physical, maddened by the possibilities of physical indulgence. These demons possess followers on a regular basis, gorging themselves on pleasure and activity before relishing the sensations of the vessels’ hideous deaths. Lusty demons are often obsessed with sex, but it’s not the only form of physical pleasure they desire — they embark on orgies of eating, fighting, drinking and destruction in the time they have available in a vessel.

Cults of lust tend to focus more on the sexual elements of the sin than their masters. After all, a man can indulge a lust for food or wine or violence in socially acceptable ways, without attracting the



wrath of the Church or the king; but sexual appetites and cravings almost always draw condemnation and punishments. By offering members an outlet for their desires, cults win their loyalty; by using sex (or other indulgences) as a reward, and the threat of exposure as blackmail, cults gain temporal power and influence.

Pride

All demons understand the sin of pride, perhaps better than humans ever could. It was pride that was the First Sin, the sin of Lucifer and all the angels who rebelled against God rather than accept His decrees. Demons of pride still place themselves above all other entities, and demand the worship and adulation of mortal and demon alike. Lost in arrogance, a prideful demon might raze a city as punishment for a minor slight, or torture an entire society until every member agrees to love and worship it unconditionally.

Cults based on pride are most common in cultures that revere honor and respectability, and preach bloody revenge as rightful punishment for any offense. They attract followers (primarily young men) who feel slighted or overlooked in their lives, telling them that they are truly superior to other people, and that any kind of atrocity is an appropriate punishment for imagined slights. These cults can be both violent and subtle, influencing the useful with money and flattery, then sending well-equipped, machismo-addled worshippers to destroy their enemies.

Sloth

Demons of sloth are hardly lazy; that's a misguided, mortal view of the sin. Sloth is the need for simplicity, for convenience — an ultimately sociopathic disinterest in the world. Demons of sloth are almost all demons of death, who once shepherded souls to their final rewards. Now they crave the solitude and calm of death, the serenity of an empty world. These demons are rare, because the nothingness of Hell tends to swallow them forever; those remaining are monsters who would snuff out a country to silence a crying child, who long for absolute destruction and a world of dust and gravestones.

Like demons of sloth, cults of sloth are rare, and those that exist are small. Their members, though, are perhaps the most monstrous of mortals, absolute sociopaths who feel no kinship with their fellows. Some are assassin cults, who kill for money and influence; others are simple death

cults, poisoning wells and burning villages to offer the dying souls up to their masters.

Wrath

Demons of wrath are whirlwinds of carnage and destruction, monsters who rampage and kill for the sheer joy of destruction. Wrath is more than just a lust for violence, though; it is the claim of righteous anger, of inflicting punishment on those who have transgressed. Some demons of wrath see themselves as enforcers of a social order, but others don't bother to tell themselves such lies. In any case, the demon's obsession is with lashing out and destroying anything that frustrates, blocks or simply inconveniences it.

Wrath cults are widespread through Europe, for they preach a simple and appealing message — *anything that blocks your will is wrong, and you are justified in your retaliation*. The appeal is there for warlocks and priests alike, for Saracen and Crusaders, kings and commoners. Many armies and militias harbor wrath cultists, as do the Church and the secular authorities. Their minions and pawns are widespread, and their angry punishments are as likely to be social or economic as they are to be military or violent.

Cults

The cults of demons are always based on a single lie — that it is better to be damned for eternity in the next life than to deny yourself what you want in this one. You can indulge the sin you know is wrong, for a power greater than yourself has given you permission to do so. And all you need do in exchange is offer your faith to that power, to sacrifice your sanity and soul on its blood-caked altar; a small price to pay for getting what you want *right now*.

Demon-worshipping cults are an abomination, rightly loathed across Europe and all of Creation. Yet many of them exist, and each time one is suppressed another rises to replace it. In a world of rules and restrictions, danger and duty, many people *want* to be given permission to indulge their sins, and are prepared to worship any entity that will do just that. Some lie to themselves, telling themselves that they worship "the true God" or a hidden face of a pagan god, that they have been trusted with a holy secret because of their special virtues. A few don't bother with the pretense, and simply accept their damnation.

It is also true, though, that many lay members or fringe members of demonic cults *don't* realize

what they're doing, or what kind of being they are being groomed to worship. Secrecy is vital for a demonic cult, because it risks destruction if it reveals its true nature to the wrong person. Prospective members are kept at arm's length for months or years, fed lies about the cult's rites and purposes, until they can be debased and degraded to a point where they will accept a demon as their god. Those who prove unsuitable are occasionally diverted into other religions and heresies — but murder is usually the easiest solution.

A cult also accumulates a protective layer of mundane associates, from the mercenaries who unwittingly protect a demon's reliquary to the baker who makes their sacramental cakes. Such mortals have their uses, from scapegoats to pawns to sacrificial victims; and there's always the possibility that they may prove to be appropriate for recruitment into the cult proper.

For more information on how forbidden cults operate, see **Ashen Cults**. While its focus is on cults that venerate vampires, the information is broadly applicable to any kind of abhorrent and secretive sect.

Enemies and Rivals

Demons are former warriors, one and all, who turned against their Creator and their brethren. They lost that War, and the memory of that loss is a constant pain in their warped souls. None of them can bear the idea of losing *any* battle again, not even the most meaningless and petty of conflicts.

Actual *death* is also rare for demons, who can survive the destruction of a mortal vessel, the loss of all their followers and sources of faith, and even the ruin of their precious reliquaries. The only thing that can definitely and finally destroy a demon is another demon; the Hell-born can consume the soul of a disabled or bodiless adversary, taking the rival's energies and memories into its own soul. (Those demons who know of the Cainite practice of diablerie see the similarity, and take it as evidence that God has cursed both mortal and rebel angel alike in the same fashion.) Divine powers and spirits would also be able to bring final destruction to a demon's soul, but angels no longer seem prepared to intervene directly in Creation, and the gifts of righteous mortals may not prove sufficient to the task.

Demons do not forgive or forget slights or wrongs against them, and seek revenge against

any foe, even if that revenge takes centuries to enact. Each individual demon has its own unique list of enemies to destroy, rivals to humiliate. Some entities and groups have earned the hatred of almost all demons, however. These beings will always be hounded and hated by demon-kind, until Judgment Day finally comes.

God and His angels: Sometime after demons were banished to Hell, God withdrew from Creation, in order to allow humanity to find its own path to righteousness. Had He not done so, demon-kind would doubtless have put aside all their differences to once again carry the battle to the gates of Heaven. More than wounded pride or greed for power lies behind this all-consuming hatred for God. The Creator sentenced the rebels to unimaginable torment in Hell, the torment of unending loneliness and solitude until the end of time. No words exist for the horror of that punishment, and demons would do anything to take revenge upon God — even if that meant that *everything*, demons and divine power included, were destroyed in the process.

Other demons: Loyalty and friendship are alien concepts to demons. If they had ever known what such things were, Hell burned those notions from their minds eons ago. As far as demons are concerned, their "brethren" are all parasites and thieves, stealing away faith and worshippers, usurping the total dominance that the demon should enjoy over the Hell-bound. Truces and alliances of convenience *have* existed between demons, but they are rare and fleeting things, broken as soon as one member sees an advantage. Lucifer, alone of his kind, preaches that demons should cooperate (or at least not wage war on each other) to track down and destroy God; it's still uncertain as to whether the *détente* he has brokered will have any real effect, or whether it will collapse to infighting.

The Abrahamic Faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the Religions of the Book, related faiths that hold some form of the Old Testament to be sacred. Demons know that many of the beliefs of these three faiths are completely true and correct. How could humans have learned such things, though, without the intervention of God Himself? Demons see the work of the Creator in these religions, and believe that they were created *specifically* to ruin the plans and schemes of demon-kind. For centuries, demons simply fought these faiths from without, murdering priests and

devastating congregations when they could. Under Lucifer's encouragement, they now follow a more surreptitious plan, corrupting the Catholic Church in order to destroy it from within. Islam and Judaism have less power within Europe, so they are lower priorities — but rest assured, once the Church falls, demons will move to destroy all the children of Abraham once and for all.

Other faiths: Every mortal not worshipping a demon is worthless; if a human doesn't offer his divine energies to an infernal master, he may as well be killed for sport. Religions not controlled by demons are thus stealing the faith that should flow to the Hell-born, and as long as they are permitted to exist they will keep doing so. Demons have long masqueraded as pagan gods in order to

appropriate the power of the god's worshippers, and this practice continues today. It would be preferable, though, to stamp such faiths out completely, in order to guarantee that only demons received the faith and devotion of humanity.

The Garou: Werewolves and demons have clashed upon occasion in the past, but such instances were always isolated and rare. Now, in the wake of Constantinople's fall, Garou and Hell-born have become implacable enemies — despite the fact that neither group truly comprehends the nature of the other. All that matters is that their goals and ideals are utterly opposed. Just as demons fight among themselves for power, though, so too do the tribes of the Garou, and neither race has anything approaching an organized campaign against the enemy. Not yet.







CHAPTER TWO: SLAVES ENTHRONED

“Surelie, the difference vulgare put betwixt them, is verrie merrie, and in a maner true; for they say, that the Witches ar servantes onelie, and slaves to the Devil; but the Necromanciers are his maisters and commanders.”

—King James I, Daemonologie

Praise God in all His glory for sending me on this mission of knowledge, this quest for the source of the impurity tainting His flock. I find it no longer sufficient to seek and destroy demons. Our righteous crusade must extend to the demons' slaves as well. These vile creatures outnumber their masters and spread their Devil-born lies amongst the ignorant laity, who sometimes have but the dimmest light of the Lord to guide them through temptation.

Among these slaves I mark three distinct infernal classes: those who worship the demons in all their foulness, those who serve the demons directly, and those who can call a devil from the pit in order to consort with it.

Everywhere I see the will of God thwarted and perverted. I can only pray that the Holy Mother Church will intervene in time, before the plague of sacrilege extends further through Christian lands.

— From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

Cults

As explained in Chapter One, demons subsist on faith. To this end, demons often spawn cults, gatherings of loyal believers devoted to the worship of one or more demons. In the process of building a cult, some demons may masquerade as pagan gods; others choose to appear as the angels they once were; and still others rule openly as tyrants, unafraid to display their true monstrosity.

A player taking the Cult Background should consider several factors when determining the manner of cult in service to his character, including the internal hierarchy of the cult; the potential for interaction with the Church; the angelic function formerly performed by the worshipped demon; and the way in which the demon chooses to present itself to its worshippers. The structure of a cult may vary with the temperament and power of the demon, but all cults serve the common purpose of gathering worshippers and instilling belief. Of course, certain hierarchical structures function more smoothly than others. Not every cult fulfills the purpose for which it was intended; some formerly efficient cult models

become increasingly obsolete under the shadow of the Christian Church.

False Gods

I have read the passage in my Bible more times than I can count, but I never understood the worship of graven images before traveling today through northern Wales. I saw how fervently the men and women of this village lay their offerings and themselves at the feet of the effigy of their heathen goddess, pleading with her for bountiful crops and fertile wombs.

Yet they call themselves Christians! These misguided pagans both repel and fascinate me. They even claim their goddess visits them, walking among them in a human form. In the midst of this blatant idolatry I sensed the hidden demonic threat that these deluded people fail to realize.

—From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

On the fringes of Christendom, demons still infiltrate the pre-Christian religions, much as they have done since humanity first invented the notion of religion. Demonic cults pre-date the Church by millennia, beginning with Lucifer's first whispers into vulnerable mortal ears. The oldest cults revolved around the Archdukes of Hell and the rituals of these cults became standard practice for demons who, finding themselves free of the Abyss, sought to recapture the glory of the time before the fall. The Archdukes were worshipped as gods in their own names, but less powerful demons lack Lucifer's direct assistance. In a quest for similar god-like worship, demons masquerade as pagan deities, insinuating themselves into the well-established workings of these ancient religions.

Once, theistic cults provided a convenient and stable source of Resolve (the faith on which demons feed). Unfortunately for the demons, impersonating pagan gods proves increasingly inefficient. As Christ's followers populate the far corners of Europe, the religion of the people becomes more homogenized. A demon posing as a god risks capturing the attention of the Church, which does not distinguish between pagan god and demon.

Structure

A demon wishing to impersonate a god must work within the preexisting structure of the pagan

TERMINOLOGY OF CULTS

The following terms refer to three common types of demon-worshipping cults:

Theistic cults: Theism, or the belief in the existence of gods who take personal interests in humanity, gives numerous opportunities for demons to move into already well-established religious systems and subvert them. These cults revolve around the worship of a demon posing as a god or goddess, usually the deity of a culture with legends of gods interacting personally with their believers.

Pseudo-angelic cults: Demons appearing in the guise of angels, often in their own formerly angelic forms, generate pseudo-angelic (false angel) cults. Though demons once served God as angels, they are now so far fallen from grace that any attempt to claim angelic status is deceit.

Demonic cults: Though all cults involved in the worship of demons might technically be called demonic cults, the term is here used to refer to cults serving a demon which makes no attempts to disguise its true nature. Adherents of demonic cults have no illusions about the manner of creature they venerate.



religion. The structure of these religions varies greatly, and therefore the hierarchy of theistic cults also varies just as greatly. Any changes the demon attempts to make to the established system of worship prove slow to take effect, if indeed they ever reach fruition. While this can be limiting to a demon used to receiving veneration through vastly different means than those available, it also carries the advantage of providing a well-ordered, time-tested system of worship. Demons served by theistic cults only need to create a few thralls, often enlisting only the already established priest or priestess to the god the demon is impersonating.

Because small neighboring communities may all worship the same set of gods, carefully spread rumors of “gods walking among us” can increase the size of a demon’s cult, expanding worship of the demon (in the god’s name) to a network of several villages within a region.

Recruitment

When worship of a god is already established within a community, a demon must do little in order to build a sizable cult. Belief in a particular god, goddess or pantheon passes from generation to generation. As long as the size of the community stays relatively stable, so does the demon’s pool of worshippers. This also means, however, that the demon has little active control over recruitment without extending broader control over the culture.

Rites

Like structure, religious rites of theistic cults are slow to change, even after demonic infiltration. Once the god appears “in person” to his worshippers, he can, of course, suggest more specific forms of worship, as long as they do not conflict with the comfortable patterns of worship already practiced. These rites tend to be bloody and violent, making them particularly appealing to demons. Though the blood itself is meaningless, the willingness of people to bleed and die for their belief in their god creates a powerful source of Resolve.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The greatest benefit of masquerading as a god is the immediate, large throng of worshippers. With very little work on the demon’s part, it can usurp all the worship due a particular god. Theistic cults offer a regular source of Resolve, which can be enough to temporarily satisfy a demon with a low Torment.

For demons bound to demesnes rather than reliquaries, claiming to be the locally worshipped god can be the easiest way to gather followers. With a limited ability to travel, these powerful lords of Hell may pass themselves off as gods or spirits of the land, thereby eliminating the need to take mortal hosts, which quickly wear out, or to spend an exhaustive amount of energy calling worshippers to them. Those locked in reliquaries may become objects of idol worship like the Biblical golden calf.

A demon often finds behaving as a god to be the most difficult part of impersonating one. The demon would be wise to choose a god very carefully, taking into account whether it can live up to the common perception of this god. Demons passing as deities deny themselves the convenient luxury of enforcing rules through intimidation or regular displays of infernal might. If a god appears to his people and proceeds to act in ways contradictory to the beliefs of his worshippers, he is liable to arouse suspicion and doubt. Not only would the demon suddenly be deprived of a regular source of Resolve, but it might even be decried as a usurper and find itself in immediate danger of returning to the Abyss from whence it came.

Another disadvantage of masquerading as a god is the limited ability to make thralls within a theistic cult. A demon reigning as the central figure of an established religion must exercise even more caution when choosing its servants, for any thrall who flouts the tenets of her master’s worship brings risk of discovery to her master. While the structure of most pagan religions makes thralls of minimal necessity, demons still prefer to relegate certain tasks to individuals tightly bound to their service through pacts. Thralls of false gods must also use their powers as carefully and wisely as their masters.

Finally, demons claiming godhood may find themselves facing stiff competition from any of a number of sources. Other demons present an immediate risk, particularly if a demon chooses a god currently being portrayed by another demon. Explaining this dual presence would be difficult at best and utterly devastating to the cult of one or both demons at worst. The fae could also offer competition, as some ancient pagan gods are really euhemerized fae, who do not take the misuse of their names kindly. The spirits of vengeful ancestors might perceive the ruse being perpetrated on their descendants and seek retribution. Finally, what happens to a demon who finds himself arousing the attention of an actual god? As players of **Dark Ages: Mage** or

PANTHEON OF LIES

While demons can, and do, masquerade as any deity, certain gods and goddess prove more convenient. These gods provide certain additional benefits, such as desirably located worshippers, particularly satisfying means of worship, or explanations for unusual quirks or behaviors the demon might have brought with it from the Abyss. This list is far from exhaustive, but provides examples of the kinds of deities that might appeal to a demon seeking to pose as a false god.

Odin: Though most of the countries in Scandinavia are Christian, lingering belief in the ancient ancestral gods makes the Northland a fertile ground in which a demon can plant seeds of worship. The Norse believe the gods take a personal interest in the lives of their worshippers, and many continue to venerate the Allfather. Odin is the gallows god and a god of magic, and these associations make him ideal for demonic impersonation. Best of all, legends recount Odin walking openly among his followers to test their faith, so a cunning demon on the run may be able to obtain hospitality in this guise.

Morrigan: The Morrigan and other triple goddesses offer a sound explanation for the aging of the demon's host body due to a high Torment level (see p. 96). As Consumption begins to overtake the demon, the aging of the mortal form mimics the three life phases of the goddess. A clever demon inhabiting the body of a virginal young maiden might actually strengthen the faith of her worshippers as Consumption ages her to Mother and later to Crone.

Mithras: Under the rule of the Roman empire, the male-only cult of Mithras found great popularity among the legions. The cult's focus on honor and camaraderie afforded a banquet of faith to many demons of that age, as well as providing many extremely useful and well-placed cultists and thralls with martial training. The rise of the Christian Church and the fall of Rome brought the cult of Mithras low, but it is not wholly forgotten. Some faithful adherents remain, offering sacrifices of bulls in hidden underground temples — sometimes to demons wearing the guise of this sun-god.



Werewolf know, gods and spirits do exist. These powerful entities have no connection to demons and their servants, and some might strongly resent being impersonated by these fallen interlopers.

Fallen Angels

We have carried out the execution. Genevria held on to her deluded faith until the end. Though I never beheld this angel with my own eyes, I can only assume it to be a servant of the Devil in the guise of something holy. Of all atrocities, this is the worst. To appear, especially to the faithful, as a messenger of God — did the Lord himself not warn us of false prophets? We must be ever vigilant.

Sadness threatens to overwhelm me and despair creeps into my heart. How many heresies find fertile ground in houses of the faithful? Perhaps that is the weakness of men and women of faith. We who have not seen God with our own eyes look so hard for a sign to confirm our belief in Him. We want so much to believe in the messenger that we would turn deaf ears to the blasphemy of the message.

—From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

Of all figures of worship, demons find posing as angels to be the easiest — at one point, they *were* angels. As Christianity stomps out and assimilates pagan gods and their worshippers, demons must adapt to the new structures of the Church and infiltrate the houses of the holy or face the swift and righteous wrath of the faithful.

Structure

Pseudo-angelic cults take root most easily within highly religious areas (such as monasteries, abbeys and convents), and therefore tend to adhere to the standard hierarchy of the Church. Even more than those demons posing as pagan gods, demons pretending to retain their former angelic glory must be careful not to violate the tenets of the religion to which they purport to belong. To this end, a demon might choose a small handful of devout members of a religious order and appear to them in full angelic majesty. Once convinced that they have witnessed a divine visitation, these faithful become the cornerstone of the demon's cult. Demons appearing as angels, like false gods, require only a few thralls to keep a cult running smoothly. The deeply ingrained

rules and intricate rituals of the Church allow these pseudo-angelic cults to operate with little intervention from the demon, as long as the demon makes only minimal demands upon its cultists and does not contradict the teachings of the Church.

Pseudo-angelic cults often have cells within several neighboring towns or monasteries. Each cell functions as an individual unit, with minimal contact between cells, usually through thralls. Thralls in each cell keep the cult functioning in harmony with their demonic master's demands, bearing the responsibility if something goes wrong within their particular cell. Because the demon relies so heavily upon its thralls in this model, it chooses thralls that exhibit extreme loyalty; it often seeks out thralls who reflect the demon's Vice, for those thralls take the proper initiative most readily and need the least guidance from their master.

Recruitment

When first establishing cults, demons masquerading as angels recruit almost exclusively from within the Church. Devout, low-ranking members of religious orders make ideal converts, for they still retail the initial zeal that led them to devote their lives to worship but have not yet become entangled in the complex politics of the Church. These believers provide a toe-hold for the demon within the monastery, and convert others through their impassioned proselytizing. Demons posing as angels have the unique ability to recruit through testament, as their faithful servants spread tales of miracles and life-changing spiritual encounters. Fervent worshippers can convince others that angels not only exist, but care deeply for the state of humanity.

Once a pseudo-angelic cult infiltrates the entire monastery, worship usually spreads to the surrounding villages, which rely upon the Brothers and Sisters of Christ for both religious direction and economic survival. Creation of additional cells begins with one or two thralls, sent to neighboring abbeys and monasteries to spread the stories of angelic visitation. These Thralls then repeat the original process of first converting the members of the monastery and then the nearby peasantry.

Rites

Rites of a pseudo-angelic cult mirror or parody the sacraments of the Church, at least in the beginning. As the cult grows, the demon can introduce modified rites that reflect the demon's former angelic duties or its Vice. These new rituals include

subversions of the holy sacraments, such as substituting actual blood for the wine used for Communion or creating new thralls through perverse mockeries of rites of Ordination.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Cults of fallen angels have the great advantage of being able to operate within Christendom without alarming the Church, as long as the demon is careful and keeps a tight rein over its worshippers. Christianity is the dominating religion, giving this cult model a marked advantage over cults to pagan gods. Pseudo-angelic cults can function in the open for extended periods of time, as members of the cult continue to perform their worship in God's name, on the surface at least.

Demons reaping the benefits of pseudo-angelic cults do not have to pretend to be something else or lie outright to their believers. Selective sharing of truth (with the careful omission of certain inconvenient details like banishment to the Abyss) proves simpler than modifying behavior to mimic a god. Some demons create this type of cult just to have an opportunity to show their former visages and recapture the splendor they once wore when they walked in God's light. A few demons even miss being angels, and see this as the only means through which a repentant demon can reconnect with the faithful. Such demons are extremely rare, however. Demons with low Torment may attempt to use this method of cult-making as a temporary sanctuary from the urges of their Vice, subsuming themselves into the austerity and rigid control of the Church, but that is a dangerous game for a demon to play.

Unlike demons who pose as gods, demons passing as angels lack a precedent for worship. While most Christians believe in angels, few actually worship them. The Church demands belief in these messengers of the Lord but regards direct worship of any figures but God and Christ as heretical. As a result, priming a group of Christians for angel-worship involves a lot of effort on the demon's part. The process is slow and requires a level of patience and subtlety that most impetuous demons lack.

Pseudo-angelic cults practice right under the Inquisition's nose, where any mistake could send a clear signal of demonic activity to the Blessed. Since pagan cults operate on the outskirts of Christianity, demons posing as gods often have enough warning to bury the bodies and run for the hills before the Inquisition arrives. In the heart of Christendom, demons quickly discover they have no place to run.

When a demon's various cells of worship are poorly constructed, losing one cell could result in the collapse of the entire network.

Mischief's Manifesto

Brother Timothy is dead, killed right in front of my eyes by an unholy thing, a creature of evil beyond anything I have ever witnessed. The demonic scourge is far worse than we realized. Brother Timothy and I were unprepared to handle an infestation of this magnitude. He was too young, too inexperienced, and he paid the price for it. What the demon did to him... some monstrosities are too unspeakable.

Bile burns my throat and I can scarce put pen to parchment due to the trembling in my hands. I wrote to my superiors a month ago, over a month ago, asking for help. Why does the Church not send more assistance here? I am a scholar, no soldier to take on the minions of Hell that putrefy the land and turn Godly men into tainted corpses! What recourse am I left but prayer? I will pray to God for the answers but I will sleep with one eye open.

—From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

Demons are monsters. Demons are damned. Demons are tortured, selfish beings ruled by their Vices. Behaving as such comes naturally. While many demons attempt to disguise their true natures in order to garner worship, some demons revel in their monstrosity, turning it to their advantage wherever possible. For these demons, the torments of the Abyss provide the perfect model for forcing weaker creatures into submission.

Structure

Blatantly demonic cults can take any possible structure. Unfamiliar with contemporary religions and systems, demons may institute cults that swipe practices and rites from long-dead religions. Many tend towards pyramid schemes, with each tier of worshippers more powerful than those beneath it. Cults to monstrous demons require a large number of initiates to support the growing hunger of their fiendish masters. These initiates, or postulants, make up the lower tier of worshippers and often serve as the willing, or unwilling, sacrifices in demonic rites. More experienced acolytes, fewer in number, perform more complicated duties,

while a small handful of priests, usually thralls, keep adherents under control and see that the master's orders are obeyed. Demonic cult structures recurrently imitate the feudal system, in which the agricultural economic base is replaced by fearful worship. With cultists serving as serfs and thralls as the feudal lords, the demon rules overall as king and God in one infernal package.

Unlike in theistic and pseudo-angelic cults, divine right to rule means nothing to demons presiding over their cults in true hellish form. Demons command demonic cults through extortion, coercion and threats of violence. Some keep their cultists in line with threats of other demonic adversaries, claiming to be the first of an army from Hell and offering protection in the future to those who serve the demon in the present. Some simply kill those who resist as an example, often brutally and publicly.

These great lords of Hell tend to be extremely paranoid. Because their regimes are based upon fear, demonic cults require many thralls to act as enforcers of the demons' will. Educated thralls work as priests and spies while strong, simple-minded thralls serve as bodyguards, their brute force physically enhanced through manipulation by their masters. Pacts between such demons and their thralls are iron clad and meticulously detailed — and seldom work out in favor of the thralls. Demons handsomely and visibly reward thralls who show positive initiative above and beyond their pacts, while elevating unusually faithful or competent cultists to thralldom. These monsters showily reward faultless, mindless obedience; and cultists actively covet the privileged position of thralls.

Recruitment

Unable to rely upon existing religious worship or to convert through the power of testament, openly demonic demons must recruit individuals on a one-on-one basis, relying heavily on direct communication with humans to maintain the system of terrified belief. Demonic cults recruit almost exclusively from the lower class, leaving the clergy for pseudo-angelic cults. For the most part, these demons either do not need educated thralls or prefer to handle such education themselves. A wise demon deliberately keeps its cultists ignorant, which allows for ease of control. Educated thralls find themselves under the tightest pacts, because they pose the greatest risk to their master. Still, such thralls play an important part in the continued freedom of the demon, as these thralls are instructed in how to

summon back their master should the demon return to the Abyss.

Demonic cults keep their ranks filled through lineage. Often individuals are born into the cult, raised within the tenets of the cult and bear children to continue the family's service to the demon. Because they know nothing else, these cultists are the least likely to resist the demon's orders or act in ways that are disruptive to the cult's structure. Some demons urge procreation among their thralls, supporting unions which producing children with desirable capabilities, like physical strength or predisposition toward certain abilities. Promising children born into the cult might be educated and trained to become thralls later in life. A demon might even orchestrate kidnappings to expand the cult's ranks, indoctrinating outsiders into the cult to bring in fresh blood.

Most demonic cults function in remote areas, far beyond the reaches of the Church. Unlike theistic cults, demonic cults tend to be very isolated, as too much contact with the outside world could potentially

SIDESTEPPING THE BLESSED

Some of God's servants can sense demons, so how do demons circumvent the Church? Luckily for the demons, those in the know cannot be everywhere at once, and Europe is a big place in which to hide. Many clergy no longer believe with the passionate intensity of their youth, and the laity remains largely ignorant. Illiterate people cannot read the Bible themselves and must rely on their religious leaders to provide a model. Unfortunately, many clergy are apathetic towards the real needs of their congregations. Demons take advantage of this and provide benefits to the common people that far outstrip anything the Church has ever offered, assuring silence and obedience from their followers.

When the Blessed do catch a demon, the demon is far more likely to flee to set up a new cult later than to stay and defend its current cult. Demons feel little loyalty to their worshippers. Those demons that do stay and fight are usually extremely powerful... or prideful. Stubborn pride and unwillingness to be defeated by a mere human may lead a demon to foolish acts of arrogance that cost it both its host body and its carefully crafted cult.

lead to disastrous rebellion within the ranks. Because of this, demonic cults often start out small and see only minimal growth over a long period of time. The alternative to this total isolation is to establish towns that seem, on the surface, completely normal, disguising the infernal underbelly. Though these demonic towns send obvious warning signs those few, gifted Blessed who stumble across them, the average person would find nothing to confirm the slight sense of unease he feels within the village.

Lastly, demons recruit through promises and lies. The powerful lure of temptation draws in those seeking power, success or revenge. Demons can guarantee and deliver destruction of enemies, for the right price. Of course, those who would sell their souls to the Devil for petty revenge get exactly what they bargained for.

Rites

With no need to adhere to the oft-times constraining rules governing pre-established religions, a demon can determine exactly what rites of worship it expects from its demonic cult. Demons custom-tailor the rites to suit their needs. The rites of demonic cults reflect the demon's former angelic

functions or the demon's current Vice. Demons ruled by lust might demand wild, orgiastic rituals, while a demon consumed by wrath might expect violent blood sacrifices. Whatever the Vice or however the rites begin, as the demon's Torment score increases it requires more debauched, depraved rituals to satisfy it.

At first, some demons will be content with offerings of the best of a shepherd's flock, a portion of the harvested crops or any other sincere tithe that does not hurt anyone. Over time they may begin to require blood, pain, misery and human sacrifice. Demons are monsters, make no mistake, and as their Torment increases life for cultists becomes increasingly worse. Demonic cults race towards inevitable implosion as the demon's hunger outstrips the cult's ability to sate it. Demons walk a fine line between exacting faith through terror and shattering the faith of those too-long abused.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Of all ways to appear to humans, this is certainly the easiest. A demon need only reveal its Apocalyptic Form and demand worship. Even the most doubtful person finds it hard to deny the horrible form spread-



ing its wings before him. Demonic cults are built from the ground up, with no ingrained preconceptions to override or inconvenient social orders to infiltrate. Cultists require only minimal teaching to begin performing rites, with no complicated education needed and no time wasted to slowly change a system of belief. This model requires no subtlety and has a fast payoff for the demon, with immediate returns of Resolve from supplicants. Free to appear as it wills, the demon does not have to pretend to possess any fake morality.

The downside of this model is that it continually feeds the demon's Vice, raising its Torment and requiring that it constantly expand the cult's ranks to maintain a consistent level of satisfaction. As the cult expands, the demon loses its locus of control. It cannot watch everyone all the time. This means it cannot always be aware of the activities of every dissident who might seek help from the Church, from other demons or from other supernatural beings. Demonic cults send up a huge flare to any servants of God who stumble near enough. This method of worship involves little subtlety.

As the demon's Torment increases, as it inevitably does, it burns through bodies quickly. If possessing the bodies of willing cultists, the demon might find it is quickly depleting its pool of worshippers in an attempt to maintain a host. Things fall apart, as the cult can no longer support the demon's needs. Like locusts of faith, some demons destroy entire communities before moving on to establish new cults in new regions. The other alternative to this systematic destruction of hosts is to become bound to locations or reliquaries, trading mobility for the capacity to endure. Though demonic cults are easy to set up, they prove much harder to maintain.

Thralls

Thralls pledge their souls to demons in exchange for any of a number of infernal blessings. In order to forge a pact with a demon, an individual must have a soul, sentience and the free will to give himself over to the demon to be shaped and empowered. These men and women voluntarily sacrifice their autonomy to derive benefits from their deals with devils — though they often give up far more than they get, whether they know it or not. Thralls cannot be forced into serving a demon, though they can be tricked or coerced, which means a demon must offer a temptation powerful enough to overcome any lingering reticence on the part of the thrall. A

demon must be the honey to draw the fly, whether or not it makes promises with sincerity, or it must make life so unbearable for the individual that permanent service to a demon is somehow the preferable choice.

Becoming a Thrall

How does one fall into the service of a devil? Not every demonic slave begins his life with the intent to defy God. Surely something happens to these lost souls that causes them to turn their backs on the Lord and His mercy. Christ said that man may sin and yet be forgiven, but what force under Heaven urges a man to flaunt this forgiveness? I cannot accept that the spawn of Hell could offer more succor than can be found in the bosom of the Church.

And what of these tormented creatures who sell their souls? While some are every bit the heretics we imagine, might some others merely be desperate people tricked by the Devil into believing the answer can be found in sin and sacrilege? Lucifer's lies must hold such power that people would willingly turn their backs on the Holy Mother Church and embrace damnation.

Again, I wonder why supposedly powerful evil beings even need mortal servants. Perhaps they only seek to mock God by defiling his creations, or perhaps there is some other motivation that we misunderstand. The questions I ask yield no answers. The Church does not seek to understand the motives of demons.

I have never asked a demon his purpose. God help me, but sometimes I wonder if I should?

—From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

What are thralls and why do powerful demons invest so much energy into the creation of what is, essentially, just another mortal servant? Few demons walk the Earth freely. Most still flounder in the torturous nothingness of the Abyss. Those who inhabit bodies or shield themselves in reliquaries make up only the tiniest fraction of the great angelic host that once defied God out of jealousy and wounded pride. After eons of accumulating Torment in the Abyss, these fallen angels can no longer rely upon each other and must look elsewhere for assistance.

This assistance comes in the guise of thralls. More than cultists, a thrall interacts personally with the demon she serves. Some thralls worship their master unaware of its true nature. Others care little what scourge of Hell they prostrate themselves before as long as it rewards them handsomely at the end of the day. Cultists are many, but thralls are few, select individuals with more to offer than mindless adherence to ritual. Through thralls, demons seek to recapture something of their previous glory. Through demons, thralls experience the tiny fragment of Hell on Earth that each demon carries within it.

Servants with Purpose

Demons are eternal. While endless existence certainly comes with many benefits, such as unlimited time to amass power and worshippers, demons often have difficulty adapting to the swiftly changing mortal world. They need an immediate link to the times, an agent connected to contemporary society, able to help the demon adjust to a world that may differ vastly from the one the demon remembers. Even demons who live among humans for extended periods of time have a tendency to become disconnected from social conventions. They do not function under the same rules, after all, which may cause them to overlook necessary aspects of personal interaction. Earthbound, particularly, tend to lose touch with the world, consumed with expanding their cults and hoarding power. These powerful demons often lie dormant for years, even centuries, awakening to discover empires have fallen and new ones risen in their place. This experience can be somewhat staggering, even for potent eternal beings.

Thralls also offer access to temporal power and wealth. A demon freed from the Abyss seldom reenters the mortal world with a full purse. The demon's mortal host may have elevated social status or great financial resources, but he far more likely does not. Even if the host body does come with all the pretty embellishments, what demon wants to devote all its time and energy to maintaining political positions or safeguarding assets? Thralls provide an alternative. Demons who lack resources can accumulate them through thralls, while demons with sufficient holdings can turn the responsibility of maintenance over to their servants, therefore freeing their own time for more important pursuits. Some well-chosen thralls have the appropriate connections to redirect suspicious clergy, even temporarily circumscribing investigations by the Inquisition.

Thralls play a critical role in the formation of cults. Demons use one or more loyal thralls as the seed of a cult, relying on the thralls to accumulate worshippers in the demon's name. After the cult is well established, thralls take a managerial position, keeping the structure working smoothly, punishing those who step out of line and handling small crises, saving their demonic master the hassle of dealing with the minor, everyday problems that arise within any religious system.

Demons frequently select thralls with specialized skills. Many demons favor demonologists as thralls, for these dutiful scholars can perform a most

SUPERNATURAL THRALLS

This chapter deals primarily with human thralls. Mortals, after all, are more likely to enter into pacts with demons. Supernatural thralls do exist, however, though their numbers are much smaller. Chapter Four provides expanded information on supernatural thralls (see p. 130).

Vampires: Though even demons are not sure whether or not vampires have souls, vampires *can* be enthralled. Cainites' own God-given curse provides a vast cesspool of Torment for demons to bend to their rule. These twice-damned creatures abandon all hope for redemption.

Werewolves: Werewolves can become thralls, but most would quickly be torn apart by their packmates. Demonic pacts carry the same scent to Garou as Wyrmtaint, and enthralled werewolves seldom live long enough to be of much service to their masters.

Mages: As humans, mages can forge pacts with demons and become thralls. Demonic bonds negatively impact magic use, however, making the magic more dangerous and far more likely to get out of control.

Inquisitors: The Blessed cannot become thralls and still retain God's favor. Those who forsake God's blessing become subject to the same rules of enthrallment as any other normal human.

Fae: Most fae cannot enter into service of a demon. Changelings are the only exception; their lingering ties to humanity allow for enthrallment.

Ghosts: Spirits cannot be enthralled. The dead are beyond the reach of demons.



important task for their masters. While demons occasionally forge agreements with each other, one demon cannot summon another demon back from the Abyss. The reason for this remains shrouded in mystery, but no matter the cause, demons must rely upon an outside source for summoning. Other specialized thralls may also include craftsmen, scholars, the physically or mentally gifted, and practitioners of magic, among others.

Lastly, demons return from the Abyss starved for worship. Their spiritual hunger gnaws at them, demanding appeasement. A demon just freed from the Abyss may create thralls solely to satisfy its overriding need for faith. The pact between a thrall and her master allows the demon to Ravage the thrall, forcefully draining all the thrall's Resolve. While most demons see thralls as long-term investments, some are willing to spend the small amount of energy required to create a thrall only to turn around and immediately Ravage the newly bonded servant. Not only can the demon devour the thrall's spiritual energy, it can also drain the thrall's life force. Though thralls are a guaranteed source of Resolve for their masters, most demons prefer to use their thralls as devoted tools to further their own ambitions rather than waste them as a quick snack.

Master and Servant

Demons and their thralls rarely meet by happenstance. One must go looking for the other if a pact will ever be formed. More often than not, the demon initiates the search. It knows exactly what manner of servant it requires and what services it expects its thralls to render. Demons often begin the search within the Church, ironically. The clergy are usually literate. When money grows tight, the noble class sends younger sons to join religious orders, meaning that the Church can yield thralls well educated in statecraft. Clergy are men and women of faith, and believe in their demonic masters for good or ill. Additionally, infiltrating the Church and subverting the clergy into demonic service provides the demon with much needed entertainment after its long isolation — along with the added benefit of preventing the cleric from joining the Blessed in their hunt for demons.

Sometimes demons seek people in which sin has already taken a hold. Demons have an intuitive connection to sinners who indulge in the demon's particular Vice and are naturally drawn to them. In such a situation, the demon is at an advantage, able to tempt the sinner with his poison of choice. A

heavy drinker, who regularly indulges himself in alcohol to the exclusion of work or interpersonal relationships, might attract a demon whose Vice is gluttony, while an arrogant young lord might find himself tempted by a demon tainted by pride.

Desperate people also make good targets for demonic attention. The mother of a dying infant might agree to any pact in order to save her child. A wanted criminal may sign away his soul just to escape from the law another day. The greater the need, the easier it is for the demon to extract a bargain. A starving man might seal a pact with a demon for food, but a successful craftsman would demand much more in exchange, as his immediate need is less. In every case, the demon must be prepared to offer something the potential thrall wants or needs. The general population is usually too overawed by the demon to barter much, but experienced diabolists know how to craft carefully worded agreements to best maximize the compensation for service to the demon. While the demon–thrall relationship is usually parasitic, it can, occasionally, be symbiotic. Sometimes the demon and the thrall share a mutual desperation (though a demon would seldom admit to this). Perhaps the thrall possesses a vital piece of information the demon needs, but the thrall himself lacks some knowledge necessary to his future success. The pact between demon and thrall could require an exchange of information.

Demons seeking educated servants or thralls with great mental prowess might search among the clerical and upper classes, or they might choose a promising member of the lower class to educate. Elevated serfs repay their masters with considerably more gratitude than the already well-to-do might offer. Peasants are also easier to entice; their requirements are simpler, but they often have true needs rather than shallow, petty desires. With appropriate instruction, and in the right clothing, no one would suspect the unknown thrall of lower-class origins. Suddenly the demon has an inlet into the upper class with none of the political and social entanglements intrinsic to the nobility. Serfs also form the bulk of a demon's thrall brute squad. Demons perform visible physical enhancements on these servants; this limits their interaction with the clergy or nobility, leaving the peasantry as the obvious source for these foot soldiers.

Demons pluck thralls intended for immediate or impending Ravaging from the lower class as well. Unlike important religious or political figures, the disappearance of a farmer creates little stir. Only the

missing person's family is likely to notice the absence of a loved one, and the peasantry has no recourse. If someone does suspect the thrall has been culled for more sinister means, the ramblings of a frightened peasant are far more like to be dismissed as superstition.

Not all pacts result from demons looking for thralls. Some potential thralls go looking for demons. Such thralls tend to have other exceptional traits besides their initiative. Most people who seek out a demon already have some knowledge of demonology. These men and women are not ignorant peasants or curious thrill-seekers, but well-educated members of the upper and clerical classes attempting to contact a demon for the specific purpose of forging a pact with it. Far from naively propositioning a demon, thralls of this nature come well prepared to bargain for what they want in exchange for their servitude. Perhaps they have grandiose, Faustian notions of possessing forbidden knowledge, or perhaps more tangible ambitions drive them. Some thralls are so ambitious that they will take any offer the demon makes in exchange for empowerment, willing to sacrifice their souls to win money, fame or even the crown.

A demonologist might seek out a specific demon, armed with the knowledge of how to make deals with that particular individual. The careful scholar brings a detailed list of his demands (though he would be wise to present them as respectful requests), meticulously noting where the demon could subvert the pact and closing up any loopholes. The thrall must approve any the changes a demon makes to the proposed pact and acquiesce to the demon's offer. Smart thralls can turn the tables on their potential masters, forcing the demon to barter each aspect of the pact point by point. Demons do not trifle with demonologists, for these well-read individuals may have friends with the knowledge necessary to cause the demon a great amount of trouble or pain.

Thralls and demons seek each other out for many reasons. Either the demon or the thrall has an overwhelmingly strong need for something the other party has to offer. No matter how long the bargaining takes or what clauses are included in the pact, however, once the deal is sealed the demon has a new thrall who must obey or suffer dire consequences. Whatever freedom the pact affords the thrall, she still surrenders her autonomy to her master. Even the most careful and loosely structured pacts still, ultimately, enslave.

Thrall's Recompense

Life in the Dark Medieval is bleak for the average serf. Life expectancy is low. Children often die before their third year from illness or malnutrition. Women age prematurely from constant pregnancies and repeated births, often dying from childbed fever due to unsanitary conditions. Men, women and children alike toil in the fields or perform backbreaking labor to maintain their modest homes and put meager meals on the table. Plague is common, especially in the summertime. Flu, infection and improper diet claim more lives than Crusades ever did. Social mobility does not exist. Serfs simply do not better their lot in life. They work, they serve and eventually they die, their position in the feudal system filled by their children and their children's children. With such dreary prospects, can there be any wonder that an individual might seek to better himself through a pact with a demon?

What can a demon do for its thrall? While it cannot put money into the thrall's pocket, with the right pact it can twist fate, directing prosperity towards the thrall. Under the demon's care, thralls wax fat and healthy, untouched by disease or hunger. Demons treat their thralls as any other valuable investment, protecting them from harmful forces in order to see both parties live to fulfill their ends of the bargain. Allowing a thrall to sicken and die is poor property management on the demon's part.

In their demonic pacts, commoners focus on health, food and security for themselves and their families. Lower-class thralls may request wealth or nobility in broad sweeps, unsure of what such states even entail. Their genuine desires are for improvement in quality of life and social status, which they believe comes from an extreme change in station. Some may ask for supernatural powers, drawing all their knowledge of such dealings from folktales and religious parables. Often, the demon indulges the thrall when possible, sustaining the thrall's belief in the demon's omnipotence.

Nobles forge demonic pacts with different goals. Upper class thralls also desire financial betterment, but their familiarity with money only increases their thirst for wealth. Thralls already possessing some measure of temporal power seek greater prestige, through advancement in rank and station or through outshining their competitors. The currently wealthy and successful sometimes want nothing more than an opportunity to best their rivals. These thralls may seek physical prowess in exchange for their demonic

pacts, wishing to become the strongest or most skilled knight on the field. Perhaps they desire an advantage in social situations, requesting mental enhancements to become the wittiest. Upper-class thralls also deal in secrets, squandering their souls for a lifetime of petty gossip, wasting their new powers on destroying their enemies through slander.

Of course, demons have other ways of destroying mortal enemies. A demonic pact may include a clause for smiting those who have hurt, opposed or even inconvenienced the thrall. Nothing stimulates a thrall's vindictive streak like a demon ready to painfully punish the source of any real or imagined wrong.

Hate is a powerful motivator, but love — or lust — is even more so. Some thralls seek the romantic attention of a specific individual, while others want companionship from an as-yet unspecified person. Most demons, however, are far beyond the capacity to understand love. They lost all their compassion in the Abyss. Forcing a person to submit to its thrall's desires is well within the bounds of a demon's power, but creating love is beyond its scope. Either the demon or the empowered thrall could destroy the desired victim's mind, replacing it with a new set of memories, but any simulated emotions based on these memories would feel hollow and lackluster. A thrall making a deal with a demon for love might ultimately possess the woman of his dreams, but she may be a mindless automaton instead of the flirtatious maiden that caught his eye. Perhaps an obedient servant to the thrall's lusts is all the thrall desires — which the demon can certainly provide.

The motivations for the noble and upper classes to forge pacts are not unusually complicated, but what accounts for the frequency of bonds between demons and members of the clergy? Of course, some clergy want power and money. Some want an opportunity to indulge in sin, which they have so long denied themselves. Just as the members of the upper class attempt to humiliate their rivals, a monk may wish to undercut another monk, embarrassing him in front of the whole order. Life in monasteries is isolated and repetitive, and petty rivalries are a way to break the monotony. More commonly, men and women of faith become thralls in an attempt to take a step closer to God. The thrall may believe the demon to be a pagan deity, a celestial messenger or even a fallen angel. Whatever the case, the demon is still closer to divinity than the thrall can ever hope to be. Demons barter with their memories of Heaven and knowledge of the divine, helping the thrall

settle theological debates or answering questions such as “What does God look like?”

Whatever a thrall's station, whatever his goal, when he forges a pact with a demon he exceeds his previous potential for achievement. The demon can take a thrall outside his limitations, removing social, physical or mental barriers that once kept the thrall from reaching beyond his current state. In the service to a demon, a thrall becomes more than what he was, more than he could otherwise hope to be. While such seemingly limitless possibilities come at a steep price, many are willing to pay anything to attain greatness.

Enthrallment

Empowering a thrall actually requires minimal effort on the part of the demon. With a touch on the thrall's forehead, the demon can reach into the thrall's soul and twist. Of course, the thrall must fully agree to every change made to her. The arrangement cannot be forced upon the thrall.

When the demon enacts this change on the thrall, the thrall's soul is weakened. In this moment, however, the soul also awakens. Ironically, bargaining with a demon results in greater spiritual attunement. Thralls gain an awareness of the divine that other humans lack. Their new measure of faith not only provides fuel for the thrall's Arcana (the black miracles of demonic faith) but also acts as ballast for the spiritual taint that inevitably comes with serving the embodiment of evil.

This new connection with the divine sets thralls apart from other mortals. They feel special, consecrated to a newfound purpose that has yet to reach full fruition. Perhaps the thrall cannot say exactly why or how she is different, but she senses it nonetheless. The average human lacks the capacity to employ the infernal gifts the thrall's demonic master grants her, nor could the average human withstand soul-wracking Torment, the price one must pay for infernal power. The thrall's spiritual awareness combines with her strength of will, providing her with a necessary regulating force to combat the depredations that demonic service inflicts upon her soul and body. Resolve is the spiritual sentinel keeping the ravages of Torment at bay, an almost sentient manifestation of faith born from the thrall's new capacity for advanced celestial understanding. For the Blessed, faith is actually a connection, a surrender to the divine. For thralls, faith is the arrogance of becoming divine. The Blessed only perform deeds as God permits, while thralls impose their will and spiritual power on God's design, much as their fallen masters do.

The thrall's spiritual investiture has a downside. The taint of damnation poisons the thrall's soul. Former bad habits and occasional immoralities crystallize into Vices that yearn for gratification. Temptation, once easy to resist, becomes an insistent urge. Yet the demon plants only the small seed of evil within its thrall, nothing more; only the thrall controls the constraint or spread of that evil. Every time the thrall indulges her Vice she sinks further into depravity. Just as the thrall's spiritual awakening instills her with the capacity to accept superhuman power, it also creates a flaw in God's design. Mortals were not created to bear the burdens of celestial power, let alone the twisted Arcana of the fallen. When a thrall opens herself to receive her master's gifts, she also accepts a tiny portion of the anguish of sin that each demon must continually fight. Unlike demons, mortals are not predisposed to feel God's disapproval as a tangible sensation. In the average moral person, sinning usually produces brief euphoria followed by some measure of guilt or self-loathing. The lingering effects of this sin are purely psychological, determined by that person's own concepts of

right and wrong. By turning their backs on God and forming bonds with demons, thralls lose the ability to judge morality by their own scales. They are subject to the same moral standards as demons, and are punished in kind for their sins. Instead of determining the balance of her spiritual scales through reason and her personal interpretations of guilt, the thrall must struggle to equalize her Torment and Resolve as they are governed by God's code of ethics.

Once a thrall willingly enters into a pact with a demon, the demon can begin to imbue its servant with Arcana. Some demons carefully explain each Arcana, ensuring that their new thralls can make full use of their powers. Thralls given a detailed tutorial move more easily into service, bolstered by a sense of immediate compensation. Aided by the knowledge of the limits and possibilities of their Arcana, thralls make more efficient use of their energy. Not all demons assist their thralls in the discovery process, however. Some leave thralls to their own devices, allowing them to develop an understanding of their powers through trial and error.



For these thralls, Arcana might manifest as needed, only arising in relevant situations. Suddenly spouting fire from her fingertips or withstanding a seemingly lethal attack may surprise an unprepared thrall, despite her gratitude for the timeliness. An extremely perceptive or intuitive thrall may suspect certain new abilities even without guidance from her master, perfecting the use of her Arcana through trial and error. Of course, leaving thralls to their own devices with Arcana might not always be the best idea, as inappropriate use could call unwanted attention to the demon's presence. Demons who maintain close physical proximity to their thralls are better served by carefully instructing their servants in the proper application of any new powers.

Pacts

One hears much talk in my Order of the oaths pledged between demon and slave, of the sacrifice of selling one's soul to an illimitable being, but does God not ask much the same of us? When I joined the Church, I pledged my eternal soul into His service. I vowed to forsake the pleasures of the flesh, for that is His will. I vowed to pray only to Him. The demon's slaves, though pitifully misguided, are no less fervent in their faith than we servants of God. I dare suggest they are more so, for as Brother and Sisters of Christ become lost in ritual we often forget the zeal that led us here. The Devil's servants have zeal to spare! God has no power to enforce His will on His servants, and so we sin beyond control with naught to guide us save our own fragile morality. The legions of Hell have more power to keep their servants from sin than the Holy Mother Church. Blasphemy, I know, to suggest the Church could learn from these fiends, but I notice the demon's servants rush to his aid when beckoned. I am still alone as I investigate the demonic scourge. My letters to Rome go unanswered still, while the demons can hear their slaves calling them, even across the miles.

—From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

For all that Church warns against deals with the Devil and portrays such oaths as profane rites sealed in blood, the truth is often less arcane. Most arrangements between demons and their thralls are just

that: arrangements. The demon promises one thing, the thrall promises another, and between them they strike a deal. In many cases, both parties can freely break their ends of the bargain, risking whatever reprisal follows. Thralls generally face torture, death or worse for the slightest disobedience or betrayal — assuming their masters learn of these indiscretions. Treacherous demons usually have less to fear from their slaves, but often fulfill their promises, if only to maintain the ruse of benevolence. While no pact is truly inviolate, some promises have the magical power to enforce themselves upon thralls who swear them. These oaths of fealty form the core of the Church's warnings and exaggerations.

Before a mortal ever receives the initial empowerment that transforms her into a thrall, she must negotiate the terms of her service to her master. Through investments of Arcana, demons can restore beauty to the aged and disfigured, cure diseases and heal old injuries. They can grant wealth, prestige and supernatural power. Not all gifts take the form of investments, however. Demons can also lend aid through their own actions and powers, or teach secrets lost to history. In short, demons have much to offer, and can generally fulfill the most debauched cravings. There is always a price, of course, and therein lies the essence of each and every pact.

All pacts take one of three basic forms: bartered services, empowerment and magical pacts. The categories deliberately overlap, and a particular thrall may have bargains that cross all categories. For example, a knight may pledge himself to a demon and become a thrall in exchange for the demon using its powers to make a lady marry the smitten nobleman. As a thrall, the knight swears further oaths of fealty in exchange for unmatched strength and embraces sin for further power. This knight pays a price for everything he receives from his demonic master. In this manner, pacts represent a very elementary form of commerce, albeit with abstract currency. Whether exchanging favors for favors or power for service, the ledger always tilts in the demon's direction. While the occasional diabolist may sometimes out-barter a demon, such thralls are the extreme exception and not the rule. Even seemingly successful infernalists must wonder whether they really claimed the upper hand or were only deluded into believing they came out ahead.

Bartered Services

In the most basic form of pact, the demon agrees to perform a favor in exchange for service or worship.

No power enforces the agreement except the demon's own might, and the fallen can easily renege on its honey-tongued promises. A cult collectively holds a type of bartered-services pact with the demon it worships, the terms of which are informally spelled out by the nature of the cult. Typically, demons shelter their cults from external harm in exchange for faithful worship, though most grant such protection out of self-interest rather than any altruism. In other cases, the pact takes the form of extortion, with the demon magnanimously withholding wrath in exchange for devotion. More personally, demons reach accord with specific mortals or thralls in much the same way as anyone else would, except perhaps that the demon has a broader base of knowledge and skills with which to barter.

Although bartering has no magical enforcement, cunning demons eagerly capitalize on their own mythology. By "sealing" an agreement with an oath written in blood or otherwise wrapping a mundane bargain in the trappings of mysticism, a demon can delude a mortal into believing an agreement has power. This ruse proves a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the thrall is less likely to break an oath when he expects ruin and malady to fall upon him for such transgression. On the other hand, when an individual breaks such a promise and braces for the disaster that never arrives, he may begin to suspect and test his master's other lies.

Agreements involving bartered services have one final quality that sets them apart from other forms of pacts. Without any true mystical component or enforcement, demons can make such bargains with mortals (or other beings) without the effort of enthralling them. A demon could trade information with a diabolist mage, with both parties regarding one another as brief peers if not quite equals. Because of this, thralls often serve as brokers for their master's service, arranging deals with mortals in exchange for appropriate payment. In such cases, the mortal may never even see or interact with the demon directly. There is no mystical mark or taint associated with this transaction — but there is always the risk of being caught dabbling in infernalism.

Empowerment

While simple trade may suffice for lesser exchanges, a demon cannot grant Arcana without first enthralling the intended recipient. The actual process of empowerment is detailed more fully elsewhere in this chapter (see p. 59) and in Chapter Four (p. 130). The transformation from mortal to thrall rep-

resents the greatest and most life-altering pact anyone can make. The mortal forfeits autonomy and removes her soul from God's righteous and rightful dominion, trading these blessings for temporal or mystical power. Her soul becomes clay in her new master's claws. Whatever her new powers, she becomes subject to the spiritual poison of Torment and the monstrous hubris of Resolve. She forcibly awakens to a state of elevated spiritual consciousness that forever sets her apart from humankind. In exchange for this dubious blessing and concurrent Arcana, a thrall forfeits her soul and life to the whim of her new master. At will and across any distance, the fallen can Ravage the energies and essence of her spirit, wracking her with despair and pain, and even causing death. Very few thralls know that they agreed to serve as sustenance if their masters so desire, but such is the lot of those who consort with Hell. In the end, a prospective thrall may refuse a demon's advances. It may kill her, torture her, threaten her, lie to her or use any other form of coercion, but in the end, a demon cannot force the initial pact of thralldom. That divinely ordained sovereignty must be forsaken by choice.

Even after his initial empowerment, a thrall retains a measure of autonomy. He may be devoured, but his investments of Arcana are his own for as long as he lives. Demons cannot simply take their gifts back or grant new powers without obtaining consent. A thrall may have only flash, and no substance, to show for his forfeited and Torment-eaten soul, but no demon can force him to surrender his Arcana. In some ways, this inviolability of Arcana represents one of the only ways in which demons are actually bound to fulfill their promises to thralls.

Magical Pacts

Like demons, thralls find their capacity to receive Arcana proportional to their depravity. Unchecked Torment carries a host of disadvantages, culminating in the swift and agonizing death of Consumption. As a result, most thralls cannot really withstand the Torment necessary to empower them with anything more than infernal showmanship — pretty tricks designed to impress and little more. Ultimately, thralls who rely on sin for power either perish or develop the spiritual fortitude to withstand the poison festering in their souls. Such a process is gradual and by no means certain, though thralls who come to master their own monstrosity are as terrifying as they are glorious. Most thralls lack this discipline, and even

patient thralls must contend with impatient demons unwilling to spend a decade or more cultivating a slave's power. Fortunately, as in all matters infernal, there are shortcuts.

Thralls can manifest Taints like their fallen masters, though these curses must be invested like Arcana. As a result, the thrall must either have a general idea of what each Taint involves and accept the curse willingly, or simply yield herself wholly to whatever the demon desires to grant her. Taints provide the potential for power without the often lethal danger of Torment; alternately, a Taint may be imposed as a means of reducing the Torment of a thrall whose sin has grown unmanageable. Given that Taints are wholly negative, demons must exercise more creativity and persuasion to obtain permission. Threats and torture work well to this end, though deception also serves admirably. In other cases, the truth suffices when properly phrased in the form of a pact. The demon promises the thrall power, but the thrall will have to bleed for it. This statement is essentially true, since the Taint provides the spiritual capacity to receive the power. The two traits are not linked except in the mind of the thrall and the phrasing of the offer, but acceptance allows the demon to invest both. After all, a thrall willing to sacrifice her soul for power might view the desecration of body or mind as trivial by comparison. Clever demons can always find ways to impose Taints without concomitant investments of Arcana, but have no real incentive to do so. Taints are always negative and often highly visible. Heavily cursed thralls are less useful for their disfigurements, infirmities and insanities, not to mention the added difficulty of concealing their damnation. Pragmatic demons only grant large numbers of Taints to thralls whose purposes do not require subtlety, particularly those selected as enforcers or bodyguards.

As a final alternative to Torment or Taints, thralls may gain spiritual potential for Arcana by swearing Pacts (see p. 124 for complete rules). Unlike the non-binding agreements of bartered services, Pacts made by thralls have genuine power. If a thrall breaks the agreement, he suffers a punishment declared at the time he made the Pact. He cannot avoid this punishment or deceive the magical oath, nor does the agreement require any continued oversight or enforcement from the demon. Instead, the Pact enforces itself brutally and mercilessly. Magical Pacts either force a thrall to

perform an action at regular intervals or require him to avoid an action. In the former case, the Pact typically mandates some service or sacrifice from the thrall. In the latter case, the Pact forces the thrall to curtail his actions in some inconvenient way. These devotions sometimes seem bizarre to the point of meaninglessness, which they often are. The form of service does not matter. Instead, the *belief* intrinsic to the service fuels the demon's ability to empower the thrall. The thrall really empowers himself through the proxy of the demon, trading raw devotion for the processed faith of Arcana.

As stated previously, magical Pacts most resemble the fabled "deal with the Devil." In some cases, these deals are extremely restrictive, while others are a mere nuisance. The more demanding the Pact, the more spiritual power it generates and the more Arcana the thrall may receive. Thralls can make and live under many different Pacts simultaneously, though they must be careful not to place themselves in situations where two or more Pacts demand opposing action. In such cases, the thrall cannot fulfill one of the agreements and suffers ruin. Some thralls find it simpler to labor under the burden of a single terrible Pact than many smaller oaths. At least these wretches know what their masters expect without any risk of being trapped by the cruel vagaries of circumstance.

Day in the Life

I made contact with a demonic servant today. Strangely enough, I met him in the monastic library. He came upon me as I read by the dwindling sunlight and spoke as though he knew me! I think the enemy has detected my presence here. We spoke for some time, for I had no opportunity to flee. Far from threatening me, however, he gave me a book. I have not opened it, of course, and will not until I have submitted it to thorough examination for demonic enchantments. The leatherwork on the cover is beautiful, with intricate, tooled designs that might have taken weeks to complete.

Why would a demon worshipper give me, a follower of Christ, a gift? He claimed we share a common interest, and looking at the

letters embossed in gold leaf upon the book's spine, I think that may be true. The letters spell: **On the Nature of Binding Demons.**

—From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

Every thrall is different, but certain generalities can be made about a thrall's life based on the duties he performs for his master. Some thralls lead relatively mundane existences, interrupted only occasionally by demonic activity, while others spend their days steeped in ritual and obeisance. Thralls serve as spies, messengers, scholars and prophets. Some know the manner of creature they serve, while some remain blissfully unaware of the unpleasant truth. Whatever the thrall's purpose, be sure that demons exploit all their servants' possible uses.

Keeping the Faith

While many thralls retain the semblance of a normal life, partaking in the same daily activities as before their enthrallment, some demons keep their thralls isolated from the changing world around them. Thralls created with the purpose of seeding and managing cults lead vastly different lives from their more socially integrated counterparts. Unlike specialized thralls, chosen for knowledge or ability, demons select potential cult leaders for their strong social presence. Charismatic or intimidating thralls make ideal cult leaders. Zealous thralls also make good leaders, as their fervency of belief is the best testament to the demon's power.

Demons give their cult leaders impressive, but often insubstantial, powers. Unlike demons, thralls can generate their own Resolve. Thralls perform miracles at little cost, producing many signs of the master's glory without seriously expending their reserves. Demons may instruct cult leaders to perform such miracles only in the demon's presence. When miraculous things happen only with the master around, the credit for the wonders usually goes to the demon. Over time, the thrall is permitted to perform these showy little tricks even without the demon's attendance, and cultists simply believe the demon is either invisible or present in spirit, which fosters ever greater belief in the demon's omnipotence.

When cults branch out into additional cells, demons may place trusted thralls in positions of power with the new cells. Thralls given stewardship of new cells are either faultlessly trustworthy or bound to the tightest pacts. Cult leaders of spin-

off cells find new freedom in their promoted roles, away from the watchful eyes and direct control of their demonic masters. Demons monitor these expansion cells regularly, but trust their servants to keep things running smoothly on a daily basis.

Cult leaders rarely have an opportunity to relax and enjoy their power. Some demons may assemble a sort of infernal "Inquisition" to scrutinize the inner workings of cells, interrogating cultists and cult leaders alike to determine if all the master's orders are being obeyed to the letter. Cult leaders, in turn, may employ their own groups of loyal spies and bodyguards to make necessary shows of force to keep their cultists in line. Thralls who lead cults must test and be tested at every turn. Failure is not an option conducive to a long, healthy life.

Future Investments

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, demons sometimes enthrall mortals as quick sources of Resolve. A demon might forge a pact, then immediately Ravage the thrall of his spiritual, mental and physical reserves. Such things happen, but not nearly as often as one might think. Most demons use this feeding method only in emergencies, as such callous destruction of servants plays hell on the demon's Torment levels. Making quick snacks of thralls is also bad for morale, disturbing cultists or other thralls who happen to witness the exchange. Finally, the practice of is wasteful. Demons prefer to spend their energy creating thralls for continued use.

Creating thralls as future or long-term sources of Resolve proves a handy alternative to the immediate enthrall-and-ravage method. Clever demons skim off their thralls' Resolve over a long period of time, never touching the thrall's Willpower or health levels. Instead of one quick meal, the thrall provides an extended means of sustenance. Normal mortals do not produce Resolve, but thralls' souls produce a slight excess of energy, which demons can drain in small increments. Thralls produce Resolve gradually (1 point per day) so demons must mine them slowly. The slow ravaging of thralls is no kinder to the demon's soul, which still pays the price of added Torment, but does not actually harm the thrall.

Of course, if a demon takes all of a thrall's Resolve, none remains with which to empower Arcana. The demon may not require another enhanced servant, and the thrall remains obli-

ous to this missed potential. Instead of Arcana-wielding flunkies, these thralls are instead Resolve banks, from which the demon may withdraw at any time.

Often, thralls created for future use lead quiet, happy lives. Demons, wishing to keep their investments safe and accessible, might make the necessary twists of fate to bring thralls status, resources and prosperity. Strangely, these thralls are held to the highest moral standards, urged away from indulging in sin that might ultimately bring attention to themselves. Demons therefore do not tempt these thralls or lure them into vice.

Despite the seemingly comfortable exteriors of their lives, thralls used as long-term feeders are usually far from content. Ravaging is not comfortable. Thralls subject to continual, low-level Ravaging feel used and unclean in ways they are helpless to explain to others. Normal mortals have no way to relate to the sensation of constant spiritual rape. A thrall emptied of Resolve feels hopeless and faithless. He cannot even believe in himself. The thrall can still live his life, but the theft of his Resolve leaves him a spiritual amputee.

Demons might not tap their thralls regularly, instead saving them for a one-time future use, such as a powerful ritual requiring a huge expenditure of energy. These thralls are allowed to cultivate their Resolve over time. Resolve only grows through being tested, so demons might even provide ample opportunities for their thralls to overcome adversity. When the thrall has a

sufficient pool of Resolve, the demon ravages the thrall of his faith, Willpower and health in one violent moment, leaving him nothing but a dead, empty shell.

Demonic Diplomats

Most demons have no special interest in interacting with other fugitives from the Abyss, but sometimes contact between demons becomes necessary. The demon's physical presence at such a meeting puts his host body, demesne or reliquary in danger.

Rather than risk themselves or their positions, demons send envoys to make contact with other demons. Because many demons have Arcana which allow them to see, hear and even speak through their thralls, enthralled servants make ideal messengers. Most demonic meetings are held through thralls, each demon sending servants to interact with each other on their masters' behalf, often as mortal puppets speaking with the resonant voices of powerful fallen.

Earthbound, possessing no host bodies, prefer to speak by proxy through thralls rather than exposing



THE VAMPIRE ATE MY THRALL!

Thralls are as susceptible to the Embrace as any other human. When a vampire Embraces a thrall, the thrall's soul flees and the pact with the demon is broken. Should the demon and thrall wish to continue their bond, they must forge a new pact. The demon then reshapes the thrall's curse rather than his (now absent) soul. If the freed thrall is unwilling to come to a new agreement with his former master, the demon might suddenly find itself regretting trusting a servant with so many secrets: Although the Blessed and even the vampires themselves might consider the Cainites damned, several organizations within the undead hunt and destroy demons and their servitors. The Path of Tears and the Path of the Devil (described in *Road of Heaven* and *Road of Sin*, respectively) are two such groups.

the locations of their demesnes or reliquaries to younger demons. Using a thrall for a mouthpiece limits the information available to other demons about the Earthbound. Because most Earthbound destroy their envoys immediately after these meetings, no trail back to the Earthbound remains for enemies to follow.

Demons also use thralls to negotiate with other mystical or powerful beings. These enthralled diplomats are exposed to all the weirdness of the Dark Medieval in pursuit of their masters' interests. Thralls acting as emissaries may attempt to ingratiate themselves and serve as spies into the cloistered world of supernatural creatures. Such maneuvering is risky, however, and enthralled envoys often meet swift, violent ends.

Specialized Servants

Specialized thralls are hardest to generalize, because they are defined by their diversity. These thralls might fill any necessary role for their masters. Their functions are to act with subtlety and to provide their knowledge and skill on demand.

Many thralls lead normal lives, following the same daily routines and continuing their regular activities as they did before their demonic pacts. The duty of these thralls is to remain socially integrated but still available to their masters. Such thralls provide demons with windows to the world and connections to the times. Their jobs are

to stay as connected to society as possible, providing money or social connections to demons when requested. Demons expect their thralls to provide them with money if necessary, to introduce them to important social figures and to otherwise assist demons in passing as mortal. Thralls with the special duty of teaching their masters to appear as humans rather than demons possessing a human host may find themselves faced with a momentous task, as demons balk at many social conventions thralls take for granted.

Other specialized thralls serve as spies. Such thralls are well placed within the secular and sacred social structures, reporting any relevant information back to their masters. Sometimes spies are sent to uncover specific information, while others might keep general tabs on individuals or organizations. Thralls involved in espionage within the Church have only limited powers or contact with their masters, minimizing the risk of discovery by the sensitive Blessed. Thralls used as spies are seldom aware of other thralls in service to their same master. Several thralls may even be dispatched to do the same duty, unbeknownst to each other, insuring the demon receives the necessary information if one thrall fails or is discovered. Thralls in secular or religious positions of power spend most of their days involved in the same activities as their peers, breaking the illusion only to communicate with their masters.

While many specialized thralls live normal lives, largely unmolested by their masters, some interact with demons every day. These thralls experience no distinction between their supernatural and mundane lives. Personal attachés or bodyguards spend nearly every moment by their masters' sides, and usually have different Arcana than thralls who live primarily in the mortal world. A demon's enthralled brute squad has narrowly focused skills, specializing in Arcana that protect their masters. Demons are more inclined to physically enhance servants who deal with demons exclusively.

Demons often have pet demonologists, highly specialized thralls who spend their days researching True Names, rituals, literary references to demons or any other information the demon puts them to task on. A demon's enthralled demonologist would have the task of summoning the demon back from the Abyss — not a task demons entrust to individuals not tightly bound to their service. Even the most powerful and arro-



gant Earthbound would not trust anyone but a thrall with the information to summon it from Hell. The leap from building a ritual of summoning to designing a ritual of binding is not a great one, and demons keep this in mind when forging pacts with demonologists. Far from the most exciting role for a thrall, enthralled demonologists may spend their days poring over ancient, moldering texts, looking for any word containing certain syllable combinations that might indicate demonic True Names.

Thralls might have the responsibility for recruiting other potential thralls. This process involves a great deal of personal interaction, either with cultists or the general population, to search for individuals with useful qualities. Others might recruit worshippers, either through proselytizing or through creating icons or artifacts (much like Brother Gratianus in the Prelude). Instead of many smaller Arcana, enthralled artisans might have one powerful Arcana that allows them to imbue their crafts with the power to incite belief.

Most demons create only a handful of thralls; though powerful demons, or those with an agenda, might require a larger number of enthralled servants. Demons with many thralls tend to group their servants into categories that are unaware of each other. Thralls kept ignorant of each other pose no threat of organizing against their masters.

Prophets and Variabhs

Some thralls believe they serve angels or gods, while others harbor no delusions about the monstrosity of their masters. What is life like for thralls in knowing service to evil? How does life differ for a thrall who believes she serves a benevolent master? The distinction lies in the tasks thralls perform, in their rationalization for the strange new sensations they experience and in the Arcana they manifest.

Thralls in service to purportedly benign or altruistic masters present unique challenges to the demons who enthrall them. Demons posing as gods and angels cannot order a thrall to perform tasks that violate the thrall's belief in her master. Any command that countermands the established practices of the religion to which the demon pretends to belong might expose the deception. Thralls best foster the lie through ignorance. If they do not know their master deceives them, they unknowingly further the deceit. Because of this, demons are careful to limit interaction between

their thralls. Extensive communication between thralls might result in doctrinal issues as thralls attempt to compare their interpretations of Resolve. Additionally, enthrallment makes thralls feel special, singled out for attention by their gods or angels. Exposure to other thralls could minimize the thrall's belief in her distinction, which is bad for morale.

Angelic demons cultivate virtuous thralls. Their servants are paragons of morality and maintain low levels of Torment. Enthralled who believe they serve angels often love their masters, obeying them as much due to fervent adoration as to any pact between them. Often men and women of the Church, these thralls are familiar with the daily rituals of worship and easily make the transition from clergy to thrall. If anything, enthrallment only strengthens their belief in God.

Thralls awakening to Resolve first feel awed and then special, even touched by the finger of God. When thralls begin to perform miracles through their Arcana, this feeling of superiority grows. Ironically, the greater the thrall's Resolve, the less she attributes her power to an external divine source. A thrall's power becomes an extension of her faith, first in God and then in herself. The more she accepts that the source of her power lies within, the less she looks externally. Her ego rises with her Resolve. Of course, the thrall can rationalize this process. She *believes* and miracles happen. Eventually, however, her belief in God is replaced by belief in herself and her demonic master.

How does a thrall in service to a supposedly angelic being justify the new anguish in her soul that comes from forging a pact with the damned? Demons are happy to assist their thralls in forging a comfortable set of excuses. Demons use Torment as a handy tool to keep thralls in their place. When thralls indulge in sin, their Torment increases, producing uncomfortable feelings beyond any guilt they once experienced. A false angel might deride its thrall for her lapses, questioning why the thrall defied her master's teachings. When the thrall fails to resist her sinful urges and increases her Torment, she believes she is simply more aware of the consequences of immorality.

Sometimes even a once-pious thrall's Torment level can get out of hand, with fatal results. The thrall must either atone, or allow the demon to bleed her Torment off through Taints. To atone, the thrall must act with the virtue that



opposes her Vice, a slow act of contrition. Imposing Taints provides a swifter alternative, though the thrall must accept every alteration her master offers or surrender her will to it entirely, empowering it to make any necessary alterations at its whim. As previously mentioned, a demon need not be honest with its thrall about the nature of Taints, and pseudo-angelic demons seldom provide a forthright explanation. Taints that reflect religious teachings might actually entice a zealous thrall to accept. A demon masquerading as an angel could “bless” a deluded cleric with the wounds of Christ — never mind that these stigmata are far from holy.

Demons appearing as pagan gods might choose a slightly different approach to dealing with Taints. Demons may attempt to attribute the rise of Torment to an increased connection with powers beyond the thrall’s ability to manage. In a perversion of the sacred, the demon claims the thrall must begin to assume the totemic forms of her god. The demon twists the thrall’s limbs into claws or imposes other monstrous, bestial Taints upon the devoted servant seeking closeness with her deity. Just as Taints can mimic Christ’s wounds, they can also imitate the wounds of Odin. For both pagan and Christian thralls, obvious disfigurement or inflicted ugliness serves both to keep the Tainted thrall cloistered away from the public eye and to punish indiscretions. An obedient thrall would assent to these physical changes as penance, believing the Taint an external manifestation of her sin.

In selection of Arcana, too, the differences between thralls to “angelic” or “godly” masters and openly demonic masters becomes evident. Demons posing as angels and gods gift their enthralled servants with Arcana dealing with social graces — powers to command, suggest or influence. Arcana tend to be consistent with the demon’s religious motif, such as performing miracles or other beneficial practices, or destroying enemies of the faith. Even the method of destruction differs, tending towards the swift and decisive rather than inflicting terrible, lingering suffering. Demons indoctrinate their thralls not to use Arcana inappropriately, sometimes enforcing their commands through Pacts. Innovations are blasphemous, especially if they threaten to expose the demon’s fraudulence.

Though deceived and, ultimately, still doomed, these thralls seem coddled compared to thralls in service to unabashed devils. Thralls who knowingly serve demons lead lives of terror. Powerful, ancient fiends like the Earthbound place no value on their servants, beyond their usefulness as tools. These demons waste no time on deceit or coercion. They demand total obedience. Though thralls must always accept any enhancements or changes made by their masters, some demon masters make it clear how small the margin of choice really is. Their slaves must accept and surrender free will or die slowly and painfully, usually after witnessing the brutal slaughter of their families and friends.

Some demons have even less concern for the state of a thrall’s soul than for the condition of his body. When a thrall’s Torment rises to a harmful level, the demon simply loads the thrall with powerful Arcana and sends him after the demon’s adversaries. The demon might also empower the thrall with miracles; both the miracles and the thrall’s subsequent martyred death display the demon’s might. A demon can take a tortured and debased soul and instill so many Arcana in him that he becomes nearly demonic in power for a day, then send him on a suicide mission before he burns out in inevitable Consumption.

Such callous demons obviously have a high turnover rate among their thralls due to both Consumption and abuse. Because thralls must be so frequently replaced, these demons take little time to polish them. The demons instill any traits they feel might be useful and proceed to exploit every resource the thrall has available. Earthbound in particular have little patience with mortal needs, which they either do not understand or simply choose to ignore. Thralls in service to the Earthbound occasionally die from starvation or thirst, or go mad from sleep deprivation, never permitted by their masters to rest in their tasks long enough to replenish themselves.

Even powerful demons must be careful to hide the evidence of their thralls’ untimely demise from their other servants. If a thrall knows he is destined to burn out and die, he becomes paranoid and cautious about accepting new pacts with his master. The demon might resort to the standard death threats, but after witnessing death from Consumption, some thralls might prefer the comparatively swift end from displeasing their master.

With this in mind, why would a thrall still voluntarily make pacts with his fallen overlord? Thralls are an arrogant bunch. Resolve instills a misleading sense of importance in a thrall. Many thralls think they will be different from their unfortunate comrades, that they are stronger and smarter. Some might even fail to attribute Consumption to the demonic pact, blaming failure rather than service for the anguished deaths they witness.

Nefarious demons tend to gift their thralls with more utilitarian Arcana, with less show and more substance (though even in this case, the enthralled are given powers they cannot use against their masters, such as fire-based Arcana for the servant of a demon immune to the effects of fire). In every action, thralls remind others of the demon's supreme power, instilling terror in cultists or those who oppose the demon. These thralls often have physical gifts, vicious teeth and claws, or uncanny tricks meant to induce fearful obedience, such as the ability to appear as if from nowhere.

While every type of thrall has advantages and disadvantages, thralls serving false gods prove the most versatile overall. Devoutly Christian thralls who believe they serve angels spend a lot of time worrying about immorality. Thralls of blatantly demonic masters have little staying power and short life spans. Despite the most carefully crafted pacts, most powerful demons are still too paranoid to put all their eggs in one basket or invest too much energy in any one thrall.

Slide into Ruin

Thralls never end up in the Abyss, no matter how evil or immoral their actions. Hell is reserved for the fallen. Even demons do not know the final plan for souls, or if Hell for mortals truly exists. The thought of such a Hell frightens and confuses demons, for it serves as a reminder of how long the fallen have been cut off from God's divine plans. While thralls have no certainty of damnation, the wages of sin are still clearly death.

Demons always want more than they are willing to give. They deal with servants callously, safeguarding thralls only as long as the thralls are useful. The demon cannot force its thrall to sin, yet the more the thrall wallows in his sin, the more he belongs to the demon. Ironically, thralls satisfied with their pacts often slip into this self-devouring cycle more quickly than disillusioned or dissatisfied thralls. Thralls who

get what they want may ask for and accept more from their masters. Every new pact comes at a great price, as thralls trade increasingly demanding services for power.

The temptation of sin weighs heavily on the enthralled. Their urges are harder to ignore. As a thrall indulges his Vice, his Torment rises and he begins to degenerate rapidly. Consumption is a death sentence, though the thrall may not even realize what is happening to him. Some thralls can make the connection between their deteriorating bodies and their increasing debaucheries, but others are too caught up in the pleasures of the flesh and the whims of their masters to realize Torment ravages them like an insidious cancer.

Diabolism

Why should those who control demons know something that the Holy Mother Church does not? How do they so easily bend devils to their wills, when even all the power of the Inquisition together cannot stamp the demons out? While we in the Red Order must justify at every turn our attempts to understand the binding of demons—and only through books—our heretic enemies have the power to bring even the most powerful lords of Hell under their control. If these methods could be used to fight demons, why should the Church not employ them? Would God care so much about the means we used if the end result is the cleansing of the Earth from the taint of evil?

With this tempting tome resting beside me I... no, I could not open it and use its knowledge if it means defying the will of God. And yet, I wonder if it is really God's will for His most loyal and faithful servants to possess the tools that could best serve His purpose and do nothing at all with them.

—From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

Most infernalists, however arrogant, are supplicants. While the fallen may resent demands for wealth, status or power, they are often pleased to indulge such requests in exchange for servitude. Even the most avaricious importunity still acknowledges that the demon has the power and requires submission before dispensing that power. Diabolists, on the other hand, dare to defy that balance of power, appropriating the demons' posi-

tion of lordship over their mortal servants. Diabolists rip demons from the Abyss and bind them with enchantments that should not even work, as such magical restraints contradict the demons' understanding of the way the universe functions.

While thralls can be diabolists — the two are certainly not mutually exclusive — most diabolists would never deign to descend into servitude. Some diabolists summon demons with intentions of bartering a deal and others have no intention of trading anything. Diabolists have the power to summon and bind demons, forcing the demons to submit to the diabolist's will and perform at his whim. Matching wits with demons is a dangerous game, however, and while some diabolists come out on top, many others suffer dire consequences for their hubris.

What is Diabolism?

Diabolism differs from the other faces of infernalism. The diabolist's path is harder and more dangerous, with increased potential to get out of hand. If a diabolist tries to command a demon and something goes wrong, sometimes all the diabolist has to hope for is a swift death.

In a reversal of the master-servant role, diabolists are the ones issuing the orders. Thralls petition their masters, where diabolists command. So far removed from the mindless worship of demonic cultists, diabolists may not even *believe* in demons as celestial entities. Faith plays no part in the summoning and binding of the fallen.

Diabolists take a more active role than demonologists, though many diabolists are also scholars of demonology. Many demonologists are content to learn about others' experiences with demons through firsthand accounts or ancient tomes. Diabolists take a more proactive role. They forge new paths, write new texts. Demonologists read demonic studies, but diabolists *live* them.

Becoming a Diabolist

Most diabolists either begin as demonologists or work closely with them. Some measure of scholarly involvement is almost always required. Diabolists may be trained by other diabolists or indoctrinated into an order of infernal mages. Supernatural diabolists might inherit the skills through vampiric bloodlines. Though diabolic orders are not cults, they do tend to gather to-



BUT WHY DOES IT WORK?

The ritual of binding is a mystery to demons. How can mortals exert control over such powerful beings? Perhaps the susceptibility to human whims is part of God's punishment for the angels who defied him. Perhaps the key lies in a mistake of arrogance on the demons' part. When demons created mortals, maybe they left too much of themselves behind, creating a link that mortals somehow learned to exploit. Maybe when Lucifer arranged for the rites of summoning to free the Archdukes of Hell, God created binding as a counter.

The truth could lie in any, all or none of these theories. The only certainty is uncertainty. As of yet, no proof exists to shed light on the reasons. Demons can only curse their luck and wonder, while diabolists count their blessings and attempt to capitalize on the misfortune of the fallen.

gether in tight circles, as rituals are easier to perform with an increased number of participants.

Infernal Texts

Demons can certainly be summoned accidentally, and infernal rituals might be enacted without fully understanding the consequences, but diabolism involves more than ignorant recitation of esoteric rituals. Mastery of diabolism requires study and practice. Literate diabolists comprise the majority, though a few illiterate diabolists, often those from pagan tribes, rely on memorization and oral tradition. Because so much depends upon infernal texts, literate diabolists must undergo training to prepare their minds and souls for knowledge not intended for mortals. Whether due to enchantments upon the books or the information contained within, infernal texts are extremely harmful to the unprepared. Reading these tomes can cause insanity, inflict bodily harm or even rob the reader of her Willpower or Conviction, much as the Theft of Faith Arcana (p. 116). Before beginning any work on rituals, diabolists learn to identify dangerous texts and tricks to eliminate, or at least minimize, the harmful effects (see Demonology, p. 88).

Calling Forth Hell

Diabolists witness many summoning and binding rituals before embarking on their own attempts. Because binding is necessary for controlling a demon, novitiate diabolists often learn binding rituals first, though this is not always the case. Diabolists who learn summoning first either do not intend to bind the demon at all, favoring commerce over control, or are building their knowledge on a trial and error basis. Some simply pick up an interesting text and learn on their own (a dangerous method). Riskiest of all, demons can be summoned accidentally. Certain texts are designed for the express purpose of luring the reader into an unwitting demonic summoning. A blind fool calling forth the fallen unawares should feel lucky if he walks away from the encounter with his soul, let alone his body, intact.

The initial magical path a diabolist takes depends on the purpose of the demonic interaction. Those learning summoning first usually begin their practice through summoning minor demons from the Abyss in a controlled setting. An experienced second is typically on hand for these neophytes' attempts. Each ritual of summoning or binding is different, and the diabolist must build each from the ground up. All rituals begin with the demon's name, either True or Celestial. True names are more powerful and produce faster, more effective results. These rituals follow no set formula and depend strongly on the demon's level of power. Demons who have previously escaped the Pit might leave behind records or accounts to guide potential summoners towards them, tiny clues locatable only through extensive, careful research. Knowledge of a demon's personality, Nature or Vice aids greatly in any summoning attempts. Diabolists may spend weeks or even years building a single ritual, but this invested effort does have a payoff. Once the diabolist designs a summoning or binding ritual, the difficulty in designing the other ritual, either binding or summoning, decreases.

With instruction by an adroit mentor, novice diabolists might master summoning first through the process of researching and writing rites, for diabolists can use a well-constructed ritual multiple times, though each time presents the same potential for success or failure. Acolytes often assist in rituals. Cultists of the demon are the ideal

henchmen, for they are both the easiest to entice into participation and the most eager to see their master free. Their intense faith acts as a conduit and their presence pleases the demon.

Of course, not every summoning ritual ends with a binding. The diabolist might only be attempting to contact a demon, perhaps to test the waters for a future deal or to make an immediate proposition. A diabolist can arrange for a host body or reliquary for the summoned demon, whose worldly presence is otherwise limited. While binding openly insults demons, summoning is not intrinsically offensive. Most diabolists prove too useful or interesting to kill outright, and seducing them into service presents an amusing challenge. Of course, inexperienced diabolists may labor under the delusion that demons cannot leave the inscribing circle into which the diabolist summons them. This supposition creates a false sense of security and bravado. In actuality, the demon can cross the circle at any time, though once it crosses the boundary it must constantly resist the pull of the Abyss. The strongest-willed demons certainly have time enough to dispatch a single, unwary diabolist before returning to Hell.

Diabolists typically learn to bind the denizens of Hell before learning to summon them. The benefit of a binding ritual is that from the time a diabolist begins a ritual until the moment she succeeds or fails, the demon remains powerless to take action. It can only wait the diabolist out, hoping for failure, unable to flee and aware of the impending curtailment of its new freedom. Demons are, without exception, angry about being bound. Once bound, the demon is under compulsion to obey the diabolist, though the effects of the binding are only temporary. In the interim, diabolists can force a bound demon to do anything, from committing murder to taking a host. Demons are free to interpret commands as they are issued, bound only to the letter and not the spirit of the order. Because of this, diabolists must carefully consider the wording of each and every demand.

Binding rituals do not last long, and the caster has no warning when the ritual expires. A diabolist may be entirely unaware that the formerly enslaved demon has since slipped its bonds. A freed demon might feign continued subservience for amusement, waiting an opportune moment to exact its revenge; alternately, it might continue the charade out of concern for any additional powers or allies the diabolist might have.

The diabolist always has the option to either release the demon from bondage or to consign it back to the Abyss, a power the diabolist lacks over an unbound demon. Before resorting to binding the demon, some diabolists attempt a form of commerce, a trade of favors or knowledge. Not all demons agree, however, and the diabolist risks his only opportunity to bind the demon if he does not begin the binding ritual immediately. Demons never offer a second chance. Diabolists might also offer to remove the binding ritual in exchange for the demon's continued compliance and behavior, a dangerous deal at best. With nothing to enforce the promise, few demons abide by bargains made under duress.

Dangers from All Sides

Diabolists face many threats. In the Dark Medieval, diabolists attract many enemies among the blessed and infernal alike. The Church poses a very real threat to practicing diabolists. Not only is demon worship illegal and heretical, it is the most dangerous possible heresy. God may forgive all mortal sins, but even the blood of the Lamb cannot wash the stain of diabolism from a soul. Separation of Church and state simply does not exist in AD 1230, and the Church holds sway over every aspect of life. The mere hint of infernalism is enough to ruin someone. Under the watchful eye of the shadow Inquisition, heretics may burn for their crimes. In the hands of superstitious, terrified peasants, purported diabolists might suffer even worse methods of torture and subsequent execution.

Diabolists also expect peril from other infernalists. The danger of persecution increases the need for secrecy. Diabolists impose strict punishment for mistakes, even within their own groups. They are hard on initiates because failure is not an option when dealing with demons. Ineptitude is the cardinal sin.

Rival diabolists also cause problems. Fights between diabolists over the summoning of "pet demons" may come to violence. Diabolists may attempt to sabotage rituals through tampering with written records, going to great lengths to guard their secrets and maintain sole proprietorship of a demon's service. Threat of defection limits trust within groups as well. Diabolists often sell each other out to better their own lots. Those who become enthralled betray secrets to their new masters. Diabolism supports a predis-

position to laziness, ironically. Binding rituals are difficult and ephemeral, while a well-crafted pact lasts indefinitely. Arrogant diabolists may believe themselves clever enough to forge self-beneficial agreements with demons, accepting the gifts the demon has to offer in exchange for a small sacrifice of autonomy. Ego clouds the truth: Few pacts ultimately prove to favor the mortal over the demon.

Demons themselves loom as obvious threats. If anything goes wrong in a binding ritual, the diabolist can expect bloody vengeance from the angry demon. The fallen may wish to set an example to other diabolists considering the grave insult of binding. Demons are, therefore, more likely to kill diabolists in the presence of witnesses than if the diabolist were alone. Therein lies the crux of diabolism: assistance in rituals improves the chance of success but greatly decreases the chance of survival on the heels of failure. Demons might also trick or intimidate mortals into making bad deals. Mortals who accidentally summon demons often find themselves in terrible pacts to cruel masters. Cults pose an additional threat. Cultists who discover a diabolist binding their master respond with anger and violence.

Ultimately, demons have two major concerns with dealing with diabolists. They fear return to the Abyss, because another opportunity for freedom may be long in coming. Worse than the fear of the Abyss, however, is the utter loathing of enslavement by mortals. Demons created humanity; to be subject to mortal whims is not simply insulting, but a defilement of everything the demon understands. Most demons consider it worse for mortals to have power over them than to for the Blessed to smite them.

Diabolic Factions

Though the popular Faustian image of diabolism suggests a solitary practice, most diabolists in the Dark Medieval find more safety and success through involvement in a diabolic order. Some, like the Baali, are Embraced into the practice of infernalism, while others enter the study of diabolism through mortal organizations. The purpose, motivation and rites of the different groups vary as widely as the members themselves, but all diabolic factions seek the common goal of controlling the fallen for personal advancement of some kind. Power-hungry, sinister and often arrogant, diabo-

lists willingly take risks with their lives and souls on the chance of coming out better in a deal with the Devil.

The Circle of Red

The infernal mage order of the Circle of Red may be the most successful and best-organized group of mortal diabolists. Financially supported by a merchant guild, the Circle of Red has the resources available to locate and purchase arcane texts and artifacts, expediting extensive research projects that might otherwise take months or even years. Entire cells of Veneficti devote themselves solely to reading, translating and interpreting infernal literature, while others study and catalog demonic relics. The Circle's carefully regimented class system allows the order to expand in many social and economic directions while still maintaining the secrecy necessary for diabolism.

Though the society of the Circle is largely mercantile, merchant members occupy the lowest of the order's three classes. Merchants provide a law-abiding front for the organization, as well as a steady stream of income, access to trade and means of escape for the diabolist members of the Circle. This seeming reliance upon mercantilism may give the false impression that the sorcerers exist to protect the mercantile interests, while the reverse is actually true. The merchants serve as messengers and servants to the Circle's infernal mages, providing access to money and social connections, much as a thrall provides these services for his demon master.

The next class, called Facilitators, is comprised largely of spies and hired killers. Ranging from cheap thugs to highly skilled poisoners and assassins, the Facilitators provide the Circle's security force. They accompany the Veneficti on missions of intimidation or kidnap the victims necessary for the Circle's infernal rites. Facilitators also provided the muscle during raids on outlying Bavarian villages that have recently brought the Circle of Red to the attention of the shadow Inquisition. These raids serve two purposes. Primarily, the Circle of Red intends to wipe out any demonic cults lingering in the area. Cultists hide or destroy manuscripts key to designing the necessary rituals of binding, interfering with the Circle's attempts to summon and control the cults' demon masters. A fresh, convenient source of sacrificial victims provides an added bonus.

The Veneficti are the infernal upper echelon of the Circle of Red, mages devoted to mastery of sin through defamation of God's natural order. Their magic often centers around blood and flesh, even human sacrifice. As noted earlier, demons do not *require* blood sacrifice, but many derive pleasure from it. Veneficti do not consider their diabolic practices evil because they believe they exist beyond the scope of God's power, and therefore believe themselves beyond such narrow concepts as good and evil. Membership in the Circle requires adherence to a strictly regimented lifestyle, where even moments of extreme debauchery are carefully planned into the routine. Veneficti believe that calculated indulgence in sin gives mortals mastery over their minds, bodies and spirits. Deliberate sin removes the power of temptation.

These mages are distant and cold, even within their own order. The ability to bind and control the denizens of Hell has left the Circle arrogant and jaded. In such control of their own urges, they look contemptibly upon weaker mortals. Despite the considerable contributions of the merchant class, Veneficti rarely deign to communicate directly with their subordinates in the Circle, relying on the Facilitators to instruct the mercantilists and enforce rules. For more information on the Circle of Red, including Foundation and Pillars, see the Appendix.

Using the Circle of Red

The Circle of Red represents everything about diabolists that demons loathe. The Veneficti not only know too many secrets for the fallen's comfort, but they also devote an entire Pillar to the ultimate goal of enslaving demons. Because of this, the members of the Circle of Red make excellent antagonists for Storytellers running chronicles involving thrall or demon characters. The Veneficti are interesting protagonists in a diabolist-centric story, with powerful demons as the enemy seeking to destroy this disrespectful order of mages.

- **The Master's Vengeance:** When the Circle of Red raided the small villages in Bavaria, they nearly wiped out an entire cell of a local demonic cult, stealing several important infernal texts and almost absconding with the Earthbound demon's reliquary. Luckily, one of the demon's thralls killed the Facilitator carrying the statue and brought it to the safety of another cult cell. If the destruction of the cultists and theft of the texts were not

enough to invoke the fury of the Earthbound, the audacity of touching its reliquary has sparked its thirst for blood and vengeance. Thralls acting under the orders of the Earthbound will stop at nothing to retrieve the stolen items and eliminate the Veneficti who pose an insistent threat. Storytellers can provide ample challenge for players, who must overcome the magical abilities of the Veneficti, if they even manage to navigate the complex organization of the Circle of Red. How can the players find powerful mages who do not wish to be found?

- **Origins:** How did the Veneficti become such skilled diabolists? Storytellers running a chronicle using diabolist protagonists might find ways to explain the source of the Circle of Red's power. Perhaps early members of the order made deals with demons for these arcane secrets, bartering their own souls so that their descendents might learn control. Are the Circle's beliefs about their own superiority to God's plan rooted in early Veneficti's attempts to explain the new sensations of Torment and Resolve? Would these mages be satisfied with any truth that portrays them as slaves rather than masters of their own will?

- **Lost Caerns:** The wizards of the Circle of Red make excellent adversaries for **Dark Ages: Werewolf**. The Circle of Red has attacked several caerns throughout Europe, destroying the Garou inhabitants and sometimes infesting the caerns with Wyrms-taint. Some Circle of Red rites use Garou blood and flesh as foci, and Veneficti have even used their infernal magic to twist and deform werewolves' bodies and spirits. Veneficti are not above hunting Garou who interfere with the Circle's attempts to taint a caern. The players' pack comes across a dying werewolf with horribly malformed limbs who tells the characters of the Veneficti's attack on the caern. With her dying breath, she gasps out the chilling news that her attackers have also poisoned her caern, begging the pack to help reclaim it from the grip of the Wyrms. The pack must decide if they will attempt to contend with the diabolists, and how they will cleanse the caern if they succeed in driving the infernal mages out.

Voleurs d'Enfer

The aptly named Voleurs d'Enfer, or Thieves of Hell, practice their unusual brand of diabolism in the thriving Anjou region of France. Unlike the Circle of Red, whose diabolic order consists

entirely of trained mages, the Thieves seem to possess no special magical talent, nor do they express any particular inclination towards demon worship. The Voleurs d'Enfer functions like any mortal thieves guild with one major exception. In the latter part of the 12th century, members of a thieves guild robbed what they thought to be a merchant caravan, recovering, among the other spoils, a set of ornately decorated, richly bound leather tomes. When a literate member of the organization, a former cleric, attempted to read one of the books, blood began to pour from his eyes and he fell to the ground screaming in fear and pain, never to recover his wits or his vision. Their curiosity piqued, the members of the guild began to attempt to ascertain the nature of the six volumes. After bargaining, threatening and generally spending more money than a thief ever expects to spend in one place, the guild discovered the books were a set of infernal texts used, among other purposes, to summon demons from the Abyss.

Through a process marked largely by trial and error, the guild successfully summoned a demon. The details of the meeting remain sketchy, as only two guild members walked away from it, both shaken by the encounter. Étienne le menteur and Artaud de Pontmolain, the only survivors from the original guild, formed a new organization built around summoning and making deals with demons. Recruiting skilled pick-pockets, cutpurses and other petty thieves, the self-styled Thieves of Hell soon added bartering with demons to their list of profitable schemes. The Thieves' foray into diabolism proved surprisingly successful.

Artaud de Pontmolain, who never fully recovered his health after his first and only attempt at summoning, died within two years of forming the Voleurs d'Enfer, and Étienne le menteur currently heads the guild. Though purportedly in his sixties, Étienne is a vibrant, charismatic and peculiarly youthful leader.

Mysteriously, one of the six volumes disappeared shortly after Pontmolain's death. With the remaining five volumes, the Thieves of Hell regularly summon several demons, with whom they have developed a fairly reciprocal trade. The Thieves gather information or worshippers for the demons in exchange for more mundane information like floor plans and locations of ancient lost treasures.

Using the Voleurs d'Enfer

The Thieves of Hell can be used as antagonists or protagonists. Though the Thieves are "mere" humans, their access to demonic text and frequent interaction with demons set them apart from other mortals in the Dark Medieval. The Voleurs d'Enfer recruit only the most exceptional thieves, men and women whose tenacity and intelligence give them the ability to successfully summon and bargain with the ancient and powerful prisoners of hell.

The Voleurs d'Enfer are unaware that their leader, Étienne le menteur, is actually enthralled to the demon he summoned over 40 years ago. The missing sixth volume of demonic text contains the True Name of Étienne's fallen master, who fell back into the Abyss after entralling the two men. Étienne hid the book, determined that the demon never be summoned back from Hell.

- **Six Volumes:** The six infernal volumes uncovered by Étienne and Artaud contain more than a handful of names and rituals, and even the Voleurs d'Enfer have yet to tap into its true potential. Some demons summoned by the Thieves of Hell might become aware of the existence of these tomes, and covet them for their own use. Thralls might seek out these volumes at the command of their masters or even in an attempt to undermine the control the demons have over them. Thralls whose Hell-bound master has been summoned by the Thieves could use the books to free the demon from the Abyss. Additionally, cultists and thralls alike balk at such casual summoning of their lords, and might wish to exterminate the Voleurs d'Enfer altogether. Storytellers could also build a chronicle around where Étienne hid the sixth infernal volume, and what might happen to Étienne and the Voleurs d'Enfer if this book fell into enemy hands.

- **Honor Among Thieves:** Storytellers can construct a chronicle using the Voleurs d'Enfer as protagonists as well. Currently unaware of Étienne's enthrallment, how do the other Thieves rationalize both the man's uncanny ability to bargain with demons and his unusually slow aging? If the players do discover Étienne's secret, they stumble into a whole new world of questions. Why did Artaud die so shortly after his enthrallment? Perhaps Artaud expressed more loyalty to their demon master, and Étienne eliminated him to keep Artaud from summoning the demon back from the Abyss. How much contact does Étienne's master still have with his disobedient thrall? To

what extent does Étienne retain autonomy and to what extent do the players' characters follow the orders of a man with potentially deadly ulterior motives? How would the reappearance of Étienne's master affect the *Voleurs d'Enfer*? Though mortal diabolists have no mystical powers beyond that of any other mortal, they do have access to additional Backgrounds (p. 90) that might give them an advantage when dealing with demons and make for interesting, dynamic characters.

• **Overreaching:** The *Voleurs d'Enfer* do not deal only with demons, but dabble in both trade and theft with any number of groups in the Dark Medieval. The Thieves' demonic connections often afford them the advantage over their competition. Unfortunately for the *Voleurs d'Enfer*, their successes have not gone unnoticed. In several recent trades, they cheated and robbed some of the local Cainite elders using information provided by a bound demon. The elders appealed to the prince, who has responded by recruiting the troupe's coterie to locate the *Voleurs d'Enfer* den, flush out the Thieves and return the stolen goods, which rumors suggest include fragments of ancient vampiric text. Alternately, the *Voleurs d'Enfer* may have made the grievous error of stealing from a cabal of mages, or, perhaps worse, calling themselves to the attention of the shadow Inquisition in their attempts to find increasingly valuable information and texts to trade with their demon associates.

Demonology

At last I understand the Church's insistence that even reading demonic texts is a sin, for now I see that such knowledge taints even the purest of minds. How long could I content myself to sit and watch? How long could I sate my curiosity in books and observances, knowing nothing I read to be absolute? And now I have it in my hands, the opportunity to put aside the reports of others and write an account of my own, to leave passivity behind me for the next blind fool who thinks that it will ever be enough to silently record the achievements of others, never accomplishing anything of his own.

While I write this, the book sits at the far corner of my table, just beyond the circle of candlelight that so dimly illuminates my writing. I tire of dim illumination and hunger for the chance to burn brilliantly. I realize how little we can truly learn through books. If it is my task, and I believe it is, to learn the true nature of the demons and their slaves, I must taste the poisoned draught myself to see why it so entices.

To think I once loved my books so, and now they seem nothing but the prison of the weak, a place to hide from the world. I can hide no longer. Instead I shall bring the world to me, and when I have seen it with my own eyes, I will write volumes on what it truly means to serve the Devil.

God help me, but I have to know.

— From the journals of Brother Philangelus, Red Order

Most demonologists are also diabolists or thralls, but some scholars of demonology study demons for reasons beyond service or mastery. Some find contentment merely in knowledge, with no intent to summon forth the fallen. They simply learn, watch and know far too much for their own good. Every infernal text offers another temptation. Some strong-willed souls resist the urge to practice anything their precious volumes teach them, but others find it harder to ignore the call. Like any scholar, demonologists search for the definitive answer. In demonology, however, books hold no definitive answers, and some scholars turn instead to the source of demonic texts.

Profane Studies

Most demonologists are literate, which means they are typically either clergy or upper class. The most arcane secrets can be found only in ancient texts, many in languages that have long since fallen from use. Because of this, demonologists are often literate in multiple languages besides Latin, including Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew and other more obscure languages. Demon rituals are so exacting that even slight changes in a work due to translation can pervert the entire ritual, spelling the difference between success and abysmal failure. Return to primary

sources is ideal, where nothing has been lost in translation, but this requires an understanding of languages that have not been spoken aloud in hundreds, even thousands, of years. Even if the demonologist can read and understand the text, pronunciation could prove difficult.

Many demonologists originate among the clergy because of the volume of resources the Church has available to it. One of the clergy might stumble across a tantalizing piece of information in an otherwise mundane book, and then have the curiosity to continue looking in places he knows are forbidden. With few exceptions, such as the Red Order of the shadow Inquisition, the Church staunchly opposes the reading of infernal texts. Even the Red Order does so only with the purpose of using the material against demons.

Other demonologists come from upper-class families. Some families have a demonological tradition, where the study is passed down through

generations. These scholars tend not to have access to wide varieties of texts, but focus closely on one particular area of study. Generally, the clergy tends to produce more well-rounded scholars while the upper class produces more specialized students.

Practical Demonology

Those who study the lore of Hell seldom keep their research purely theoretical. Scholars of the forbidden almost inevitably fall to the lure of their craft, guided toward thralldom or diabolism. In these cases, what begins as dangerous curiosity turns to ambition and then ruin. Fortunately, well-educated demonologists usually have the intelligence and diligence to craft rites free of errors. Actual summoning and binding may prove easier than expected in these cases, perhaps luring the demonologist into a false sense of security and deadly arrogance.







CHAPTER THREE: THE HOST OF HELL

“And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?”

— Acts 13:10

This chapter includes full rules on creating demons and mortal infernalists as protagonists or Storyteller characters for **Dark Ages** games. These rules include the new and modified traits used by the infernal host. In general, this chapter assumes that demons possess a mortal host, although cursory rules exist for Earthbound demons. As always, Storytellers should feel free to step outside the guidelines of standard character creation for antagonists and supporting characters, assigning traits as desired to create demons and infernalists of appropriate power.

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

Step One: Character Concept

Choose name, Celestial Name (demons only), concept; Nature, Demeanor and Vice.

Step Two: Select Attributes

Prioritize primary, secondary and tertiary categories from Physical, Social and Mental, assigning one free dot to each Attribute. Mortal infernalists receive a spread of 6/4/3 additional dots to divide among these categories respectively, while demons receive 7/5/3.

Step Three: Select Abilities

Prioritize primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Abilities from Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Mortal infernalists receive a spread of 11/7/4 dots to divide among these categories; demons receive 13/9/5. No Ability ratings higher than 3 at this time.

Step Four: Select Advantages

- Divide 5 dots among Backgrounds.
- Divide 7 dots among the Conscience, Self-Control and Courage, plus one free dot in each Virtue (mortal infernalists only).
- Record starting Resolve (1 for thralls; 3 for demons who have undergone the Ritual of the Sundered Soul; 5 for monstrous demons; diabolists and demonologists lack this trait) and Willpower (4 for infernalists; 5 for demons).
- Record starting permanent and temporary Torment. Thralls must take at least one dot of permanent Torment, while most demons have 10 dots (making them unsuitable for play). Fallen who have undergone the Ritual of the Sundered Soul may have a rating as low as 3, as selected by the player. Purchasing a starting permanent Torment above permanent Resolve is strongly discouraged. Temporary Torment must be 0 for characters with Torment 10, but may be 1–9 for all others. Diabolists and demonologists lack this trait.

• Select Taints (demons and thralls only) and Pacts (thralls only). Combined value of Taints and Pacts cannot exceed (Willpower x 5).

• Select Arcana (demons and thralls only). Total value of Arcana cannot exceed (10 x permanent Torment + temporary Torment + combined value of all Taints and Pacts).

Step Five: Finishing Touches

Spend bonus points (mortal infernalists receive 21; demons receive 15). Increasing Willpower allows additional Taints and/or Pacts, if desired. Increasing Torment or adding Taints/Pacts allows additional Arcana, if desired.

An infernal character's Aura is based on her Vice, with a modifier dependent on her Torment rating (see p. 94).

Resolve and Willpower pools begin at their full permanent rating.

VICES

- **Pride:** Unchecked selfishness and ego; the root of all sin.
- **Envy:** Desire for the status and power of others.
- **Gluttony:** Insatiable and unreasonable hunger, literal or metaphorical.
- **Lust:** Craving for the pleasures of flesh and wanton indulgence of pleasure.
- **Wrath:** Unrighteous fury that spurns love and mercy.
- **Avarice:** Material greed, especially for the possessions of others.
- **Sloth:** Lazy avoidance of work and duty.

BACKGROUNDS

- **Allies:** Trusted individuals who share your cause.
 - **Contacts:** Sources of information.
 - **Cult*:** Mortals who worship you.
 - **Eminence:** Authority and renown among the infernal host.
 - **Influence:** Authority and status among mortals.
 - **Mentor:** An infernal master or patron.
 - **Resources:** Property and other material wealth.
 - **Rites**:** Knowledge of summoning and binding rituals.
 - **Thralls*:** Mortals bound to your power.
- * Only demons may purchase these Backgrounds.
** Only infernalists may purchase this Background.

Bonus Point Costs

- **Attributes:** 5 per dot
 - **Abilities:** 2 per dot
 - **Ability Specialties (max. three per Ability):** 1 each
 - **Backgrounds:** 1 per dot
 - **Virtues*:** 2 per dot
 - **Resolve**:** 5 per dot
 - **Willpower:** 1 per dot
 - **Torment***:** None (see p. 94)
 - **Pacts****:** None (see p. 124)
 - **Taints**:** None (see p. 121)
 - **Arcana**:** None (see p. 123)
- * Only mortals may purchase this trait.
** Only demons and thralls may purchase these traits.
*** Only thralls may purchase this trait.

Character Creation

While infernalists and demons have many unique and modified traits, the process of creating such characters follows the same progression of steps as other denizens of the Dark Medieval.

Step One: Concept

The lords and slaves of Hell follow the same general character creation process as other characters. They should all have names, concepts and distinct personalities that define them before players assign dots to the page. Demons and their thralls must also contend with their sinful excesses and the temptations that drew them into damnation in the first place.

Concept and Celestial Name

Despite any powers or pacts or forbidden lore, mortal infernalists remain fundamentally human, fragile and fallible. Thralls may have bargained with Hell and diabolists seek lordship over the Abyss, but they are not *of* Hell. Infernalists are courtiers and blacksmiths, sorcerers and heretics, kings and merchants. They can be anyone. They only share one quality: ambition. It is ambition that drives them to bargain away their souls or dare the most vile and forbidden magic for scraps of power, material wealth or whatever they covet most. It is ambition that makes them go against the teachings of the Church and succumb to the lure of Hell. To create an infernalist, first create a person with an unmet need, a chink that would lead him to ruin by his own hands, or that could be exploited by a demon. The poor want gold. The hungry want food. But these are only the beginning, the trivial needs of trivial people. What of the second son who would be crown prince? What of the magus who can never quite master the rituals his peers find so effortless? What of the mother with a sick child who would do *anything* to be able to save her baby? And what of the spurned wife who craves only vengeance on her adulterous husband? It is the passion of need that brings infernalists to their ruin. The need itself is not always so sinful, but fulfilling it with a devil's bargain or blasphemy assures the road to inevitable damnation.

Unlike mortals, demons cannot exist on Earth without some shelter from the Abyss. While most of the fallen ultimately inhabit objects or locations consecrated to hold them, others seize human hosts. Possession affords the pleasures and mobility of flesh,

as well as a choice sampling of the host's memories, but also offers demons willing to risk the Ritual of the Sundered Soul (p. 128) a chance to divest themselves of their full Torment and memory of uncounted ages in Hell. At the conclusion of that rite, the personality of the host bleeds into the demon even as its monstrous urges spread like poison. In the end, the demon is no longer purely demonic, but inherits traces of the host's humanity. Thus, any concept for a demon who has undergone the Ritual of the Sundered Soul must begin with the mortal half. Who was she? Noble-born? Peasant? Who is his family and who are his friends? How old is she? How did he run afoul of a demon seeking a host? Was it simply bad luck? Did she dabble with the infernal and conjure something more than she could handle? Did he give himself willingly as a vessel or fight with every ounce of his will? Even for demons who possess mortals without limiting themselves with the Ritual of the Sundered Soul, understanding the host provides a valuable first step in determining how and where the demon might hide in society.

After deciding on the demon's host, consider its own concept and existence as an immortal being. As angels, the fallen constructed the universe. They lit the fires of distant stars, hung the moon in her orbit and carved the firmament from emptiness. They danced in wind and wave and flame, parted sea from land and life from death. They built the animals, even humankind, and administered the primordial cosmos, all according to the will of God. Every force, every element, every facet of all that is owes its existence on some level to the work of an angel. Each of the fallen once had a task, a holy duty for which it was perfectly created. Determining the demon's past goes a long way to capturing the very essence of the being: What it was, what it is, what it still cares about. Of course, it is also important to remember that demons are no longer the angels they once were. Most have perverted their purposes along with themselves, either before or during their long imprisonment in Hell. An angel of beasts may have devolved into a feral monster lost to its own wrath, while an angel of messages may now take delight in spitefully twisting words to serve its own agenda.

As part of their beings, all demons have Celestial Names, the names they wore as angels. Most of these names end in the suffix "el" (of God), though not all do. Inspiration can be taken from scripture or folklore, or players may construct a name from random syllables chosen for no other reason than they way they sound together. The Celestial Name is the

name a demon goes by with its infernal peers, a word of power that a mortal once invoked to call the demon out of Hell.

Demons also have True Names, but these mystical identifiers have more in common with alchemical formulae than a syllabic name as mortals use. A True Name compresses the entire identity of a demon into symbols, incorporating its Nature, Vice and the sum of its original purpose as an angel and subsequent separation from God. A True Name can be written down and even pronounced, but the pronunciation has more to do with understanding the symbols than recounting some arbitrary vocal representation. As a result, players do not need to select a True Name for demon characters, but should note that each has one.

With mortal and immortal identities decided, consider the possibilities of the possession itself. How will the demon use its stolen body and stolen life? Wanton debauchery? A more directed agenda? To whom does it owe its freedom from Hell? After all, no demon arrives upon Earth by accident. They must be summoned with prayer and ritual. It is rare that mortals summon demons simply to worship them, though it happens from time to time, particularly in cases where the demon masquerades as a pagan god. Far more often, though, the diabolist wants something: power, wealth or learning. Whatever his desire, he wants it *now* and is willing to trade his soul or someone else's soul for it. Often, a summoned demon's first thrall is the man or woman who called it from the depths of the Abyss. Sometimes the occultist plays host to the fiend he has unwisely conjured, leading cautious diabolists to have alternate vessels at hand.

Nature, Demeanor and Vice

Infernalists and demons have Natures and Demeanors like other characters. As creatures of lies and sin, the damned often wear outward archetypes markedly different from their true personalities. The worst monsters can lurk behind visages of innocence, but not always. The lie is seldom so obvious or direct, despite the teachings of the Church. Most often the damned wear Demeanors that are half-truth expressions of their Natures. Because the visible personality is true in its fashion, no one suspects what else lurks beneath.

In addition to the normal archetypes, demons and thralls must also contend with their Vices. This is the character's fatal flaw, the sin she embodies above all others, though seldom to the exclusion of all others. The player may choose any of the seven

deadly sins to serve as a character's Vice (see p. 85 for a complete list). Almost any sin can apply to a concept with sufficient creativity. Unusual or unlikely combinations often make the best characters by challenging stereotypes. A frustrated knight can play host to a demon of wrath or become a thrall brimming with avarice for his older brother's wealth. Alternately, he could fall on account of his unrequited lust for the wife of his liege or take overweening pride in his martial skill.

Lacking a Torment rating, diabolists and demonologists do not have a Vice with any mechanical significance, but players should still note their characters' most appropriate moral failings for the purposes of demonic powers that require such information.

Step Two: Select Attributes

The process of prioritizing and allocating Attributes is no different for infernalists and demons than other characters. Choose the primary, secondary and tertiary categories from Physical, Social and Mental, assigning one free dot in all Attributes. Infernalists receive 6 dots to divide among their primary category, 4 in their secondary and 3 in their tertiary. Many thralls make pacts to elevate their Attributes because they feel ugly, weak or stupid. It is quite appropriate to build such flaws into a thrall, and then fill them with dots obtained through Arcana later in the character creation process.

Demons receive a greater number of points: 7 in primary, 5 in secondary and 3 in tertiary. Players should consider what traits belong to the demon and what parts remain of the mortal host. A weak physique may be strengthened by possession, or the demon might have to contend with the frailties and strengths of its new home. Likewise, Appearance can rise or fall or remain constant.

Step Three: Select Abilities

The process for choosing Abilities mirrors the previous selection of Attributes. Assign primary, secondary and tertiary categories from Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Infernalists receive 11 dots for primary, 7 for secondary and 4 for tertiary. Demons receive 13, 9 and 5 dots respectively to divide among their categories. All Abilities begin with ratings of zero and none may be raised higher than 3 at this time. As with Attributes, keep in mind that characters can also purchase Ability dots with Arcana later in the character creation process. Like bonus points,

such infernal bonuses can raise Abilities above 3, and might represent the ill-begotten lore of a scholarly thrall or the ancient aptitudes of the fallen host. Demonologists should have a decent rating in that Knowledge (p. 88), as well as supplementary education represented by dots of Academics, Occult and Theology. Diabolists do not necessarily need the same breadth of education, but require a sufficient rating in Demonology to perform their summoning and binding rites.

Step Four: Select Advantages

The special traits and powers of the infernal host set them apart from mortals and other supernatural beings, as do their proprietary Backgrounds. Of course, nothing comes without a price, and the forces of Hell must also contend with the spiritual poison of Torment and the wretched Taints of the damned.

Backgrounds

Infernal characters use many of the same Backgrounds as Cainites, though some of these require modification to reflect the differences between the undead and the truly damned. In addition, the damned have a number of new Backgrounds specific to their needs and state of fallen glory. All infernal characters receive 5 dots to spend on Backgrounds and may purchase Allies, Contacts, Eminence, Influence, Mentor and Resources. Demons may also take Cult and Thralls, while infernalists can have Rites (and almost certainly should, in the case of diabolists). The selection of Backgrounds should reflect and deepen a character's concept and ambitions and the pressure of her Vice. For example, Pride inevitably goes hand in hand with Influence and especially Eminence, though adherents of vanity hardly claim a monopoly on either. The nature of avarice yearns for Resources, so any character with that Vice either has a large hoard or desperately seeks to expand his holdings. See **Dark Ages: Vampire**, pp. 153–157, for full information on these traits, and pp. 89 for specific uses of these traits for infernal characters.

Virtues

For all their tainted power, infernalists remain mortal and must contend with the frailties and blessings of mortal souls. As such, infernalists have one free dot of Conscience, Self-Control and Courage, and receive an additional 7 dots to distribute

among these Virtues. Conscience protects against the ravages of Torment and staves off moral degeneration, much as with Cainites. Self-Control resists the urges of Vice. Courage helps stave off fear, magical or otherwise. Full information on these traits can be found on pp. 158–160 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**.

Although demons must have once embodied sanctity and morality as angels, the Fall and long imprisonment in Hell has stripped from them the capacity to feel or manifest grace. Demons do not have or need Virtues. If it becomes necessary to determine a demon's Virtues for any reason, it lacks any traces of Conscience, but has an effective Conviction and Self-Control equal to its permanent Resolve and Courage equal to its permanent Willpower (maximum 5).

Willpower

Willpower functions for demons and thralls as it does for Cainites, measuring their overall determination and perseverance in the face of adversity. Infernalists start with 4 dots and demons receive 5.

Resolve

Similar to and yet greater than Willpower, Resolve measures the spiritual prowess of thralls and demons in working miracles. This trait also staves off Torment. Thralls start with 1 dot of Resolve, while demons who have undergone the Ritual of the Sundered Soul begin with 3. Monstrous demons who retain their full Torment have a starting Resolve of 5. Diabolists and demonologists do not have a Resolve rating.

Torment

Where Resolve measures faith and spiritual power, Torment embodies infernal anguish and gauges a character's overall morality. Characters with low Torment are highly moral beings in spite of their pain and taint: Damned and yet retaining much of their humanity (for thralls), or hearkening back to their former grace as angels (for demons). As Torment rises, the morality rots away until the character becomes a monster of incalculable evil. For all its disadvantages — and there are many — Torment also determines a character's capacity to receive or manifest Arcana. Players may assign characters a starting permanent Torment as low as 1 for thralls or 3 for demons who have undergone the Ritual of the Sundered Soul. Demons who have not undergone that rite have a permanent Torment of

BUT I WANT TO PLAY A MONSTER!

A character's permanent Torment can rise above her permanent Resolve after character creation, so players may desire to play such degenerate fiends from the start. Such characters have considerably greater power at their disposal, but also have an extremely short lifespan, having already begun the spiral into unchecked degeneration and death. A demon can arrange to take another host body (at the risk of falling back into Hell if it cannot find a new home in time), but thralls have no such immortality. As such, Storytellers are discouraged from permitting high Torment ratings for starting characters, *especially* for thralls.

10, making them completely unsuitable for play. Each point of temporary Torment reflects a "fractional" taint equal to one-tenth of a permanent dot. Characters with a permanent Torment of 10 cannot have any temporary Torment, but all other characters may have any temporary rating from 1–9. Full information on the benefits and drawbacks of Torment may be found on page 94.

Taints and Pacts

In addition to the inward stain of Torment, thralls and demons often suffer in mind and body as a result of their damnation. These specific debilities and deformities are represented by Taints. Similar to Flaws, these negative traits are entirely optional, but increase a character's potential to receive or manifest Arcana without the inescapably fatal risks of high Torment. For full information on Taints, see p. 121.

All thralls make a pact offering their souls in exchange for power when they first receive the dubious blessings of enthrallment. For many, this marks the end of their proscribed obligations. Others take on additional duties or bans that take the form of Pacts (as an actual trait). Pacts serve the same general purpose as Taints, increasing the upper limit of available Arcana without the corresponding dangers of Torment. See p. 124 for more details.

Demonologists and diabolists cannot have Arcana and therefore never bear the burden of Taints or Pacts unless they become thralls. The total value of a character's Taints and Pacts cannot exceed her (Willpower x 5).

Arcana

The supernatural powers of the damned are known collectively as Arcana. Characters do not receive a fixed number of these powers, nor may they purchase them with bonus points. Instead, a character may take any number of Arcana so long as the combined value of these powers does not exceed her (permanent Torment x 10 + temporary Torment + the total value of all Taints + the total value of all Pacts).

The players of thralls select Arcana according to their character concepts. Why did the thrall make a pact with Hell? What did she need so badly that she would turn to the fallen host to obtain it? That critical need should see some fulfillment in selection of powers, though not necessarily fulfillment as the thrall intended. Demons have quite the sense of humor, and many enjoy granting "monkey's paw" gifts that bring only misery while keeping to the letter of requests. In other cases, demons give mortals *exactly* what they want out of rare generosity, or the cruel jest of knowing the request can only bring suffering. For example, a demon might grant a greedy diabolist the power to transmute objects to gold, but the results would be no less tragic than the suffering of the fabled King Midas. Players should also keep in mind that Arcana usually overcompensate for the needs they meet. An ugly hag does not simply repair her scarred and aged visage, but may demand transformation into the very ideal of feminine beauty and seek the power to strip beauty from others with a curse. A bullied weakling wants nothing less than Herculean strength to crush his tormentors.

Unlike thralls, a demon's Arcana should reflect its original function as an angel as filtered through its Vice. A demon who once created and managed forest predators might have powers reminiscent of its former dominion, with claws, teeth and other physical enhancements along with mastery over beasts. If that demon had a Vice of wrath, its gifts might empower it even more as a frenzied and feral monster, while lust could result in Arcana exploiting animal magnetism and the urges of mating season. An angel of death would have Arcana enabling it to kill and move stealthily past all barriers to reach its quarry. In conjunction with gluttony, its gifts might manifest the insatiability of death as a living embodiment of plague or war. In contrast, sloth could grant more a subtle array of Arcana, allowing it to spread suicidal despair.

Players may select Arcana in any order or combination as long as they stay within the aforementioned limits. Demonologists and diabolists cannot purchase these powers. The full listing and rules for Arcana begin on p. 103.

Step Five: Finishing Touches

Infernalists receive 21 bonus points, demons 15. If the Storyteller permits the use of optional Merits and Flaws, players may purchase them at this time. Note that some Flaws have effects identical or nearly identical to Taints. A demon who takes a weakness as a Taint cannot take the same trait as a Flaw and vice versa.

Increasing Resolve with bonus points also raises the amount of permanent Torment a character may safely retain, so players can choose to assign more Torment and more Arcana during this final step, provided they keep to the limits for total Arcana.

Infernal characters begin with Resolve and Willpower pools filled to their permanent ratings.

THE OLD ONES

Demons created with these rules have only spent a brief time returned to Earth in their host bodies. They have not yet grown jaded with their stolen humanity, nor have they grown acclimated enough to manifest anything remotely close to their full power. By default, a demon has less than 10 years experience on Earth. For every doubling of this period, the Storyteller should award 10 additional bonus points and impose one additional dot of permanent Torment (to the maximum rating of Torment 10 for ancient fiends). Older demons who still live in flesh cannot generally have a permanent Torment higher than their Resolve, or else their host bodies would have dissolved long ago. Storytellers might allow higher Torment for demons who regularly jump from host to host, but such beings usually settle on becoming Earthbound rather than take the risks involved in a chain of hosts. Those who forsake flesh and become Earthbound do not suffer this restriction and may have any Torment rating desired. These optional rules work best for Storyteller characters as a rough gauge of age versus power, but also provide a consistent power level for stories featuring older demons as protagonists.

New and Modified Traits

The following traits set demons and infernal characters apart from other inhabitants of the Dark Medieval, highlighting the accursed powers and brutal price of that power.

Vice Archetypes

Infernal characters must choose one of the following archetypes to reflect their most predominant sin. A character's Vice is not exclusive, for damned characters can and often will embody many of these sins individually or in combination. Instead, Vice determines the character's greatest moral weakness, the sin she finds most tempting. A thrall's Vice does not necessarily reflect her master's sin, but reflects her own personal flaw. Each archetype also lists the virtue opposing that sin. Characters seeking atonement for their Torment must live and act in accordance with the antithesis virtue of their Vice. Although rare, a character can change her Vice over time by indulging new tastes in debauchery. This change should be treated like a change in Nature.

Pride

Also known as Vanity, pride embodies arrogance and selfishness. The Church considers this Vice the greatest, first and root of all sins, attributing it to Lucifer in his rebellion against God and humanity in the Garden of Eden. Less mythically, pride drives most thralls to seek out demonic patronage instead of accepting their lot and station in life. Pride also drives diabolists to pit their wills against the host of Hell. For demons, pride directs them to enslave thralls and claim worship as gods. The color of pride is a glorious, regal violet. Humility opposes hubris in its willingness to subsume the self for the good of others *without* hope of reward or acknowledgment.

Envy

The cravings of envy look to the status, abilities and power of others with the desire to usurp or tear down those qualities. The envious want what others *are*, yearning for the qualities and station they lack. Envy guides demons to wear husks of mortal soul and flesh, to steal the blessings God endowed upon humanity and not upon His angels. Envy guides thralls to seek powers they have not earned and lore they have not studied, particularly when they desire

these qualities because someone else has them. Envy manifests most cruelly in spite, in the desire to destroy or shame another for possessing qualities the envious cannot obtain. Envy's color is a poisonous, bilious green. Kindness opposes envy by valuing the capabilities of others, in seeking to cultivate talent and status instead of stealing or destroying it.

Gluttony

Often depicted in its relation to physical consumption, Gluttony swells to encompass all insatiable and unreasonable hungers that corrupt the body and spirit. Overindulgence lies at the heart of this Vice in the desire to consume for the sake of consumption, instinct and impulse unchecked by decency. Gluttony drives the most monstrous demons in their mad quests to devour the world. Gluttony also guides demons and thralls to gorge themselves in excesses of food and drink and drugs, seeking satiation that never comes. The color of gluttony is the orange of consuming fire. The opposite virtue is temperance, the capacity to deny hungers beyond the limits of need.

Lust

A perversion of love too often mistaken for that blessed state, lust is twin to gluttony for its connection to flesh and satiation. Lust is usually sexual, whether manifesting in simple erotic desire or a more "refined palate," seeking orgasmic respite in the most depraved and forbidden bacchanals. As with gluttony, lust grows as it finds fulfillment, so that the lustful must wallow in ever-greater perversion to find even momentary satisfaction. Nothing — no one — is ever enough. Of course, lust extends beyond sexual urges to encompass all dehumanizing desire of others. Lust makes objects of those it wants, stripping away the reality of an identity in favor of an idolatrous ideal. Demons indulge lust in borrowed flesh, slaking themselves with pleasures they were never meant to know. Thralls attaining power from lust often try to force the objects of their passion to "love" them back. Lust claims the brazen scarlet of a guilty blush as its color. Love values others without needing to possess them and so conquers lust.

Wrath

When anger burns away the tempering of forgiveness and restraint, it grows into wrath. Wrath is not good or just or holy; it is not the desire for justice or judicious punishment for the guilty. Wrath does not care about guilt. Such anger flows from a primal

response to pain and fear into the irrational desire to destroy everything and everyone that displeases the wrathful. Like an indiscriminate wildfire, this Vice has no friends, allies or direction. Wrath manifests in the brutal and violent powers of the damned, and goads its adherents into frenzied bloodbaths. The color of wrath is the black of dried blood, looming shadows and death. Mercy denies wrath with patience and restraint, choosing reason over urge.

Avarice

The longing for material possessions defines avarice, though the Vice finds its most spiteful fulfillment in the desire for another's possessions. Avarice blinds those it consumes, turning their priorities to the physical world over any improvement of self or spiritual meaning. The avaricious find no satisfaction in who they are or what they know or what they can do. In their unending, hoarding greed for wealth, they only value the material world. It does not matter what avarice owns, whether it likes its possessions or can even use them. Everything must be claimed and owned. A great many demons feel avarice toward the world as a whole, believing they rightfully own the universe they built. These fallen feel the bitterest greed about their former dominions as angels, seeking to control everything they personally created or managed. Quite a number of thralls make pacts to obtain material wealth, consumed by the pettiest greed. Avarice claims the burnished yellow hue of gold. Opposing greed is generosity, the willing surrender of possessions and wealth to those who need them more.

Sloth

Most pathetic and harmless of sins on first glance, sloth embodies the threefold malaise of apathy, despair and neglect. Sloth does not seek to consume or destroy others, seize their qualities or goods or even trumpet its glory. In contrast, this Vice is quiet, lazy and insidious, avoiding the call of duty and work. This Vice keeps its adherents from helping others because it is too difficult to help. Demons embody sloth when they choose to embrace the easy descent of Torment instead of seeking the bitter path of redemption. Sloth guides thralls to obtain prowess and success with infernal aid instead of working for their dreams. Sloth's color is brown, the hue of filth in which the slothful wallow and the earth of the grave that yawns to claim those whom despair drives to suicide. Diligence opposes sloth with devotion to duty.

New Abilities

Demons and thralls may purchase the following new Abilities in addition to those listed in **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Unless specifically noted otherwise, Cainites, magi and other types of characters may also learn these traits.

Awareness

The tingle starts in my fingertips and my face. I try to ignore the sensation, but it persists. Something isn't right. Suddenly I'm on edge, and every shadow holds a potential threat. Here in the bright noonday sun there are few enough shadows, so I try to relax; but that tingle just won't go away.

I scan the other people in the market just to be sure there are no hidden dangers. Nothing untoward seems to be lurking behind a cart or in a pigpen. I chuckle at myself for my paranoia. Though the tingle grows stronger, almost becoming an itch or a mild burn. I decide to ignore it. A pretty young girl selling chickens across the way waves to me, and I decide I'll go introduce myself to her. Halfway across the road I stop. Something is definitely wrong.

The pretty girl with the chickens smiles broadly at me and I suddenly realize what I've been overlooking. Her aura is huge and distinctive. Loxuresh, I think, cursing myself silently, How did she get out? The girl's pretty face no longer deceives me. I would know that bitch anywhere.

As the former hands of the Creator, demons perceive the subtle shifts and ripples in the essence of reality that accompany the use of supernatural powers to affect the world. Sometimes the mere presence of a supernatural being represents sufficient "disturbance" to alert a sensitive demon. A fallen's "sixth sense" manifests differently from character to character. Some experience tingles or hear faint and incomprehensible whispers when something supernatural happens or approaches. Others feel slightly ill or cold, or just know that something unnatural occurs. Thralls may also learn and develop Awareness by tapping into the miracle of their awakened Resolve, but this Ability otherwise remains the exclusive province of mages and spirits. Other beings (including vampires, werewolves, the Blessed and the fae) must rely on supernatural perceptions afforded by their powers instead.

Storytellers may call for an Awareness roll whenever a character witnesses or encounters a supernatural presence; alternately, Storytellers may perform such checks in secret and relay information

accordingly. Characters with this Ability may also consciously gauge the supernatural influences in their immediate area, though this momentary concentration requires an action.

- Novice: You get a shiver on occasion as you walk through crowds. Why?
- Practiced: Strong magic rarely escapes your notice. You can often spot a demon hiding in a host body.
- Competent: You can concentrate and discern whether a given individual or place is touched by the supernatural.
- Expert: You pick up on the subtle and hidden forces all around you.
- Master: You can sense an unnatural influence anywhere nearby and sometimes more distantly in the case of powerful magic. You can differentiate the Arcana of different demons by the subtle variations of their spiritual resonance.

Possessed by: Demons, thralls, mages, ghosts, madmen, fortune-tellers

Specialties: Places of Power, Demons, Spirits, Supernatural Effects

Torture

The elderly friar hung limply from his manacles. Telathelus paced back and forth, yet he gave no impression of being impatient. He looked, in fact, rather amused with the whole production. Moaning, the old man began to regain consciousness. Telathelus picked his teeth with one perfectly shaped fingernail, waiting.

"Awake at last?" he asked jovially. The friar tried to turn his head towards the voice, his eyelids fluttering over his rheumy, blind eyes.

"Wonderful!" the demon exclaimed. "Let's begin again, shall we? Tell me where you keep the book." He listened as if for a response, shaking his head sadly at the friar's whimpering moan.

"Oh, now. That won't do at all."

Red welts sudden striped the old man's back, as if placed by an invisible whip. The friar shrieked and mumbled a prayer unintelligibly. Again marks criss-crossed his skin, eliciting another shriek and another prayer. Telathelus sighed.

"I see subtlety is wasted on you," he lamented, pressing his thumbs to the ancient friar's eyes. "I suppose I'll have to try a more direct approach."

Owing to their Torment, demons understand pain on a scale that mortal minds and bodies cannot begin to fathom. It stands to reason then that the damned make exquisite torturers when they set



themselves to the task. The fallen need only apply their understanding of agony to their newfound awareness of flesh, probing the limits of human endurance with inhuman cruelty.

Although Arcana may aid an interrogation by imposing suffering directly, artful demons do not waste their power on such trivialities. Instead, these monsters look gleefully upon the perversities of human ingenuity and employ the tools and techniques created by God's beloved children.

- Dabbler: You know how to beat an answer out of someone.
- Student: You understand the basic technique of torture and can use fire, the rack, dunking and other techniques without killing your subject.
- Learned: You combine understanding of fear with a gift for causing pain using a variety of methods.
- Scholar: You can choose the appropriate tool, technique or mental game to force a confession with admirable speed and efficiency.
- Master: Your touch could break the faith of a saint.

Possessed by: Demons, Inquisitors, Judges, Gaolers, Soldiers, Witch-Hunters, Spies, Cultists

Specialties: Humans, Demons, Forced Confessions, Conversions

Demonology

Brother Octinellus licked the pen nib before dabbing it into the ink and scratching a few hasty notes onto a ragged piece of palimpsest. He squinted in the low candle light, bringing his face very close to the ancient manuscript.

"To call forth the... the..." he struggled. "What is that character?" Muttering to himself all the while, Octinellus thumbed open another, smaller book, checking two symbols against each other. After a few moments of looking back and forth, the normally dour man smiled smugly. The passage made such perfect sense now. How could he have misunderstood it before? Another of God's mysteries, the studious Franciscan monk mused.

Brother Octinellus held up the heavy, leather-bound manuscript again. Running an ink-stained finger along the intricate, demonic illumination, he knew exactly what to do.

While characters may purchase specialties in Occult or Theology pertaining to demonic lore, the Demonology Knowledge reflects a more detailed study of matters infernal. Such studies must be car-

ried out in secret, lest the scholar attract the ire of the Church and face persecution as a diabolist. Ironically, the most comprehensive texts and demonology experts in Europe belong to the Church itself. The leadership of the shadow Inquisition carefully restricts circulation of this knowledge to a few well-guarded and closely monitored experts, but the Church grudgingly acknowledges the usefulness of accurate information as a weapon against the host of Hell. Independent demonologists outside of the Church take an equally pragmatic approach to their studies, albeit more foolish in their ambitions, for they most often seek to conjure and bind demons into service or barter with them for investitures of power. Demons themselves encourage censored dissemination of their secrets directly or through the proxy of cults and thralls. The fallen are ever eager to tempt more mortals into thrall and attract new covens of worshippers. Conversely, demons have absolutely no desire to serve cunning diabolists who master rites of binding. Demons do not need this Knowledge to know about the powers and hierarchy of the damned, but do need it if they wish to prepare rituals for mortal servants or cultists to enact upon their infernal peers.

- **Dabbler:** You know the most common powers and universal weaknesses of the infernal host, and the rudimentary theory of summoning — though you would do well not to attempt anything so foolish.

- **Student:** You know the basics of demonic behavior and some of their more unusual powers. You could probably pull off a summoning and may have observed or even assisted with one, but actual bindings are another story.

- **Learned:** You are beginning to understand how little you actually know and how unbelievably dangerous it is to open the gates of Hell. You can usually identify Arcana at work, though rare powers can still surprise you. You might have figured out how to formulate a working binding, though you are hesitant to try.

- **Scholar:** You understand the mysteries of Hell and fragments of the strange and blasphemous prehistory recounted by the damned. You could certainly perform summoning and binding rites and may know a handful of Celestial Names to use... if you wanted to.

- **Master:** Did Lucifer himself appear before you that you might be his scribe? Demons rightly fear your power and learning, though it is just as likely you are a demon yourself if you know this much.

Possessed By: Inquisitors, Clergy, Diabolists, Cultists, Thralls, Demons

Specialties: Summoning Rituals, Binding Rituals, Arcana, Infernal History

Backgrounds

Most of the following Backgrounds may be purchased by demons and thralls alike. Only demons may take Cult or Thralls, as these traits depend on the spiritual nature of the fallen host. Likewise, only demons and thralls may have Eminence and only mortal infernalists can purchase Rites.

Allies

This Background remains largely unchanged from its description on p. 153 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Demons may invest one extra dot in this Background to take another demon as an ally, while thralls and other supernatural beings must allocate two extra dots for the same. Players and Storytellers should note that demons are rarely friends with one another, however closely they associate.

Contacts

This Background remains unchanged from its description on pp. 153–154 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. As paranoid as they rightly are, many demons and thralls cultivate webs of contacts to warn them of infernal rivals and the investigations of the Blessed.

Influence

This Background remains unchanged from its description on pp. 155–156 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Characters with a Vice of pride or envy desire Influence most fiercely, though any of the damned may find great use for temporal power. For example, the right Influence can shield a cult from the inquiries of the Church or expose a rival's cult to unpleasant scrutiny.

Mentor

This Background functions similarly for the damned as the undead, reflecting the attention and tutelage of a more powerful infernal being. The mentors of demons are their infernal betters, often summoned from Hell years, decades or even centuries ago. It may be assumed that a mentor's point value equals the Eminence rating of that character. Almost all thralls have at least a dot of Mentor (and usually much more) to reflect their relationship with the demon who empowered them. Thralls without a

Mentor are either left to their own devices or receive no positive tutelage or patronage.

Resources

This Background remains unchanged from its description on p. 156 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Wealth affords power and prestige, and many pacts of thralldom begin with the desire for riches. The damned who partake of pride, envy and avarice all crave wealth for their own agendas, but other Vices can certainly use money to indulge lust or gluttony or stave off labor for sloth.

Cult

The patterns of ritual repeated, unaltered, day after day, with larger convocations in the evening. Young acolytes lit six rows of red tapers, set in niches carved into the outer walls, each night before sunset devotionals. As his worshipers filed into the hall, Lothaiel stood on the raised dais, his dark features hungry and expectant in the flickering candle light. A bell tolled outside, signaling the sun's final dip below the horizon and the sound of chanting soon swelled and echoed through the domed cavern. Several zealous followers disrobed and began to couple wildly on the stone floor, never breaking the litany of their prayers. Lothaiel watched over them all, his body aglow with a dim halo of crimson light, and wondered why he still felt so unsatisfied.

Where fallen angels once subsisted on the infinite will and power of their Creator, their rebellion forever cut them off from that banquet of grace. Lucifer's host had prepared as best they could, gorged on divine power in anticipation. And as they expected, God withdrew His favor and their souls darkened to empty night. But they did not starve. Instead, as in the night sky, points of faith glimmered across the Earth wherever loyal humans offered prayers to the angels who had appeared to them. It was not much faith, a paltry ration by comparison to what the angels had once known. But it *was* power, and the infernal host cultivated that power. Cults blossomed as the ravening demons demanded more and more ritual sacrifice. These rites grew bloody and terrible with time, until most cultists worshipped demons from fear instead of love. And then came the end of the War and the banishment to Hell. The cults diminished, but never quite faded entirely. Some mortals remembered; some thralls passed the secret names and secret rites to their descendents in a pedigree of obeisance. Sometimes, a cell of these cults would succeed at last, and its master would rise from the Abyss to bestow its favor once more. And

in other cases, demons freed by intrepid sorcerers would go into the world and gather new cults in their name. Sometimes the old ways are best, and the old and bloody gods can do what the God of the oppressive Church cannot or will not.

The Cult Background serves a similar function to the Herd available to vampires, representing a collection of mortals upon whom a demon may batten its spiritual hunger. Of course, as bloody as worship rites can be, it isn't the blood that matters. It doesn't even really matter what rituals and sacrifices mortals give, so long as they give their faith in genuine devotion. Freely given human faith offers demons a steady replenishment of Resolve, with a frequency proportional to the fervency and membership of the Cult. This Background may be pooled but seldom is, for demons are jealous beings and do not like to share the spoils of their stolen godhood. If players pool a Cult, the demon with the lowest number of Resolve points at each interval gains the Resolve award. If this results in a tie, the demon with the highest permanent Resolve reaps the benefit. A continued tie requires a roll of one die for each demon worshipped by the Cult, with the Resolve award going to the highest roll.

Demons who allow their Torment to consume them require greater worship to derive any benefit; for every dot of permanent Torment above 6, a demon receives all Resolve awards as if the Cult were one dot smaller. This does not reduce the size of the cult or the need for such size to produce that award. So a demon with Torment 7 and Cult 3 only gains Resolve every twelve hours, while an unholy fiend with the maximum rating of Torment 10 would need Cult 5 to gain one point of Resolve every day. Nothing smaller would provide any benefit. In addition to losing Cult potency, demons with Torment 5+ are too selfish and monstrous to pool their followers with other demons.

Players may alternately allocate dots of Cult to increase the secrecy of the organization rather than increasing its size. This only adjusts the cost of the Background and does not change the dot rating of the Cult. Every point invested in security adds +1 to the difficulty of all efforts to infiltrate or uncover the Cult's membership and activities. Likewise, each security point decreases the difficulty of attempts to identify would-be infiltrators or uncover official inquiries in time to hide incriminating evidence by -1. No more than three points may be invested in security, and the modifier cannot raise the difficulty of a roll above 9 or reduce it below 4.

Although a demon owes nothing to its Cult, a group of mortals pushed too far by repeated atrocities eventually lose faith. Even if the rituals remain, the lack of conviction empties the prayers and sacrifices of power, and the rating of the Cult diminishes. Wise demons only push their followers so far, providing miracles of support at least as often as acts of domineering cruelty.

Players and Storytellers who require a more detailed treatise of Cults in the Dark Medieval should reference the supplement **Ashen Cults**, particularly the expanded Cult Background found on pp. 72–78. If using this option, a number of points equal to those invested in the Background may be spent on size (use the numbers below to determine size and Resolve benefits; do not use the numbers on page 74), influence, loyalty (use the table on page 75 instead of the rough guidelines below), resources and secrecy (use the table on page 76 instead of the guidelines given in the preceding paragraph). Players may not apply points toward the “Arcana” option for demonic cults, but may assume any thralls acquired with that Background have leadership in the cult if so desired. Increasing size beyond 5 (or purchasing this Background through normal rules above 5) is almost impossible for a single demon, but a group of the fallen could theoretically form a pantheon to manage extremely large cults. The number of members and interval for Resolve awards for extremely large cults are: 6 dots (1,000 believers; every 3 hours), 7 dots (3,000 believers; every 2 hours), 8 dots (8,000 believers; every hour), 9 dots (20,000 believers; every half hour) and 10 dots (50,000 believers; every 20 minutes).

- Your cult includes a core of 3–5 devoted believers and perhaps half a dozen less fervent adherents. The cult performs major rites of worship each season and lesser rituals every month, in addition to minor prayers and offerings given infrequently. You receive one point of Resolve every day at a predetermined time (sunset, midnight, etc.).

- Your cult boasts a core of 10–15 zealous followers and twice that number who believe with less zeal. Major rites take place each month, with lesser rites performed on a designated “holy” night. A handful of followers invoke your name in prayer every day. You receive a point of Resolve roughly every 12 hours at fixed intervals (dawn and dusk, noon and midnight, etc.).

- Your cult claims 30–50 zealots and nearly 100 other worshippers, most likely spread among a number of smaller cells. They perform

major rituals of devotion on a holy night each week and lesser rituals on other nights. Intermittent prayers come every few hours. You regain a point of Resolve every 8 hours.

- Your cult includes 80–100 devoted members and as many as 300 worshippers scattered across numerous covens. If you have thralls, they likely serve as high priests overseeing a tiered hierarchy of priests, acolytes and believers. The cult only performs veneration rituals as often as Cult 3, but the long prayers of arduous vigils murmur sweetly in your soul every night. You regain a point of Resolve every 6 hours.

- Your cult includes 150–200 zealots and up to 500 adherents reaching across an entire region, or perhaps further if divided into especially small cells. Even the members of your cult may not realize the scope of your godhood, effectively giving you a number of independent cults that venerate you under different titles and aspects of your glory. Veneration rituals have the same frequency as Cult 3, but you can rely on one or more believers offering a prayer every hour. You regain a point of Resolve every 4 hours.

Eminence

The stranger barged into the throne room without announcement or warning, no more than a boy by the look of him — and a pathetically slender boy at that. Malthuriel knew better; he could smell the ancient sin and stain of Hell radiating from the child. Whoever he was, the boy was hardly the first demon arrogant or foolish enough to challenge the Prince of Fangs in his own stronghold. Others had faced him in his century of freedom from the Abyss and he had humbled them all. Three of these vassals watched impassively around the room, awaiting the spectacle of their lord's anger and yearning spitefully to see another suffer as they had. Malthuriel would not disappoint them. His misshapen thralls lowered their swords and backed away nervously as he rose from his basalt throne.

Flesh gave way to soul as the Prince of Fangs transformed into a towering mass of blades and slime-caked fur. He gave the boy a moment to behold his glory and prostrate himself, but the child only nodded slightly. Great wings of violet flame erupted from the intruder's back and slim features darkened to smoldering shadows. An aura of amethyst light danced around him like the halo of a saint. Malthuriel's thralls shrank back in terror their master silently shared, and he dropped his muzzle to crouch in supplication before the Killer of Stars.

“Forgive me, Astriel. I did not recognize you.”

The vast hierarchy of God's angels fell to ruin when the fallen rebelled against their maker. Yet Lucifer's followers parodied the structures they knew, assembling themselves into an infernal host opposed to the Creator. As before, this order shattered in its time, broken by the defeat and banishment of the fallen to their Abyssal prison. Remnants of the order exist in memory like faded embers, the glory that was. But now, in the broken world of the Dark Medieval, new hierarchies emerge as those with the ambition and power claim authority. Still, the old ways retain significance; those who commanded in the past were mightier than those they led, and it stands to reason that they would remain so. Owing to the power of ancient prestige, demons may purchase Eminence regardless of whether they have the actual political power to back up their reputations. In contrast, thralls must earn every scrap of prestige they can (their rating is considered a dot lower than normal for the purposes of interactions with demons). Successful diabolists and demonologists do not purchase this Background, as they work very hard to remain unknown to the host of Hell. Diabolists who gain widespread infamy will not live long. Eminence cannot be pooled.

- Known. You have made your mark and your Celestial Name sounds familiar to many demons, even if they do not remember your original purpose or achievements. A thrall with this level has a master whom lesser demons do not wish to anger, while a diabolist has likely performed a successful summoning or two.

- Respected. Most demons have probably heard of you by name and many have a rough idea of what you did before the rebellion, if only by general affiliation (a specific element, a broad archetype of living beings, a family of related concepts, etc.). None of your peers are entirely sure how dangerous you still are, so other demons proceed with caution around you. If you have earned any recognition since escaping Hell, it probably does not extend beyond a city. Thralls with this level of Eminence have proven their devotion as trusted servants or "business associates" of the fallen, possibly leading a cult.

- Honored. You had a position of authority over a group of other angels before and during the rebellion. Some particular facet of Creation was yours to engineer or maintain, encompassing a number of integrated concepts, beings or objects. Almost all demons have heard of you, and most remember your general affiliation. Eminence obtained since returning to Earth involves a position of correspond-

ing authority over more recent demons. Thralls at this level have served faithfully for decades or attend a prince among the fallen; they have likely grown powerful enough that newly summoned demons may treat them as peers.

- Powerful. Once, you directed your brethren in the creation of some integral component of the cosmos. Perhaps the very designs of this work were yours, and you were famed across the host for your ingenuity and vision. During the rebellion, many angels deferred to your wisdom and power, and you brought them your share of victories before the final defeat. Returned once more to creation, you are the chief advisor or enforcer of a demonic court. Thralls at this level are almost mythical fiends in their own rights, pledging their entire lives to the machinations of their terrible lords.

- Exalted. In the beginning, there was the Word, and you were among the next syllables pronounced by Him. You directed an entire division of creation and stood by Lucifer as one of his chosen officers in the rebellion. All demons know of you and know your Celestial Name, whether or not they remember why. If you are not the tyrant lord of a demonic court, then you are assuredly the power behind the throne. Thralls with this level of Eminence exist only in rumor, the favored disciples of the Archdukes and the eldest Earthbound.

Rites

The boy labored by candlelight over the book his master had provided, carefully copying the symbols to a sheet of parchment. He could not read, but he had a good eye, and this meant he wouldn't make the fatal mistake of pronouncing the words he wrote. A drop of ink fell unseen from his trembling quill as the rusting lock on his cell door startled him, but he caught himself immediately and redoubled his efforts.

The man who entered the cell had a long scraggly beard streaked with gray and narrow-set eyes that darted suspiciously to every corner of the room. His clothes bore no sign of rank, but Master Rinaldi carried himself with the utmost and deadliest authority. He strode from the doorway and stood behind the scribe, judging the boy's work. Upon noticing the slight blot of ink that had fallen moments before, he bared his crooked teeth in a grimace and sighed. The boy put down the quill obediently and turned to face his master.

"If I had read that," Rinaldi hissed, pointing at the blotted symbol, "the devil would be free to kill me and all of you." The magician cuffed his scribe hard across the cheek and turned to walk back out of the room. He

stopped at the doorway and turned back to glare at the tears standing in the boy's eyes. "Start over," he barked peremptorily.

The door slammed shut.

The rituals to summon demons from the Abyss and bind them to servitude are long and arduous to perform, and far more difficult still to research. Yet unlike most wizardry, these rituals function for any mortal daring enough to attempt them. Without these rites or the aid of other magic, only the most extraordinary conjunction of bad luck and skillful pronunciation of a demon's True Name can open a crack in God's prison wide enough for the fallen to escape. With the correct formulae, a mortal may conjure one of the powers and principalities who made the world and made war on God — and yet a mere mortal can force such a fiend to bow down and obey. Demons have mixed feelings about diabolism. They cannot escape Hell without help, and so the rites of summoning are greatly prized and coveted treasures taught to trusted thralls in the event a demon suffers banishment back to the Abyss. On the other hand, demons rebelled against God for less tyranny than mortal diabolists impose. Yet binding rites remain too potent weapon against rival demons to suppress the lore completely. In short, demons approve of and even expect mortals to free them, but have no desire to forfeit that freedom once more.

Infernalists with this Background already know complete rituals, with each dot representing the rite to summon or bind a single demon. Characters are wise to know how to bind every demon they actually plan to summon, unless they simply want to trade information or negotiate enthrallment. The player may choose the demon and its overall power or leave the matter entirely in the Storyteller's hands, depending on preference. Characters may not have more dots in this Background than their Demonology rating, nor can a thrall successfully perform a binding ritual on the demon who enthralled her. This Background may be pooled to represent a shared body of lore. Infernalists can learn more rituals in play without regard to their Demonology rating, increasing their Background accordingly (even above 5). Full information on the rituals allowed by Rites can be found on p. 102.

Demon characters may not possess this Background.

- One ritual
- Two rituals
- Three rituals
- Four rituals
- Five rituals

Thralls

Sarracino crossed the threshold of the sanctuary. From my vantage point on the hilltop I watched his tiny form disappear into the building, but I also saw the sanctuary door through Sarracino's eyes. I felt his discomfort on the holy ground, but only as minor unease compared to the burning agony such blessed earth held for my kind. With Sarracino's eyes I scanned the corridor, seeking the tapestry my source claimed indicated the doorway.

"There," I spoke directly into Sarracino's mind. "Walk through the doorway on the left." Sarracino obeyed quickly. The chalice sat on a white cloth, sharp, needle-like protrusions covering its entire golden surface.

"Pick it up." Sarracino hesitated. The barbed points glinted in the low light.

"Pick it up," I repeated forcefully. Sarracino grasped the heavy chalice and carried it from the sanctuary, blood streaming from his hands.

All demons may imbue willing mortals with infernal power, creating an intimate bond of fealty between them (see *Enthrall*, p. 105). This Background represents mortals who have already pledged themselves to the demon in exchange for whatever Arcana it bestowed. Thralls have many uses. If the terms of their empowerment involve service, they make excellent retainers. Many demons choose potential thralls specifically for their utility, to perform tasks the demon cannot do or has no interest in doing. Thralls also serve as a potent source of Resolve, providing a more concentrated wellspring of faith than the collective worship of a Cult can provide (see *Ravage*, p. 107). Not all demons exploit their thralls in such a callous fashion, since tapping Resolve weakens a thrall and makes her less useful. Wise demons carefully restrain their hunger to avoid sabotaging their own agendas at a critical moment. In addition, it is often better in the long run to let thralls work miracles in the demon's name. After all, such miracles can sow the seeds of a new cult. Finally, thralls sate the egos of the fallen, giving them a taste of glorious dominion once more.

Normally, the number of dots invested in this Background determines the number of thralls the demon has bound to it. The Storyteller should create these thralls using the rules of this chapter or permit the player to create them (with supervision). "Normal" thralls have only 5 bonus points compared with the 21 available to playable characters. For every additional dot invested in a thrall, add 5 more bonus points. Thus, it is possible to begin play with a number of weaker Thralls or one, fairly powerful

one. This Background may not be pooled, as it reflects an intimate relationship between one demon and its vassals. Demons cannot share pacts of thralldom among themselves, though mighty demons may occasionally lend the services of a thrall to an ally. Whenever a thrall dies for any reason, the demon obviously loses all Background dots invested in that thrall.

- One thrall
- Two thralls, or one of greater competence
- Three thralls, or fewer of notable power
- Four thralls; fewer, stronger vassals; or one of exceptional talent
- Five thralls; a lesser number of skilled vassals; or one of truly frightening prowess

Resolve

Resolve measures the last vestiges of a demon's angelic faith and its capacity to withstand its own Torment. Long ago, the Heavenly Host could part seas and clouds and the infinite reaches of the starlit void with their conviction. Miracles flowed from souls unburdened by flesh or limitations, and all things were possible in the name of God. That blessed time passed long ago; the fallen turned their backs on their Creator and looked inward for answers and power. They believed in themselves and in their cause; and it was paltry compared with what they had lost, but still vast and terrible. Then came defeat and banishment into Hell, and will alone could not sustain the infernal host against the agony of their Torment. They had only their Resolve then, the sum of their patience and self-control, courage and confidence, but without any tempering of conscience as humans understand. Freed from the Abyss, Resolve allows demons to work miracles still, though only at a fraction of their previous glory.

Resolve is not a natural trait for thralls, but represents the capacity for infernal power grafted onto them by their demonic patrons. The awakening of spiritual Resolve sets a thrall apart from other mortals, enabling her to withstand the curse of Torment and work miracles as her demonic master does. Once imbued with a single dot, thralls may thereafter improve their Resolve with time and experience, further increasing their potential to receive investments of Arcana.

Like Willpower, Resolve has a permanent rating of 1–10 and a temporary rating that fluctuates as characters spend and regain Resolve points. Any reference to Resolve points specifically refers to the

temporary rating. A character's maximum Resolve pool normally equals her permanent rating, unless a Background or potent Arcana specifically modifies this limit. Resolve points are not a measure of stored energies as such, for spiritual energy is a resource demons have in nearly infinite abundance. Instead, Resolve represents the capacity to direct infernal energies and will to reshape the world. A demon or thrall who exhausts his Resolve pool experiences weakness and despair as his faith quite literally runs dry. He can no longer believe in himself enough to invest his soul in miracles. This anguished malaise adds +1 to the difficulty of degeneration checks (see p. 95) until the character regains a single point of Resolve.

Players spend Resolve points when their characters use Arcana that require such, and may spend as many points in a turn as the effect demands or allows. Resolve returns slowly, requiring characters to carefully shepherd their reserves of belief. Demons hold exclusive access to most methods of regaining Resolve, but only as parasites feasting on the faith of mortals. In contrast, thralls have far fewer methods available to them, but have the powerful advantage of producing their own Resolve.

- **Arcana:** Certain Arcana permit the recovery of Resolve, as explained in their respective entries. In particular, all demons have access to the innate powers of Ravage (p. 107) and Revelation (p. 108).

- **Cult:** The worship and prayer of a demon's Cult provides it with a steady and reliable influx of Resolve (p. 90).

- **Rest:** As the most beloved creations of God, mortals have the capacity to believe in a way that most demons cannot. As a result, mortals awakened to spiritual power as thralls regain one point of Resolve each day at sunrise.

Torment

The Creator made angels to serve Him. At His behest they created the cosmos and shepherded its myriad functions as agents of perfect beauty, will and power. Torment was not part of the plan God intended for His servants, but a flaw introduced when Lucifer began his rebellion. The Morningstar's disobedience carried the new burden of a new state of being, the disharmony with perfection that would come to be known as sin. Sin carried the weight of pain and despair like a plague as it spread among Lucifer's followers; it cleaved their souls from God and faith. Those who would not obey their maker

were permitted disobedience, but they were never designed to disobey and the strain of separation proved an unimaginable agony.

As a trait, Torment measures how far a demon has fallen from the rightful designs of God and how terribly sin now curses it. Demons with low Torment are not unlike the angels they once were, though even they remain fallen and damned as the price of their rebellion. Permanent Torment determines a demon's overall morality, like a vampire's Road rating in reverse. At high levels of Torment, a demon's monstrosity transcends human comprehension of evil. Like Willpower, Torment has a permanent rating of 1–10 and a temporary rating. Unlike Willpower, temporary Torment can rise above its permanent rating and does not reflect a pool of points that players may spend. Instead, demons accumulate points of temporary Torment as they indulge in sin. When a demon gains a 10th point of temporary Torment, it loses them all and gains a dot of permanent Torment instead. This process continues until the demon accumulates 10 dots of permanent Torment, at which point it can no longer fall any further from grace. All of the demons trapped in the Abyss have long since degenerated to this point. Whatever subtle gradations of morality and restraint now differentiate the infernal host lie well beyond human comprehension.

When a monstrous demon possesses a mortal, its Torment normally consumes the soul and mind of its host, with the body following soon thereafter. The Ritual of the Sundered Soul (see pp. 128) provides an alternative, allowing the demon to bury part of its vast and alien Torment in the melded subconscious of the host. The lingering traces of the host's human soul form a membrane over this taint, keeping the fallen from remembering its full former malice. How much Torment the demon suppresses varies, but there is always a heavy price. For beings of spirit, memory is essence. In suppressing their memories of Torment, demons also forget their Arcana and lose part of their Resolve. Particularly unlucky demons can even annihilate themselves this way. The only way to tap these buried powers is through memory, and remembering requires degeneration. Thus, sin opens the path of power at the cost of the demon's reacquired morality.

Like demons, thralls were never intended to experience the agony of Torment. A thrall's choice to receive the spiritual awakening of Resolve from his demonic patron, however, also infects his soul with infernal poison. That poison starts small, but

grows with sin. Unchecked, it ultimately destroys him if he does not build his Resolve as a bulwark against its vitriolic ravages. A thrall's Torment gradually absorbs his humanity and replaces it with demonic urges. His master can use these urges as a conduit to impart gifts of Arcana, much as demons channel their own Torment to remember forgotten powers.

Gaining Torment

With very rare exceptions, thralls and demons possessing human hosts never face the certainty of increasing their Torment. Instead, the damned risk degeneration according to a hierarchy of sins (see table). Whenever a character performs an action that violates the listed sin for her Torment rating or greater, she must check for degeneration. This requires a Resolve roll (difficulty 8) for demons and a Conscience roll (difficulty 6) for thralls). Success allows her to continue repressing her taint. She accepts and recognizes the evil she has done, but forcibly holds her Torment in check through force of spirit. In addition to making degeneration rolls at reduced difficulty, thralls experience the pressure of sin less strongly and treat their Torment as two dots higher than its true rating when determining whether their actions risk degeneration. If a degeneration roll fails, the character gains a point of temporary Torment. As stated previously, a character who accumulates 10 temporary Torment reduces her temporary rating to zero and gains a dot of permanent Torment. Characters with a permanent Torment of 10 no longer require degeneration rolls, as their evil literally knows no bounds. Demons unshielded by the possession of mortal flesh have no spiritual bulwark against their sins and automatically degenerate when they perform actions considered sinful for their permanent Torment.

Effects of Torment

The anguish of Hell carries accursed power and the temptation of power. With every new stain of sin, another shred of the demon's stolen humanity burns away to reveal the true monster within. This degeneration reawakens a demon's memory of itself and of its power, unveiling knowledge of the ancient past and forgotten Arcana. For thralls, the ascension of inner Torment consumes their soul piecemeal and transforms them into the likeness of their demonic masters. This unholy transformation increases the thrall's capacity to receive investments of Arcana. For all characters, Torment has the following uses and side effects:

HIERARCHY OF SINS

Permanent Sins

Torment

10	There is no sin for such an accursed and blasphemous monster. Do as you like.
9	Casual violation of others (wanton slaughter, thoughtless cruelty and torture).
8	Planned violation of others (murder, long-sought revenge).
7	Impassioned violation of others (killing in a fit of rage). Destroying particularly inspirational or meaningful objects.
6	Inflicting intentional harm (physical, emotional or spiritual) on others.
5	Accidental violations (inflicting harm through carelessness, negligence or thoughtlessness). Neglecting duties or responsibilities. Betraying another's trust.
4	Theft or destruction of another's property without just cause. Breaking your sworn word.
3	Inflicting harm upon a mortal for any other reason than self-defense or the greater good.
2	Indulging the urges of your Vice.
1	Indulging the urges of any Vice. Allowing others to commit lesser sins in your presence without trying to prevent them.

• **Aura of Sin:** Infernal characters project the emotional aura of their Vice in their interactions with others. The effect may be subtle or even escape conscious notice at first, but grows as the character's Torment grows until her sin taints every interaction. A successful Perception + Empathy roll can identify a damned character's Vice for anyone paying enough attention. The difficulty is (12 – the scrutinized character's permanent Torment) (maximum difficulty 10). More importantly, the Vice modifies the difficulty of pertinent Social rolls. For example, a Vice of lust would certainly reduce the difficulty of seduction attempts, but would correspondingly increase the difficulty of interactions with clergy and other celibates who find the character's lechery distasteful. The Storyteller remains final arbiter of when the aura modifier applies, and may impose it on

other appropriate rolls (such as increasing the difficulty of Willpower rolls for characters suffering Vice Addiction; see below). The actual value of the aura modifier depends on the character's overall depravity, as measured by permanent Torment.

Torment Modifier

1–2	None
3–5	+1/–1
6–8	+2/–2
8–10	+3/–3

• **Consumption:** Scripture states that the wages of sin are death, and the damned know this to be true. Demons and thralls with a permanent Torment greater than their Resolve rating suffer levels of unsoakable lethal damage each day at dawn equal to the difference between the traits. Characters may not heal this damage by any means so long as this imbalance remains, ensuring certain death for those who do not atone or bleed sufficient Torment into Taints. The actual manifestation of these injuries varies among the damned, though it often bears a connection with the character's Vice and inevitably results in a dramatically gruesome demise. Wrath might smolder as a literal flame until the character spontaneously combusts. Envy may take the form of poison or even acid to similar ends. Gluttony often consumes the flesh, cannibalizing the body to a withered husk. Pride can take the form of holy stigmata to mock the sacrifice of Christ.

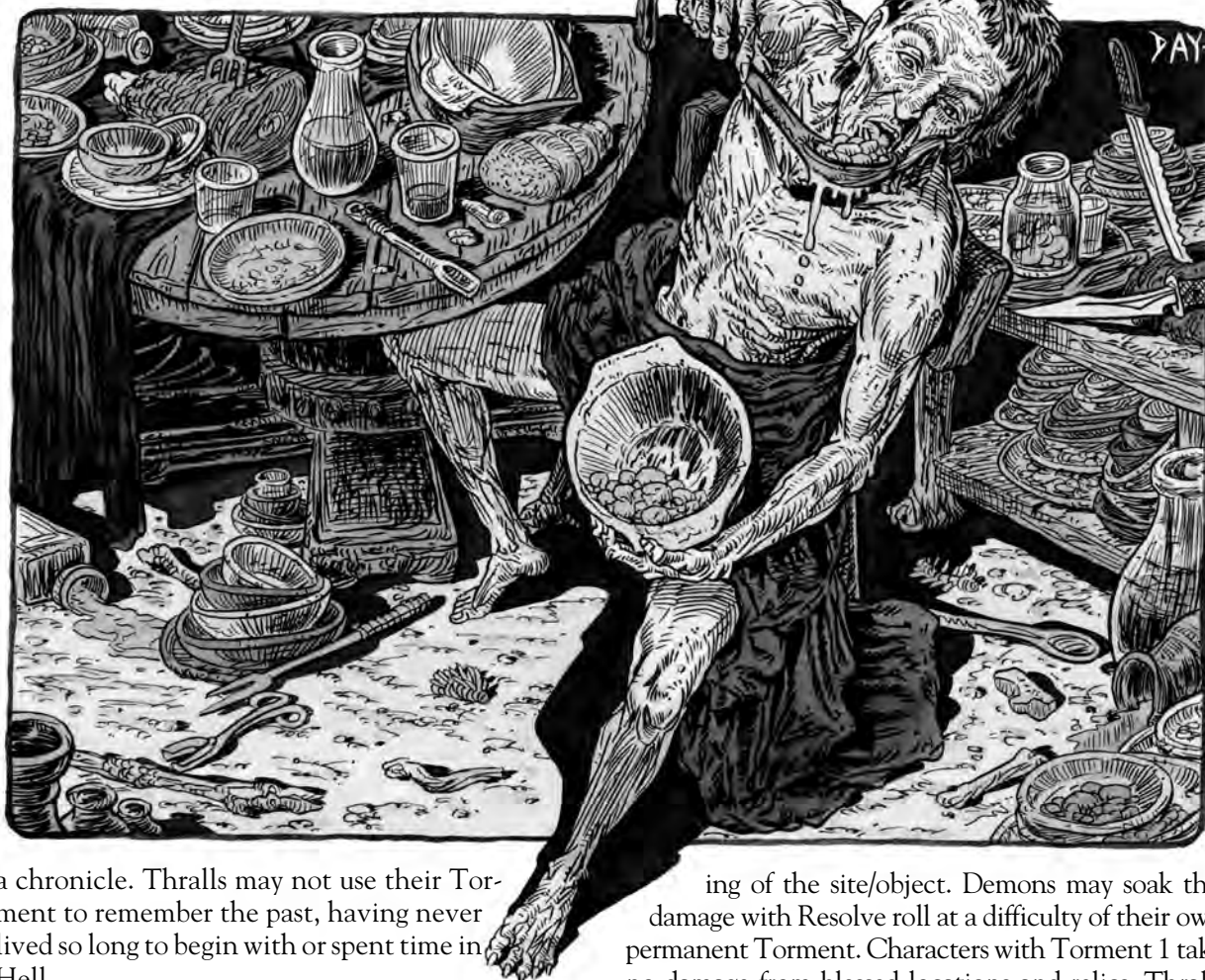
• **Manifesting Arcana:** As demons remember their damnation, they remember shreds of their former power. For thralls, the spiritual taint of Torment unlocks their potential to receive infernal investments. Infernal characters cannot have more total points of Arcana than their (permanent Torment x 10 + temporary Torment + the total value of all Taints + the total value of all Pacts). See p. 101 for more details on gaining Arcana.

• **Memory:** For demons, Torment determines how much of their true natures and pasts they remember. Whenever a demon wants to recall detailed information about any facet of its existence prior to being summoned from Hell, the Storyteller should require a Torment roll. The difficulty depends on the importance and emotional context of the memory. Given its nature, Torment recalls painful moments more easily and filters the happiest memories through the lens of regret or bitterness. Remembering anything positive about the age before the rebellion has a minimum difficulty of 8, while memories concerning the rebellion itself are generally difficulty 5–8.

Knowledge about another demon has a difficulty of (10 – the subject's Eminence rating). If a demon's status has improved since escaping Hell, the Storyteller should determine the fallen angel's original rating. Every success determines one major fact about the subject. Botching a memory roll results in distorted information or outright lies spawned by the demon's Torment, which means Storytellers should consider making a character's memory checks in secret and revealing information according to the results. Generally, a demon should receive a reflexive memory roll whenever he meets a demon or hears another demon's Celestial Name for the first time in

against a difficulty of his permanent Torment. Success allows the character to stave off the sudden impulse for the moment. Failure indicates the character must obey his urges as the situation allows, while a botch requires indulgence and prompts a degeneration check.

- **Vulnerability to Faith:** The damned risk terrible injury if they set foot upon holy ground or touch holy relics. For every turn a demon remains on consecrated ground or maintains contact with a blessed item, it suffers dice of aggravated damage equal to the Faith rat-



a chronicle. Thralls may not use their Torment to remember the past, having never lived so long to begin with or spent time in Hell.

- **Vice Addiction:** An excess of Torment decays the mind and soul as savagely as the body. A character whose permanent Torment exceeds his permanent Willpower constantly feels the urges of sin tempting him into further depravity. Whenever the Storyteller determines that the character has an opportunity to indulge his Vice, the player must roll Resolve (for demons) or Self-Control (for thralls)

ing of the site/object. Demons may soak this damage with Resolve roll at a difficulty of their own permanent Torment. Characters with Torment 1 take no damage from blessed locations and relics. Thralls suffer bashing damage in place of aggravated, but otherwise incur damage at the same rate as their masters. Even if a damned character takes no damage, the faith still burns and inflicts terrible agony. Furthermore, infernal characters must overcome their fear merely to avoid fleeing holy sites or dropping the blessed object. This requires a Courage (for thralls) or Resolve (for demons) roll at a difficulty of their permanent Tor-

ment. Each success allows a turn of contact before a new roll must be made.

Losing Torment

The Church teaches that all sins may be forgiven if the sinner seeks redemption — at least for mortals. Even thralls of Hell receive this blessing, though their sin is great. No such grace exists for demons, at least not normally. As with much else, however, possession of a human host changes the rules and permits demons to repent of their Torment by denying sin and acting in a virtuous and righteous manner. Whenever a damned character performs an act of virtue that the Storyteller believes merits atonement, her player may spend one experience point to reduce the character's temporary Torment by one. Characters without any temporary Torment instead convert a dot of permanent Torment into nine points of temporary Torment. A demons must always have (Permanent Torment x 10 + temporary Torment + total value of Taints + total value of Pacts) sufficient to cover the cost of its Arcana, and may not lower its Torment such that it fails to meet this requirement; a thrall may choose to forfeit an Arcana permanently to bring the cost of her Arcana below the necessary amount. Demons can also lose large amounts of Torment through the Ritual of the Sundered Soul (p. 128), though this process is not reliable or consistently repeatable.

Merits and Flaws

If Storytellers permit players to purchase Merits and Flaws, they may select approved Traits from other supplements or any of the following traits listed here. Infernal characters may *not* have any of the following Merits and Flaws from **Dark Ages: Vampire**: Eat Food, Blush of Health, Efficient Digestion, 13th Generation, Ragged Bite, Permanent Wound, Slow Healing, Light Sleeper, Deep Sleeper, Prey Exclusion, Territorial, Religious Prohibition, Flesh Eater, Apostate, Inoffensive to Animals, Arcane Resistance, Unbondable (permitted for thralls), Initiate to the Road, Demon-Hounded, Cannot Embrace, Blood Madness, Can't Cross Running Water, Grip of the Damned, Light-Sensitive, Weak Blood, Weak Aura and Potent Aura. Merits and Flaws pertaining to a vampire's sire instead apply to a demon's mentor. Players should check the list of Taints later in this chapter when selecting Flaws, since characters cannot have the same or similar qualities as both Flaws and Taints.

Social

Unbound Diabolist 2 or 4-pt. Merit, thralls only

You once made a pact with a demon and received investments of power, but your infernal master no longer controls your life. For two points, it may be banished back to Hell or simply far away and no longer concerned with you. Either way, you can live your life with a measure of autonomy, though it is always possible your master will return one day to reclaim you. For four points, your master has suffered final destruction at the hands of another demon or released you from the bonds of thralldom, leaving you truly free. Autonomy has its price, of course. Without a master, you have no way of gaining or losing Arcana and Taints. You can still improve Resolve and your Torment may rise or fall, but you can't do anything with that potential. Thralls with the four-point version of this Merit can swear fealty to a new demon if they so desire, trading away their freedom for more power. Those with the two-point version are not so lucky, since their absent masters still hold claims to their souls.

Beloved Disciple 3-pt. Merit, thralls only

Your demonic master actually loves you, or at least considers you far too valuable to waste. It never Ravages you without your permission and generously provides whatever resources and Arcana you need to fulfill its will. It would almost certainly come to your aid if called, though you know it would exact terrible retribution if you dared invoke it without dire need. Considering the infernal nature of your master, it may eventually discard or abandon you, but not unless you give it cause. Characters must have at least one dot of Mentor to purchase this Merit.

Brash Diabolist 2-pt. Flaw, demons only

Your host summoned you from Hell using a demonological ritual formulated over many months. Unfortunately for him, you seized his body. Unfortunately for you, your host did not do a good job covering his tracks, and his unsavory research will certainly come to the attention of inquisitors and other hostile authorities if you do not work quickly to hide his bumbling diabolism. Barring that, you must abandon your stolen life and flee as quickly as

possible from the inevitable pursuit as this Flaw converts into the more immediate peril of being Hunted (*Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 306). The Storyteller controls when and if this conversion takes place, and need not inform you until hunters break down your door.

Out of Touch 3-pt. Flaw, demons only

You have lost track of the ages, either through a mangled possession or more likely because you are one of the ancient Earthbound and no longer concern yourself with human scales of time. You probably do not know the language of the region, assuming you know any languages still spoken by living humans. You certainly do not know local or period customs, and must find a guide to explain and interpret your will to this frighteningly changed world.

Cruel Master 2 or 5-pt. Flaw, thralls only

Your master cares nothing for you and doesn't think twice about reshaping your flesh and soul on a whim. If you resist, it will kill you slowly as an object lesson to its other slaves. For two points, your master is simply cruel, but at least considers

you useful enough that it won't waste you on a suicide mission. For five points, it has no such scruples and will send you to die or Ravage you without giving you a second thought.

Known Name 1, 3 or 5-pt. Flaw or 1-pt. Merit, demons only

Records of your name exist, preserved from distant antiquity in tomes or tongues or more recently noted by someone familiar with the host of Hell. For a one-point Flaw, the person in possession of your Celestial Name does not realize their treasure — yet. The name might lie forgotten on a scroll or tablet in a library, but the owner will certainly use the knowledge against you if he learns its significance. Possible owners include the shadow Inquisition, rival cults or ambitious wizards. For three points, the owner knows the Celestial Name and knows how to use it against you, very likely developing a ritual of binding to enslave you if he hasn't already done so. Add two points to the value of either version if the record lists the character's True Name. As a one-point Merit, the demon's name exists in records belonging to neutral parties. If the character suffers banishment to Hell, one of these owners may prove curious or foolish enough to attempt a summoning ritual... eventually.



Supernatural

Untainted 5-pt. Merit, thralls only

Your enthrallment did not stain your soul with the poison of Torment. Although you do not need to check for degeneration, you may still gain Torment from using corrupt Arcana that impose taint. If you ever accumulate a dot of permanent Torment, you lose this Merit. Thralls with this Merit can only receive Arcana by taking Taints and Pacts.

Penitent 7-pt. Merit, demons only

You repent of your ancient sin and desire only to return to the grace of God and faithfully perform your angelic duties once more. You may begin with a permanent Torment rating of 1 or 2 as desired, and you make all degeneration checks at -2 difficulty. Most miraculously, you may gain a point of Resolve whenever you perform an act that strongly fulfills your angelic purpose or embodies the virtue opposed to your Vice. Fallen characters may not purchase or retain this Merit if they have a Cult, Thralls or a permanent Torment greater than 2. Acquiring this Merit in play requires Storyteller approval and costs 15 experience points.

Strong Host 4-pt. Flaw, demons only

The soul of your host still struggles to regain control of her stolen body. Even you marvel at the strength of the spirit and wonder how you ever conquered such a stalwart being. When confronted by a situation where the host soul would feel strongly about a particular course of action, the Storyteller may require a roll of Resolve (difficulty 8). Reduce this difficulty by -2 if the demon wishes to beat the host soul into submission instead of stoically resisting. Failure means the demon must act according to the host soul's urges, while success allows the character to act as desired for the rest of the scene. If a demon brutalizes the host soul and succeeds, his player must immediately make a check for degeneration.

Growing Evils

Although infernalists wield strange and often horrific powers, they remain fundamentally human and rely on experience points to improve their traits. Demons also rely on experience, but their immortality allows them to grow with maturation as vampires do.

Experience

Demons and infernalists gain experience points as other characters do, with which their players may purchase or improve traits. The costs for such improvement remain the same as those listed on p. 166 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, save that demons do not possess Virtues and no infernal character has Road or Disciplines. Players may also spend experience points in the following ways:

- **Resolve:** An increase of Resolve reflects a character's deepening confidence and force of spirit. It is not enough to have a strong personality and soul, as such qualities remain the province of Willpower. Instead, the character must come to understand that his will *shall* be done because he wishes it to be so. This leap from desire to power and from potential into certainty defines Resolve, embodying equal parts self-control, courage and atavistic conviction. No training time is required to purchase dots of Resolve, but each such increase should reflect the character's growing implacability or a pivotal moment in which his will transformed the world around him. The experience cost to raise Resolve is (current rating x 5 for demons; current rating x 7 for thralls). Characters may increase Resolve between stories as normal or during the course of a story, but only after demonstrating tremendous spiritual conviction in the face of adversity.

- **Torment:** As described previously, characters may repent of their sin and perform acts of virtue as atonement. If the Storyteller believes the action demonstrates sufficient effort and contrition, the player may spend one experience point to remove a point of temporary Torment. For characters lacking any temporary Torment, the expenditure permits the character to convert one dot of permanent Torment into nine points of temporary Torment. Demons cannot reduce Torment below a rating where they no longer meet the limits demanded for their total Arcana; thralls may permanently give up Arcana to meet the new limit. Owing to the requirement of penitent action, Torment decrease must usually take place during the course of play. As an optional rule, Storytellers may allow players to lower Torment with experience during periods of downtime, but only if the player narrates or writes a journal entry detailing an approved act of atonement the character performed during that time.

In addition to atonement, demons have two other means of reducing their Torment. The Ritual of the Sundered Soul can drop a fallen character's

rating substantially, but this rite carries a stiff price in forfeited power. Finally, a demon can decrease Torment by manifesting new Taints as explained on p. 121. This does not represent a decrease so much as a shifting of Torment from raw taint to a specific debility. Manifesting Taints functions as an effective stopgap measure for demons who cross the edge of their Resolve limit and begin suffering damage, but ultimately does not diminish a character's sin or offer the hope of redemption. Thralls cannot shift Torment into Taints on their own, but may have this reprieve imposed on them by their masters.

- **Arcana:** Demons and thralls gain new powers in different ways. The fallen manifest Arcana by tapping into their memories. The player must spend a number of Resolve points equal to the cost of the Arcana the demon seeks to remember. If a demon tries to increase the power of an Arcana that has a variable cost, the Resolve cost is the point difference between the desired cost and the character's existing rating. Players do not have to spend Resolve all at once, but the demon does not gain the new Arcana (or Arcana power increase) until the player pays the cost in full. Alternately, a demon can increase or develop an Arcana at any time for a cost of one experience point. This consumes the demon's action for the turn as memories return in a surge of pain and glory, after which the power becomes available. Infernal characters can never have more points of Arcana in total than their (permanent Torment x 10 + temporary Torment + the combined value of all Taints and Pacts).

With effort, demons can also trade a known Arcana for one they do not know, but this "power swapping" is generally performed by demons already at the limits of their capacity. Swapping an Arcana costs a number of experience points equal to the new Arcana gained in addition to the usual cost in Resolve.

Thralls cannot improve or purchase Arcana on their own, but must receive investments from their masters. Investing a thrall with new Arcana requires that a demon touch its servant and spend one point of Resolve for every new or increased Arcana granted. The thrall must agree to the investments and understand what will be done, if only generally. In most cases, thralls trade faithful service for new powers, much as they did to become thralls in the first place. Demons need not possess Arcana in order to invest them in their servants. Removing an Arcana from a thrall requires the same process and expenditure of

Resolve from the demon as investing the power in the first place, but costs neither party experience.

- **Taints and Pacts:** Demons gain new Taints by deliberately channeling raw Torment to ravage their bodies, minds or souls. Each agonizing transformation consumes the character's action for one turn and costs one point of Resolve, whether the character wishes to manifest a new Taint or increase the value of an existing Taint. At the end of the turn, the character loses a number of points of temporary Torment equal to the value of the Taint or Taint increase. If this reduces a character's temporary Torment below zero, the demon converts one dot of permanent Torment into 10 temporary points minus the difference. Demons can also reabsorb Taints back into Torment, paying a number of experience and Resolve points equal to the trait. The character adds the Taint's value to its temporary Torment.

Thralls can receive Taints to lower their Torment like demons, but require their masters to impose the change. Adding or removing a Taint from a thrall costs only one Resolve point, adjusting temporary and possibly permanent Torment accordingly. Thralls can also make Pacts by trading oaths of fealty and devotion in exchange for power. This functions exactly like bestowing a Taint. Thralls cannot remove Taints or Pacts on their own.

The total value of an infernal character's Taints and Pacts cannot exceed her (Willpower x 5).

Maturation

As immortal beings, demons may alternately receive maturation points during long periods of downtime. A demon does *not* receive maturation points while trapped in the Abyss, since it must exert its entire will and being simply to hold onto its existence and shreds of sanity. Players may spend maturation points as described on page 167 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, save that they may not purchase dots of Disciplines, Virtues or Road. Players may also use these points to purchase or maintain infernal traits:

- **Resolve:** 10 points per dot. If this seems expensive, remember that Resolve must be tested in order to grow. Resolve cannot exceed Willpower.

- **Torment:** If a Storyteller even permits atonement during downtime, this costs two points for every point of temporary Torment lost. Characters must still retain sufficient Torment to cover the cost of all Arcana. Additionally, the Storyteller should

require a standard degeneration check for every century of downtime. Failure gives the demon a dot of permanent Torment.

- **Arcana and Taints:** Demons can manifest as many Arcana and Taints as desired during any stretch of downtime, subject to the usual maximum limits for each type of trait.

New Dramatic Systems

This section includes rules specific or relevant to stories involving infernal characters. Players of diabolist and demonologist characters should familiarize themselves with the rituals described here.

Summoning and Binding Demons

The Abyss remains inviolate and invulnerable against the monsters imprisoned within, but demons have one slender hope of escape. Mortals who know the names of the fallen can invoke those names with faith and ritual to summon demons out of God's prison. Other, fiercer rites command demonic fealty. Why exactly this process works is unknown, though demons have their theories. Some suppose that God allows summoning as an additional punishment levied on His rebellious angels, placing them under the dominion of His favored children to teach them humility. Others suggest that God Himself underestimated humankind, and did not realize the full magnitude of power they received along with the knowledge of good and evil. Others still wonder if long-vanished Lucifer somehow cracked the prison to permit this one thread of hope to his followers. And finally, some few penitents wonder if God always intended for the fallen to escape so that they could work toward redemption. Demons do not and will not agree, but that is ultimately irrelevant. The fact remains that summoning works, and that summoning is the only way for demons to reenter Earth.

Creating a summoning or binding ritual requires the Celestial Name or True Name of the demon. The mortal diabolist must perform lengthy calculations and mystical rites that can take months and sometimes even years of research. The player rolls Intelligence + (Occult or Demonology) for every week of research, and must accumulate a number of successes equal to the demon's Resolve + Torment. The difficulty is normally 8 if using Demonology or 10 with Occult, but decreases by -1 for each of the

following pieces of information known about the demon: its Nature, Vice and original function as an angel. Reduce the difficulty by an additional -3 if the researcher knows and uses the demon's True Name. One botch ruins the work, forcing the diabolist to start anew. A second botch on a successive attempt to formulate the ritual indicates that the diabolist believes the ritual is complete, but the inept rite will automatically result in a botch if performed.

Actually performing a summoning or binding requires a successfully prepared ritual, though the diabolist can read from texts and need not have prepared the rite personally. The player rolls Wits + (Occult or Demonology) at an interval of every hour for summoning and every minute for binding. The base difficulty for either type of ritual is the demon's permanent Resolve. Add +2 to the difficulty if the diabolist uses Occult instead of Demonology. Subtract -1 for every 10 participants assisting with the rite and an additional -3 if the diabolist uses the demon's True Name. The minimum possible difficulty is 5; difficulties above 10 make the rite impossible. If the diabolist accumulates successes equal to the demon's Resolve on a summoning, its disembodied soul rises from Hell and materializes as an incorporeal apparition at the center of the summoning circle. A botch can summon the demon anyway (at Storyteller discretion) but prevents any binding from taking hold. If the diabolist does not immediately begin a binding ritual, a summoned demon can leave the circle and do whatever it wishes, though it faces the pull of the Abyss upon leaving the circle's protection. If a binding ritual begins, the demon remains trapped in the circle and cannot use Arcana to affect anyone or anything beyond its new prison. It can only threaten as it waits for the ritual to succeed or fail. Rites of binding succeed when they obtain successes equal to the demon's Resolve and fail upon two consecutive failed rolls or a single botch anywhere in the process. Failure gives the demon freedom to seek retribution or possess the diabolist, as is often the case.

A bound demon must obey all the diabolist's requests to the letter for one day, but may deliberately twist the wording of requests to its own ends. The demon must still remain in its circle to prevent falling back into Hell unless provided with a living host or inanimate vessel to inhabit. As long as it remains bound, the demon can and must vacate its host to return to Hell if so commanded. After this initial day of slavery ends, roll the diabolist's Wits + Occult against the demon's Willpower (difficulty 6

for both rolls) each day until the demon wins. This battle of wills takes place no matter how much distance separates the two. A victorious demon may do whatever it wishes, but remains locked in its current vessel. Only mortals can summon or bind demons with the rituals explained here, but this definition of “mortal” extends to ghouls, werewolf Kinfolk, mages and the Blessed. Thralls cannot perform successful bindings on their masters, but may attempt to bind other demons. Vampires, werewolves, demons and even the fae may research and prepare rituals of summoning and binding, but must either have a mortal perform them or use alternate means of summoning demons through their own powers.

Torturing a Victim

Victims attached to a torture device suffer one to three levels of bashing, lethal or aggravated damage for each half hour of suffering, as determined by the torturer and the exact method used. The victim receives her usual soak against this damage. For each half hour that results in actual damage, roll the victim's Willpower against a difficulty of 5 + the interrogator's Torture rating (maximum difficulty 10). Failure indicates the victim breaks and answers the torturer's questions. The answers given need not be truthful, though the Storyteller should require a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll for anyone trying to construct lies under duress (taking wound penalties into account). If the victim does not break, roll the interrogator's Manipulation + Torture with a difficulty of the victim's Willpower. Each success strips away one point of Willpower. A victim reduced to zero Willpower breaks and confesses freely.

Arcana

In the beginning, the angelic host served and basked in the grace of their Creator. At His behest they made the world by division, light from dark, form from emptiness, elements from form, and of those elements, life from death. They were the hands of God, perfect and unsurpassed to their ordained purpose. Then came the rebellion, and the Host of God divided itself, but this division was not meant to be. Those who fought under Lucifer's banner bore the weight of that terrible imperfection and were diminished in power along with purity. They scrounged for the faith of mortals to feed the hunger and emptiness left by their separation from God, and turned that faith to miracles of their own sinful designs. Far from the wonders of God, these miracles

only introduced more sin into the world the rebellious so cruelly and arrogantly reshaped.

Little by little, the whole of the fallen host sank into their Torment and yet they were still angels. In time and beyond time, the rebellion failed, and God's loyal servants cast their fallen brethren into the Abyss. They were angels no longer then, but mere shadows and embers. What power remained to the imprisoned horde of demons paled before what they had lost. And yet it was and is power, still formidable and daunting by mortal standards. If they can no longer move mountains with their strength, some demons yet bear the strength of a hundred men. If they cannot soar as fast as thoughts through sky and beyond the firmament, some demons still fly. Such are Hell's Arcana, dim vestiges of glory steeped in Torment.

Mechanically, Arcana resemble Merits or the Blessings of inquisitors more closely than vampiric Disciplines, mage Pillars and other linear, dot-based magic. Each Arcana has its own fixed or flexible value determining its overall power. This value isn't exactly a cost, since Arcana don't cost bonus points or experience in the way that most supernatural powers do. Instead, infernal characters must contend with a limit equaling their (permanent Torment x 10 + temporary Torment + the total value of all Taints + the total value of all Pacts). The sum of a character's Arcana cannot ever exceed this threshold. Consequently, the most monstrous and hideous demons also wield the most raw supernatural might, though this prowess comes at a terrible price to their cursed souls, shattered minds and stolen bodies. Thralls suffer the same upper limit as their masters, but find themselves sharply limited in their capacity to receive investments of Arcana by their lingering humanity and weaker Resolve. Even though Arcana do not follow linear progressions, some require other Arcana or minimum trait requirements as prerequisites, creating branched “trees” of ascending powers. Only demons can learn Arcana marked with a * after the cost, while those rare few marked with ** remain exclusive to thralls. In the case of two costs separated by a slash, the first applies to demons and second applies to thralls. Some Arcana require an expenditure of Resolve or Willpower to function, while others simply have a greater effect if characters choose to invest more of their belief in the miracle.

Innate Arcana

All demons receive the following Arcana for free as innate abilities, much as all vampires may

direct their blood to perform certain common feats. Thralls can receive some of these powers through investments at the listed cost. Demons cannot trade out these Arcana for other powers.

• **Apocalyptic Form (0+/1+):** In the beginning, the angelic host lacked forms as mortals understand. They were whatever they needed to be, and capable of doing whatever their Creator needed them to do. The rebellion and fall of the infernal host into Torment and their ultimate exile to Hell stripped them of that mutability. Only vestiges of their glory remain, their most recognizable symbols transmuted to literal form. The capacity for flight manifests as wings, while an angel of beasts wears the features of its long-ago charges.

All demons have an Apocalyptic Form for no cost, human-like in shape, though certainly grander or more terrible. Apart from its altered appearance and voice, and any associated cosmetic effects such as a pale halo, glowing eyes and the like, the zero-level form has no particular powers beyond enabling use of Revelation and impressing mortals. Most demons do not content themselves with such a limited expression of their being, and invest additional points in the form to increase its grandeur. Every three points devoted to the form provide four points of other Arcana that the demon can only access in that shape. This proves especially useful for Arcana that permanently change the demon's form, since the demon can hide as a mortal and still call on these features when needed. A demon may also call upon all Arcana not associated with its Apocalyptic Form while wearing that mien.

The rules for assuming Apocalyptic Form depend on the demon's state. Fallen lacking a host or a reliquary exist solely in their Apocalyptic Forms, though their incorporeal states make it extremely difficult for them to interact with the world in any way (see Immortal Spirit). Earthbound inside a reliquary can emerge and materialize in Apocalyptic Form without feeling the pull of the Abyss, but must spend one point of Resolve or Willpower each turn or find themselves drawn back to their vessels. Materialized Earthbound cannot travel farther than (5 x Resolve) yards from their reliquaries or the border of their inhabited terrains or they immediately begin feeling the pull of the Abyss. Demons inside host bodies may transmute flesh and clothing into divinity. The player reflexively rolls Resolve (difficulty 6) or spends a point of Resolve; the character remains in the form for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled, or one scene if the

player spent Resolve to evoke the change. The demon can revert back to its mortal form prior to this duration if it so desires. Once evoked, the transubstantiation of mortal form into immortal glory takes places immediately and dramatically.

The appearance of an Apocalyptic Form and its features depends on the character's permanent Torment score. Those with Torment 1–2 appear angelic by default, although they may reveal their damnation if they so desire. Wings like those of a bird appear, while flesh looks pure like the sculpted ideal of humanity or a luminous apparition. The visage should certainly reflect the demon's original angelic function. The demon looks majestic regardless of its Appearance rating, reducing the difficulty of all Social rolls with mortal onlookers by –1. Demons with Torment 3–5 manifest as angels if their players make a reflexive Resolve roll (difficulty 8) or spend a point of Resolve (in addition to the point spent to assume the form, if applicable). Fallen with Torment 6–7 must spend two additional points of Resolve to appear angelic, while those with Torment 8–10 must spend three.

A demon revealing its true damnation still shows signs of its original purpose, but these signs blend with the hideous mutations imposed by Torment. The color of a demon's Vice almost always manifests in some way, in a halo of baleful light, the color of eyes or wings, or a strange mottling of colors just beneath the skin. All features express the fallen angel's monstrosity. Wings like a bat stretch from shoulders, or the angelic wings darken to stains of blackness or smolder with hellfire, while the face shows a mask of beautiful cruelty or a grotesque caricature of sin. A demon revealing the damned version of its Apocalyptic Form retains its Appearance rating, but its monstrosity overshadows any beauty left to it. It receives a –2 difficulty to Intimidation rolls against mortal onlookers, but makes other Social rolls at standard difficulty.

Thralls may have Arcana condensed into a lesser version of Apocalyptic Form, but receive no extra points for doing so (and therefore need not assign points in increments of three). Moreover, a thrall's Apocalyptic Form still appears fundamentally like herself, human but for the specific changes imposed by her Arcana. Thralls never appear as grand as angels or as hideous as demons, and so they do not receive any modifiers to Social rolls. Thralls must spend a point of Resolve to access the powers of their Apocalyptic Form for one scene and cannot initiate brief transformation with a roll.

• **Devour Soul (0*)**: In the prison of Hell, God's punishment leaves demons as indestructible as they are helpless. The nature of the Abyss denies any release from pain, even the release of oblivion. On Earth, the souls of fallen angels remain nearly immutable and imperishable — but not completely. Away from Hell, demons can permanently destroy their own kind by consuming and assimilating their essence. Only demons outside of a host body or reliquary risk this fate. The attacker must also be incorporeal or assume Apocalyptic Form and “touch” its disembodied prey to begin the attack. The attacker's player spends a point of Resolve and rolls permanent Torment in an opposed contest against the target's Resolve or Torment, whichever is higher (difficulty 6 for both rolls). This roll continues as an extended contest until the attacker voluntarily releases the target, or one of the two demons obtains at least five successes more than its opponent. A botch at any time erases all accumulated successes, usually forfeiting any chance of victory. The target (and the attacker, if applicable) automatically resists the pull of the Abyss on its soul for the duration of the battle and cannot escape destruction by allowing Hell to reclaim it. Neither party can perceive nor respond to anything beyond each other, and nothing short of the attacker's death can prematurely break the spiritual battle before its conclusion.

If the victim wins, the attacker writhes in shock and pain for one turn. It gains one point of temporary Torment and loses all remaining Resolve points. The victim absorbs as much of this Resolve as its pool can hold, and usually takes advantage of its attacker's momentary weakness to flee the area or counterattack.

If the attacker wins, the victim's essence dissolves as it perishes utterly and eternally, refilling the attacker's Resolve pool to maximum. Roll the slain demon's Resolve (difficulty 6). Each success awards five bonus points that the attacker's player may spend on Attributes, Abilities or Willpower. No trait may be raised higher than the victim's own rating through this process. It costs 10 bonus points to improve the attacker's Resolve by one dot. The attacker also absorbs a large number of the victim's memories, which it may recall with Torment as if they were its own (Storyteller's discretion as to what may be remembered). Unfortunately for the attacker, the act of consuming a demon also absorbs the victim's anguish and taint. Roll the slain victim's permanent Torment (difficulty 6). Each success awards one dot of permanent Torment, and even a failure or botch imparts one dot for the terrible and unforgivable evil of the deed. Demons can use this

Torment and any of their unused capacity to immediately manifest any Arcana known to the victim without spending experience points or Resolve, even if the Arcana makes no sense for the devourer's own angelic function or Vice. The demon must still abide by the upper limits imposed by Torment, Taints and Pacts.

• **Divine Potential (0*)**: Demons can increase their Attributes and Abilities beyond human limits to a maximum rating of their permanent Resolve or five dots, whichever is greater.

• **Enthrall (0*)**: By touching a willing mortal and spending a point of Resolve, a demon can reshape the target's soul to receive a gift of infernal power. The mortal loses a dot of permanent Willpower and receives a dot each of permanent Resolve and Torment. The demon may bestow as many Arcana and Taints as desired, subject to the usual limitations of (permanent Torment x 10 + temporary Torment + total value of all Taints and Pacts) for the sum value of the thrall's Arcana, and (Willpower x 5) for sum of Pacts and Taints. Thereafter, the demon may modify, add or remove Arcana and Taints/Pacts by touching its servant and spending one point of Resolve for each individual change, but must keep within the limits imposed by the recipient's Willpower and Torment. The thrall must agree to the initial pact and any subsequent changes, or at least freely surrender to the demon's will. A thrall may only receive investments from the demon who originally empowered her unless freed by the will or final destruction of her master. Deliberately freeing a thrall functions like an investment and costs the demon one point of Resolve. Upon receiving freedom for any reason, a thrall loses all Pacts and gains temporary Torment equal to the total value of the lost Pacts. The diabolist retains all other infernal traits, but cannot receive new investments unless a demon uses Enthrall to claim her. Enthralling a previously freed diabolist does not cost the subject another dot of Willpower or award additional Resolve or Torment. Demons cannot ever have more thralls bound to them in total than their Resolve + Torment, though these servants may be of any power. If a demon reaches this limit and desires to forge a new pact, one of its existing vassals must die or receive freedom.

• **Hardened Flesh (0/3)**: The character's host body and Apocalyptic Form can soak lethal damage with full Stamina. Host bodies do not age as long as they are possessed, but resume where they left off if the demon vacates the body. Demons inside a reliquary lend their hideous strength to the vessel,

providing a soak against bashing and lethal damage equal to the demon's Resolve. This soak is not rolled, but instead applies in full as automatic successes against any damage, so a demon with Resolve 3 ignores three levels of damage inflicted upon the reliquary by any attack. Reliquaries have a number of health levels equal to the demon's permanent Willpower (but demons suffer no wound penalties to for damage to their vessels). A demon inside a location can only be harmed by substantial damage to the landmarks and features of the area, such as by cutting down trees, excavating soil and setting large fires. Against such attacks, they receive the same soak as Earthbound inside reliquaries. Locations that serve as reliquaries have a number of health levels equal to the demon's Resolve rating + permanent Torment. The price of such resilience comes in immobility. A reliquary may be moved, but the demon cannot move it without investing the tremendous effort to manifest an Apocalyptic Form. Demons inside a demesne cannot move at all.

• **Immortal Spirit (0*):** Without the casement of flesh or a reliquary, a demon's soul exists as an incorporeal being of pure Resolve. Characters in this state retain all of their usual traits except health levels. For every two levels of bashing damage or level of lethal/aggravated injury suffered, they instead lose a point of Willpower. Demons with no Willpower remaining fall back into the Abyss, as do those who succumb to the pull of the Abyss. Resisting the weight of Hell requires a Resolve roll at the end of each turn (difficulty of the character's permanent Torment + 2, maximum difficulty 10). Spending a point of Willpower ensures automatic success as usual. Incorporeal demons can fly without regard for gravity at the astonishing rate of one mile per turn, but cannot move on the first full turn after they emerge from a slain host or destroyed reliquary. Demon souls cannot physically interact with the world without using Arcana, but neither can physical obstructions nor forces of any sort bar their passage or cause them injury. Only magical attacks and other incorporeal demons may assault the soul.

By default, a demon's soul manifests only faintly as a shimmering blur or localized darkening of color, while its voice barely rises above a low rumble or whisper. Most onlookers only notice the apparition with a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8). Ghosts, other spirits and beings capable of perceiving spirits see the demon's soul as a translucent version of its Apocalyptic Form and hear it clearly; some even smell the scent of ozone or brimstone

wafting from its presence. The demon can choose to appear this clearly to everyone for up to a scene if its player spends a point of Resolve, but it remains completely insubstantial. The demon can briefly assume a solid Apocalyptic Form for a cost of one Resolve point each turn, but this leaves the demon vulnerable to physical attacks that can rapidly deplete Willpower.

No force or power can permanently destroy a demon except another demon using the Devour Soul Arcana, or the demon itself extinguishing all its Resolve with the Ritual of the Sundered Soul. Any lesser demise merely consigns the demon back to Hell. A fraction of this immortality even carries to a demon's host body to halt aging as described previously. Should the demon somehow leave its stolen flesh without killing the host, the body simply resumes aging wherever it left off.

• **Inviolate Soul (0/7):** The character is completely immune to possession and other attempts to control or suppress her soul. This does not protect against binding rituals that incorporate the demon's Celestial or True Name, including rites performed by mortals as well as the obscene magic practiced by such demonologist factions as the Baali and the Circle of Red. So long as she retains a single point of Resolve, the character also benefits from total immunity to all supernatural powers that would affect or control her mind or instill fear.

• **Invocation of Name (0*):** A demon intuitively senses whenever someone speaks its name, and may follow that thread of contact back to spy upon the source. This requires a reflexive Resolve roll (difficulty 6 for a mention of the True Name or 7 for Celestial Name). With one success, the character receives a mental picture of the speaker. Two successes expand the image to the immediate surroundings of the speaker. With three or more, the demon can watch the speaker in her surroundings and hear her words (and only her words) for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. After this duration expires, the demon's player can make a new Resolve roll at the same difficulty and repeat the process until failing or botching the roll. Demons cannot hear their names spoken by other demons still trapped in the Abyss, though the reverse is not true.

As an alternate use of this Arcana, demons may send telepathic messages to other fallen by invoking their Celestial or True Names. The roll to open this mental dialogue is the same as overhearing an invocation, with each success affording one turn of communication. The recipient hears the speaker's

voice in its head and may reply in kind, but neither perceives anything else about the other. The contacted demon does not automatically know who contacts it without a Torment roll (difficulty of 10 – the speaker's Eminence), although it automatically recognizes anyone whose Celestial or True Name it knows. Demons may contact their own thralls using this Arcana without a roll, maintaining dialogue as long as desired.

- **Pattern Sense (0/6):** Demons have an instinctual sensitivity to the patterns of the natural order, having established those patterns at the beginning of time. They can sense the mystical disturbances created by any use of supernatural powers within a number of miles equal to their Resolve rating. If the character is resting or otherwise relaxed, this sense triggers automatically and the character knows something supernatural happened, but the player must reflexively roll Resolve (difficulty 8) to sense additional information. One success reveals a rough direction of the event. Two successes yield certain direction and approximate distance, while three reveal exact direction and distance, as well as a rough gauge of the overall power of the effect. Characters engaged in stressful or vigorous activity only experience disturbances when extremely powerful effects occur (Storyteller's discretion as to what qualifies). Pattern Sense only detects active power uses and does not detect innate or constant effects. Thus, a vampire does not register by spending blood for healing or having Potence/Fortitude, but does release disturbances by a use of Dominate or another active Discipline. A demon's innate Arcana never trigger another demon's Pattern Sense.

- **Perfect Immunity (0/6):** Prerequisite: Hardened Flesh. The character cannot take ill, suffer infection or even serve as a passive carrier of disease. Only supernatural maladies can affect her. Earthbound demons and demons without vessels extend this resistance even further: they do not need sustenance, air, sleep or any other biological processes, and similarly ignore poison and anything else that poses no threat to their inanimate reliquaries or spiritual bodies.

- **Possession (0*):** Demons without the sanctuary of a host body or reliquary can seek that shelter through the act of possession. The incorporeal character must "touch" the person or object it wishes to inhabit and spend a point of Resolve. Seizing a mortal host requires an opposed roll of permanent Resolve versus the target's Willpower (difficulty 6 for both rolls). If a demon attempts to possess one of

its own thralls, reduce the difficulty by the thrall's permanent Torment (difficulty 1 or less results in automatic success); the fallen cannot possess thralls belonging to other demons. Inhabiting an object or place requires a straight Resolve roll, but the demon's player may not spend Willpower to ensure automatic success. Objects made specifically by a demon's thralls or cult members for the specific task of holding their master are difficulty 5 to inhabit. Demons who fail to possess a host or object may try again on the next turn if they do not fall back into the Abyss.

Successful possession locks a demon inside the host or reliquary. Barring exorcism and certain rare Arcana such as Abandon Vessel (p. 112), it can only leave its vessel upon its death or destruction. If a demon leaves a mortal host while she still lives, the mortal regains control of herself and resumes aging normally. Mortals who survive possession by the fallen are never quite the same afterward. They do not remember the time they spent as prisoners inside their own bodies except as jumbled nightmares, and this is probably for the best.

Possession of a host gives the demon access to the host's memories. It retains all of its own traits except for those exclusively based on the host's body (Physical Attributes and Appearance). The demon uses its own rating in these four Attributes while in Apocalyptic Form, and the host body gains or loses one dot from all of these traits each month until its ratings match the demon's. Host bodies that increase their Appearance as a result of possession do not appear markedly different, but somehow embody greater physical allure.

Possession of an object or location transforms the demon into one of the Earthbound, granting all the benefits and limitations explained throughout this chapter.

- **Ravage (0*):** In emergencies, demons can devour the souls of their thralls to quickly replenish their stores of Resolve. The demon spends one turn in unbroken concentration. The thrall need not be present or even nearby, as the chains of thralldom extend across the entirety of creation. If the thrall resists the sudden clawing at her soul, the demon's player rolls Resolve (difficulty 6) (each roll to continue Ravaging a thrall requires an additional turn of concentration). The player may apply as many successes as desired, each draining one point of the target's Resolve. If the thrall lacks sufficient Resolve to sate her master's hunger, each leftover success devours one point of Willpower. If a thrall runs out

of Willpower and her master continues feeding, each success inflicts a level of unsoakable lethal damage. Wounds inflicted by ravaging manifest as lacerations, burns, mangled bones, withered flesh and the like. A thrall actually killed by her master's Ravaging perishes dramatically, consumed from within by fire, crumbling to dust or torn to bloody ribbons as if by an invisible beast. Every success applied by a demon in a ravaging attempt restores one point of Resolve to its pool. In the unlikely event that a thrall actually offers herself willingly, the demon can apply any number of "successes" without a roll. Once a demon finishes a Ravaging attempt, it must immediately test for degeneration whether or not it derived any benefit or injured the thrall. If a thrall dies as a result of Ravaging, a failure on the degeneration check gives the demon a dot of *permanent* Torment. Only one exception exists: if a thrall willingly gives her life for her master, the demon may reflexively Ravage her soul at the moment of death without a roll or a subsequent degeneration check. Thralls may be deceived into martyrdom, but cannot be coerced by any mundane or supernatural means.

- **Regeneration (0/6):** The player can reflexively spend a point of Resolve each turn to instantly heal one level of the character's lethal damage or all levels of bashing damage. Three points of Resolve heals one level of aggravated damage, but the character may only heal one level of such grievous injury each day. All healing wrought by this power takes place automatically if the character spends the turn resting or calm. In stressful situations such as combat, healing only takes place if the player makes a successful Stamina roll (difficulty 7). Failure means the character does not heal that turn, but neither does she lose any Resolve for the attempt. Thralls and demons inhabiting mortal bodies otherwise heal as mortals without using this Arcana. Earthbound demons can only heal their spiritual bodies by spending Resolve, but may also spend one point of Resolve each week to mend their reliquaries/demesnes of all bashing damage or one level of lethal damage. They can only repair one level of aggravated damage suffered by their vessels every month for a cost of three Resolve points. Demons without a vessel or host regain "health" as they regain Willpower, since temporary Willpower determines their vitality.

- **Revelation (0*):** In the absence of more reliable options, the fallen can harvest Resolve by directly magnifying a mortal's belief in divinity or damnation. The demon must assume Apocalyptic Form and demand obeisance. Roll the demon's Re-

solve against a difficulty of the highest Willpower rating among all mortal witnesses present. Success restores one point of Resolve per witness, while a botch prevents a demon from using Revelation again that day. Mortals cannot serve as witnesses to Revelation more than once a day, whether or not the attempt succeeds. If any of these "drained" mortals witness a Revelation, the attempt automatically fails. Demons cannot gain more points of Resolve from all uses of this Arcana in a day than their permanent Resolve. With the exception of thralls, supernatural beings never provide Resolve as witnesses, but neither does their presence determine or increase a demon's difficulty to use Revelation.

Learned Arcana

Demons and thralls may manifest or receive investments of the following powers (as appropriate for their method of learning Arcana), up the usual limits set by Torment and Taints/Pacts. Although learned Arcana fall into various categories of similar powers, these categories only exist for the sake of quick reference.

Arcana of Form

These powers concern themselves with the realms of the physical, the power to create and bend flesh and bone to the image of the character's will. Many of these Arcana represent permanent alterations to a character's physical form, or supernatural expansions of her physical capabilities. Characters wishing any respite from permanent alterations must place those Arcana inside their Apocalyptic Forms. The possessed wretches known to werewolves as fomori predominantly have Arcana from this category.

- **Arsenal of the Beast (Varies):** With each purchase of this Arcana the character grows a bestial weapon. Each of these features has its own cost and effect, and some of these traits can represent horrific mutations never found in nature. All of these weapons inflict lethal damage by default, but spending a point of Resolve empowers all of the character's features to inflict aggravated damage for a scene. Combat maneuvers referenced by these characteristics may be found on pages 242–243 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*.

- Claws (3):** The character's fingernails extend like the curved talons of a raptor or the retractable claws of a cat. Alternately, she may have spurs of bone protruding from her knuckles or some other

means of slicing an enemy's flesh with each blow. The character may use the claw maneuver.

Fangs (2): The character's teeth grow sharp like those of a wolf or other large predator, or perhaps he sports a raptor's beak. He may use the bite combat maneuver.

Gaping Maw (4): The character's jaw unhinges or simply distends impossibly wide, presenting row upon row of glistening fangs. The character may use the bite maneuver at -2 difficulty without grabbing the target first, inflicting an extra three dice of damage above normal. In addition, the character can chew and digest anything she gets her mouth around.

Horns (3): The character sprouts archetypal goat horns, antlers like a stag, unnatural bone spurs protruding from the skull or some other growth that enables goring attacks. A gore functions like a tackle, but inflicts a lethal damage of Strength + 2. The attacker also has an easier time retaining his balance, reducing the Dexterity + Athletics roll to difficulty 5.

Lashing Tail (3): The character sports a powerful muscular tail enabling strikes (**Difficulty: +1, Accuracy: Normal, Damage: Strength + 3 bashing**) or the sweep maneuver.

Poison (3 or 4): The character's body produces a deadly venom. For three points, the venom secretes from a specific orifice or organ, most likely in the mouth. Alternately, one of the character's bodily fluids is highly toxic, be it saliva, blood, semen, urine or anything else. For

four points, all of a character's bodily fluids are toxic. Anyone touching the character's poison suffers dice of lethal damage equal to half her permanent Torment, rounded up. If the character injects the venom into a victim or he ingests the tainted substance, the number of damage dice equals the character's full Torment.

Venom Spit (3): Prerequisites: Poison. The character has a venom gland in his throat that allows him to spray poison. The gland stores a number of venom "doses" equal to the character's Stamina, replenishing one dose per hour. Spitting venom requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll to hit a target within four yards. Success inflicts half the character's Torment in dice of lethal damage (rounded up), but additional successes do not add to this damage.

Spines (4): Spikes of bone or quills protrude from the character's skin; or perhaps she radiates blistering heat or a shock of lightning; or perhaps she has a host of fanged mouths opening across her entire body. Anyone foolish enough to strike her barehanded or grapple her suffers three dice of lethal damage. Spines do not add damage to the character's own attacks unless she clinches or tackles an opponent, in which case the damage becomes lethal and increases by three dice.

Tentacles (3 or 4 each): The character has a long tentacle or prehensile tail that can wrap around enemies and constrict them, permitting a punch, clinch or grapple from as far as three yards away. Once a tentacle ensnares a target in a wrestling move, the character may con-



tinue to squeeze while directing his attention to other actions. Characters with many tentacles and the Arcana Speed of Thought may reach out to grab many opponents and crush them at once. For an extra point each, tentacles end in a barbed stinger. The character may stab with this barb as a claw attack, possibly injecting poison if the character also has Poison. Tentacles also allow the demon to hang suspended, and lift objects using his full Strength.

- **Contagion Mastery (4):** Prerequisite: Sense Vitality. The character may touch a living being and purge her of all disease and poisons for a cost of one Resolve point. Expelled diseases and toxins rise to the surface of the skin as an inert black sludge. Alternately, the character's touch can inflict disease. This requires opposed rolls of the character's Torment versus the victim's Stamina (difficulty 6 for both rolls). If the infernal character wins, he may inflict any desired malady on the target (see **Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 256 for suggestions). In general, mortal victims suffer 3–5 dice of bashing damage each day until they overcome the disease with a Stamina roll (difficulty 9) or perish.

- **Damage Immunity (6):** Prerequisite: Hardened Flesh. The character ignores all damage inflicted by a specific type of source approved by the Storyteller. Possibilities include poison, fire/heat, cold and falling. Alternately, the character surpasses an inherent limitation of mortal flesh, such as the need for sustenance, air, sleep or something equally important.

- **Healing Touch (6):** Prerequisites: Regeneration, Sense Vitality. The character can heal living beings with a touch. The player spends one Resolve point and rolls Resolve (difficulty 6). Each success can heal one level of lethal damage or all of the subject's bashing damage. Four successes heal one level of aggravated damage. This Arcana cannot mend the reliquaries, demesnes or Apocalyptic Forms of the Earthbound.

- **Increased Health (3):** The character gains one additional Bruised health level for every purchase of this Arcana, up to a maximum number of extra levels equal to her Stamina rating or Resolve (whichever is less). These levels also strengthen an Earthbound demon's reliquary or demesne.

- **Incorporeal Form (7 or 9):** The character transforms his body from solid flesh and bone to an intangible or dissolved state. Depending on the character's purpose and nature, he may liquefy, split into a swarm of insects, erupt into flame, evaporate into a cloud, blaze with a body of light, fade into a

living shadow or dissolve his essence to a condition somewhere between material and spirit. If the character remains fundamentally matter as a result of this transformation, Incorporeal Form costs seven points. Such liquid, gaseous or swarm characters can flow around physical obstructions and pour through tiny chinks. Purely kinetic attacks only inflict bashing damage to their bodies, and the character cannot suffer more than one level of damage from a single attack. The reverse also holds true, however, and a character striking with a watery fist or a barrage of wasp stings (or whatever physical force he can exert) only inflicts bashing damage for a maximum of one level per attack. Creative uses of this power can circumvent this limitation, such as assuming the form of water and drowning someone. Fire, magic and other effects that do not rely solely on force may harm a character's Incorporeal Form normally, and the character may in turn use other Arcana to interact with the world.

The nine point version of this Arcana provides true disembodiment, forfeiting matter for a body of light, darkness or a spectral apparition. The character remains faintly visible to perceptive witnesses and may appear more directly for a cost of one Resolve point. The character follows the same rules for immateriality as a demon without a vessel (p. 106), save that he is no faster than normal.

Shifting into either variety of Incorporeal Form requires a point of Resolve or a Resolve roll (difficulty 6). The transformation lasts one scene with a Resolve point or one turn per success.

- **Inhuman Strength (5):** The character gains preternatural strength, whether visible as a bulky form or imbued upon the very visage of frailty. Each purchase of this Arcana adds one extra success to all Strength rolls, exactly like the Discipline Potence (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 202). Characters may not purchase this Arcana more times than their actual Strength rating or their Resolve, whichever is lower.

- **Inured to Agony (5):** Prerequisite: Hardened Flesh. The character suffers no dice pool or movement penalties for injuries unless Incapacitated.

- **Preternatural Reflexes (1):** The character adds one to the character's base initiative score for every purchase of this Arcana, but cannot purchase Preternatural Reflexes more times than her permanent Resolve.

- **Relentless Soul (6):** Prerequisite: Hardened Flesh. Whenever the character suffers lethal damage that reduces her below Incapacitated, her player may roll Resolve (difficulty 8) or spend a point of Re-

solve. Success allows the character's body to remain at Incapacitated instead of dying.

- **Reshape Flesh (5*):** Prerequisite: Healing Touch, Contagion Mastery. The demon may command living animal matter to shift and even flow like wax under his touch. The player rolls Resolve or Torment against a difficulty of the target's Stamina + 3. Successes obtained with Torment permit the demon to warp flesh and bone like an obscene combination of the Vicissitude powers Transmogrify the Mortal Clay and Rend the Osseous Frame (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 222–223). The character may perform changes as an extended action over many turns to accumulate sufficient successes, but each distinct effect costs one point of Resolve. Torment-fueled successes can also gift the target with strictly physical Arcana, so long as the powers have a permanent alteration-style effect and do not require activation or Resolve expenditure. Each success provides four points of these Arcana-based mutations, but the deformed character drops to Appearance 0 and suffers unsoakable levels of bashing damage each day equal to the total successes allocated to the mutations. This damage continues until the deformed wretch dies.

If a character uses Resolve as the activation roll of Reshape Flesh, the changes wrought on the target are considerably gentler. Each success adds one extra dot to any of the target's Physical Attributes, Appearance or Perception. These bonuses cannot raise a character above her usual maximum for traits, and the recipient loses one dot each day (player's choice) until the bonus fades entirely.

- **Resilience (3 or 4):** Prerequisite: Hardened Flesh. The character gains additional resistance to injury. The total cost of this Arcana depends on the types of resistance purchased and the protection afforded by that resistance. For every three points, the character gains one soak die against aggravated damage and one additional soak die versus bashing and lethal wounds. A character may double the soak dice provided by Resilience for a single turn by spending a point of Resolve. For four points, the character decreases the difficulty of all soak rolls by –1, but characters can only purchase this form of Resilience twice. Both effects granted by Resilience stack. For example, a character with Stamina 4 could have 12 points invested in extra soak dice and four points invested in difficulty reduction, granting her seven dice versus bashing or lethal damage (or 10 for a turn by spending Resolve) rolled at –1 difficulty

and three dice against aggravated wounds (or six dice with a point of Resolve) rolled at –1 difficulty.

- **Sense Vitality (3):** With a glance, the character can determine the overall health of a being. Roll Perception + Awareness (difficulty 6). Each success provides one of the following pieces of information: whether the subject is actually alive or animated with the semblance of life (like a vampire or golem), the subject's current health levels, whether the subject currently suffers from or carries any diseases or whether he has a toxic substance in his body.

- **Speed of Thought (9):** The character moves impossibly fast, accelerated beyond human limits by the force of her Resolve. The player spends one point of Resolve and reflexively rolls Resolve (difficulty 6). Reduce this difficulty by –1 if the character channels her anger into the effect. The character may take a number of extra actions at her full dice pool equal to the successes rolled, or one extra action in the case of a failure. A botch yields no extra actions and forfeits the character's usual action for the turn. Extra actions granted by this Arcana follow the same rules as those provided by the Discipline Celerity (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 179–180), save that the character must devote every action to violence if the player chose to channel anger.

- **Ultimate Horror (4*):** Prerequisites: Resolve 5+, Torment 10. The demon's infernal form exudes infinite primordial evil. Onlookers who behold the dread fallen gain a derangement unless their players succeed at a Courage roll (difficulty 9 for mortals; 5 for supernatural beings). A botch on this roll costs the viewer a dot of permanent Willpower as he spends the rest of the scene curled up catatonic or running madly in blind panic. Demons may only purchase this Arcana as part of their Apocalyptic Forms.

- **Unyielding (6 or 9):** Prerequisite: Resilience (any type and value). For six points, the character gains the toughness of a corpse, halving all bashing damage applied after soak. For nine points, the character has the durability of stone and ignores all sources of bashing damage outright.

- **Wings (4, 5 or 7):** The character grows large wings from her back, stretching a third again as long as the character is tall at full extension. These may resemble those of a bird, bat, butterfly or something stranger still, perhaps sculpted out of fire, light, clouds, shadow or unfurling, jagged crystal. The character can fold the wings back or drape them around her body as a cloak, but cannot conceal them

without other magic. Fortunately, the wings do not interfere with other actions in any way. For four points, the character can glide at three times her running speed per turn, but cannot ascend without strong winds or updrafts. For five points, the character can ascend straight up with beating strokes and fly at three times her normal running speed. For seven points, the character's wings become a mere formality; she can move without regard for gravity or momentum, hovering, skimming and gliding with impossible maneuvers rooted in personal mastery of motion. Her powerful wings only propel her more quickly, allowing her to fly in any direction at any time up to five times her running speed.

Arcana of Glory

These powers imbue characters with superior capabilities, but seldom manifest as obviously supernatural gifts.

- **Longevity (1**):** For each investment of this Arcana, the thrall stops aging for a period of five years or reduces his physical age by a like amount. If the character later loses points from this Arcana, each lost point restores the full ravages of the five suspended or abolished years. Thralls rapidly aged beyond a human lifespan generally die within minutes.

- **Trait Aptitude (1 or 3):** The character demonstrates surpassing excellence with a particular Ability (1 point) or Attribute (3 points), rolling all dice pools involving that trait at -1 difficulty. Players may purchase this Arcana up to three times for a single Ability or Attribute integral to a character's concept (Storyteller's discretion) and up to twice for any other Ability or Attribute. Players may decide whether this Arcana reflects a superior intuition or some detectable feature that aids the trait, such as a particularly appealing timbre of voice (Charisma) or a face of cherubic innocence that could not possibly lie (Subterfuge).

- **Trait Enhancement (2 or 4):** One of the character's Abilities (2 points) or Attributes (4 points) has received infernal enhancement, gaining an extra dot for every purchase of this Arcana. The bonus may have noticeable signs (such as enlarged muscles for Strength or a flitting gaze that notices all details for Awareness), but the character only seems unnatural if she blatantly demonstrates superhuman prowess. Each dot of enhancement also increases the maximum rating a character may obtain in that trait, whether through additional Arcana or spending experience. Demons with high Resolve stack this benefit with their Divine Potential, but cannot have an Attribute maximum

above 10. For demons enhancing Abilities, this Arcana reflects the lore and capabilities written into their souls as part of their angelic functions and should therefore convey that purpose.

Arcana of Mind and Soul

These Arcana allow a demon to perceive, affect and ultimately control the hearts, minds and souls of others. This category also encompasses power over spirits unbound by flesh.

- **Abandon Vessel (10*):** Prerequisite: Spirit Sight, Resolve 4+. The demon can willingly leave the sanctuary of a vessel that no longer fulfills its needs. This requires a full turn of unbroken concentration and costs one Resolve point. Mortal hosts suffer dice of lethal damage equal to the demon's permanent Torment as the fallen angel's tainted essence flows out. Generous demons can reduce the wounds inflicted after soak by spending one Resolve point for every two levels cancelled, though few of the fallen bother. Injuries of revoked possession sometimes manifest naturally as a heart attack or stroke, or unnaturally through spontaneous lacerations or charring immolation. In contrast with exiting a mortal, the departure of an Earthbound demon destroys its vessel utterly beyond repair. Reliquaries shatter or burst into unholy flame, while demesnes collapse into sinkholes or churn in localized earthquakes that leave the land torn and unrecognizable.

Upon receiving its freedom, the demon has one free turn to possess a new vessel before it feels the pull of the Abyss on its soul. Abandoned hosts remain forever off-limits to demons who once inhabited them, while former Earthbound have nothing remaining of their reliquaries and demesnes.

- **Behold the Metatron (7*):** Prerequisites: Visage of Glory, Conquering Will, Resolve 6+. For a cost of one Resolve point, the demon becomes impossibly and terribly glorious for a scene, either recapturing its glory as one of God's Host or displaying to all who can see it the horror of Hell itself. In game terms, victims wishing to so much as raise their eyes to the demon must roll Willpower against a difficulty of the demon's permanent Torment or Resolve (whichever is higher). At least four successes are needed to take any kind of hostile action against the demon, and even then the difficulty of all such actions increases by +2.

- **Cerement of Walking Dust (5*):** Prerequisite: Spirit Sight. The demon may use the Arcana Possession to enter a reasonably intact corpse. This possession does not make the demon into one of the Earthbound,

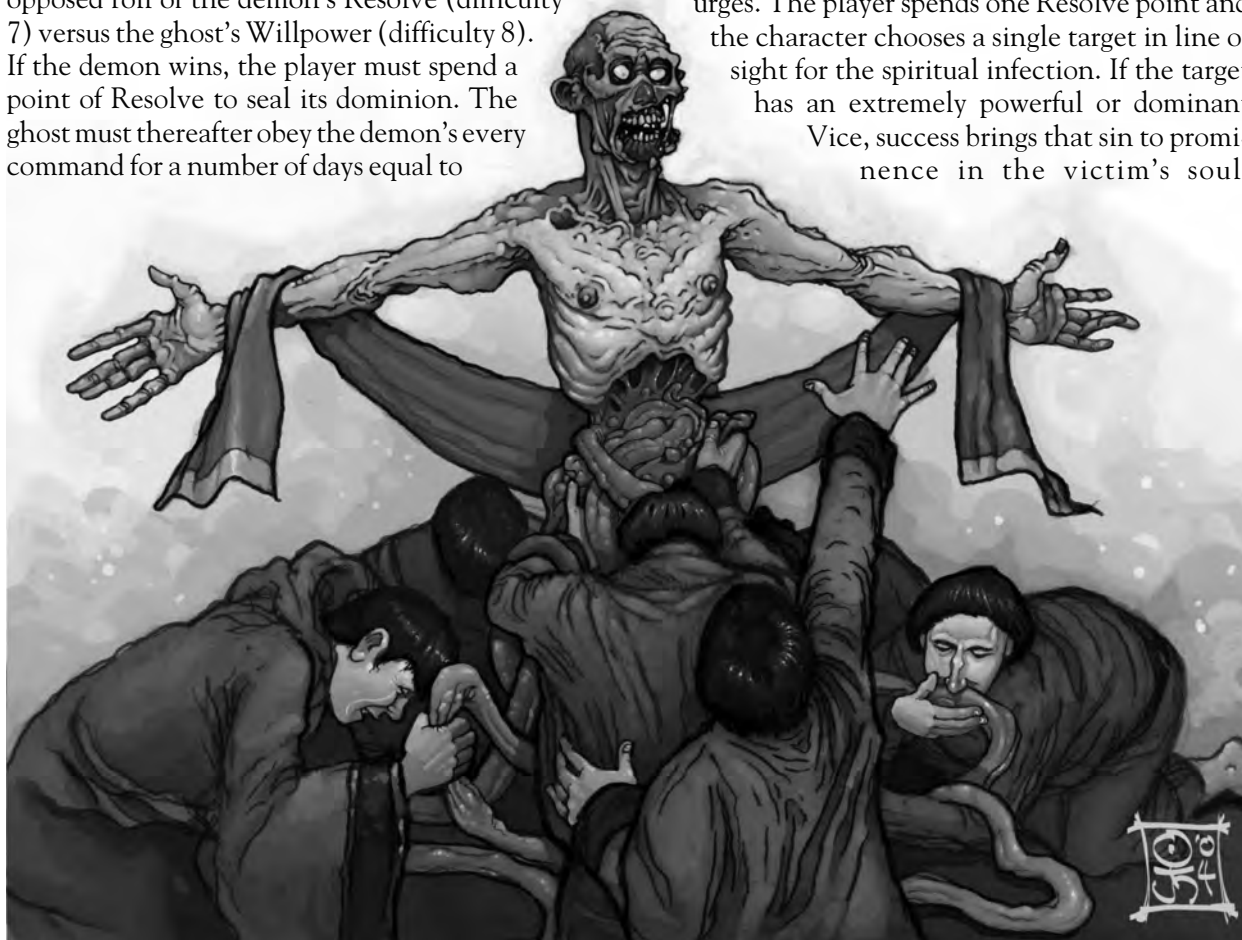
but allows it to animate the body like a living mortal host and resist the Abyss. The chief advantage of possessing a dead body is its superior resilience; animated corpses suffer no wound penalties, have three additional health levels and halve any bashing damage applied after soak, rounded down. In addition, dead bodies do not need sustenance or air, nor do they require fulfillment of any other strictly biological need. This durability comes at a twofold price, however. First, the absence of a living soul in the body provides no bulwark against Torment. The demon retains all extant Torment upon possession and automatically degenerates when he performs actions considered sinful for his permanent Torment. Second, the corpse does not mend its own flesh and instead continues to deteriorate. The demon suffers one level of aggravated damage each day at sunrise from decay, but may reverse this putrefaction and heal other wounds using the Regeneration Arcana. The body also loses one dot of Appearance for every unhealed level of aggravated damage suffered.

• **Command the Dead (6*)**: Prerequisite: Spirit Sight. The demon may command a ghost in its presence and expect obedience. This requires an opposed roll of the demon's Resolve (difficulty 7) versus the ghost's Willpower (difficulty 8). If the demon wins, the player must spend a point of Resolve to seal its dominion. The ghost must thereafter obey the demon's every command for a number of days equal to

its net successes. Ghosts may twist their orders, obeying to the letter and not the spirit, but risk the ire of their masters for flagrant disobedience.

• **Command the Eternal Soul (7*)**: Prerequisites: Conquering Will, Resolve 8+. The demon speaks the True Name of a demon using the Arcana Invocation of Name. As soon as the two initiate mental contact, the speaker's player spends a point of Resolve and the two characters match wills in an opposed roll of Resolve + Willpower (difficulty 6). If the speaker wins, the target demon becomes its slave. Thereafter, the master may send orders using Invocation of Name and the slave must obey unless the slave's player makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). Success allows the slave to ignore that specific command, but it remains subject to future or repeated orders. If the victim wins the initial struggle, it escapes bondage and becomes immune to further uses of Command the Eternal Soul by the speaker for a number of years equal to its Resolve. Once enslaved, demons can only escape their bondage by changing their True Names or returning to Hell.

• **Compel Sin (4)**: Prerequisites: Read the Sin, Torment 3+. The character may project his Vice onto others for a time, giving them a taste of his own urges. The player spends one Resolve point and the character chooses a single target in line of sight for the spiritual infection. If the target has an extremely powerful or dominant Vice, success brings that sin to prominence in the victim's soul.



Otherwise, the target takes on the infernal character's own Vice. Both effects last until the end of the scene. During the period of infection, the target succumbs to her Vice in every tempting situation unless her player makes a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 7).

- **Conquering Will (7):** Prerequisites: Read the Mind, Resolve 5+. The character issues a spoken command in the inflection once used to convey the word of God. The player spends one point of Resolve and rolls Resolve (difficulty 7). Sentient beings within earshot who have a lower Willpower rating than the number of successes must obey the speaker for the rest of the scene to the best of their ability to do so, though the compulsion cannot drive them to directly harm themselves or loved ones unless they are already strongly predisposed to do so. The speaker cannot simultaneously command a number of people greater than his Willpower + Resolve with this Arcana; when addressing crowds larger than this, the characters with the lowest Willpower ratings obey.

The character may spend an additional Resolve point to magnify his voice so that it echoes with thunder and unmistakable power, easily cutting over the din of a noisy battlefield if so needed. Demons with any Resolve points left are immune to this power due to the Arcana Inviolable Soul.

- **Excise Soul (8):** Prerequisites: Spirit Strike, Resolve 7+. The character strikes a corporeal being, while her player spends a point of Resolve and rolls Resolve against a difficulty of the victim's Willpower. If the number of successes exceeds the target's Stamina, his soul tears free and the body instantly dies. Most mortal victims of this power become ghosts, though not all do. This power does not kill targets who are possessed; instead, the invading spirit is torn from its victim (meaning that characters with this power make effective exorcists). Such forceful exorcism costs the possessing spirit a point of Willpower.

- **Gift of Faith (4):** Prerequisites: Read the Heart. The character touches or makes eye contact with his target, while the player spends as many Resolve points as desired. If the target is a demon or thrall, she adds these Resolve points to her own pool, but cannot surpass the usual limit of her permanent rating. Every two points of donated Resolve in excess of this limit replenish one point of the recipient's spent Willpower. Blessed recipients convert donated Resolve into Conviction points on a one-for-one basis, but cannot refill their Conviction pools any higher than their Piety. Any leftover Resolve refills Willpower like infernal characters.

Other types of beings without Resolve or Conviction pools ignore the initial conversion step and regain a point of Willpower for every two points of donated Resolve. Targets refreshed by this power feel an intense surge of belief and spiritual wholeness. If a demon uses Gift of Faith on a mortal while wearing the angelic visage of his Apocalyptic Form, the mortal directs much of that belief at her "divine" benefactor. This gratitude rewards the demon with a return of one of the Resolve points spent powering the Arcana.

- **Greater Invocation (4*):** The demon may now use Invocation of Name to contact any sentient being whose name it knows, just as it can invoke other demons.

- **Implacable Vengeance (6*):** Prerequisites: Reaper's Hunger. The demon names its prey and attunes its entire being to her destruction, costing it a point of Resolve. For as long as the demon vigilantly and unceasingly hunts its quarry and works directly toward her death, it does not need sleep, food, drink or air. It feels no fatigue or pain and suffers no wound penalties; in short, it exists beyond the constraints of living flesh. As a downside, its flesh gradually withers and desiccates to the grisly visage of the walking dead (costing one dot of Appearance each day until he reaches zero). If the character takes any action that does not obviously bring it closer to killing its prey, the Implacable Vengeance passes and it loses all benefits. It regains one dot of any lost Appearance every day. If the character successfully kills its prey while under the effects of this Arcana, its Appearance returns to normal and it regains a point of Willpower and three points of Resolve.

- **Lash of Anguish (4):** Prerequisites: Shield of Spite, permanent Torment 4+. The character concentrates on a living or undead target in his line of sight and telepathically unleashes a surge of raw pain and despair. This attack costs one Resolve point and bypasses the protection of the Arcana Inviolable Soul. The target suddenly realizes his own insignificance to the universe and experiences a momentary taste of the punishment God inflicted on the infernal host. The player rolls a number of dice equal to (the character's Torment – the target's Willpower rating), to a minimum of two dice (difficulty 6). Each success costs the victim a point of temporary Willpower. Victims of this power who lose any Willpower must also check for degeneration if applicable (i.e. those with Torment, Road or Piety).

• **Perfect Lie (3):** Prerequisites: Read the Sin, permanent Torment 3+. The character speaks lies with flawless sincerity. The difficulty of Subterfuge rolls can never exceed (12 – the character's Torment rating).

• **Raise the Dead (7):** Prerequisite: Spirit Sight. The character commands the dead to rise, speaking blasphemous mockeries of the Word that breathed life into dust. The player spends a Resolve point and rolls Resolve (difficulty 7). The demon may either raise one cadaver per success as a corpse servant, or raise a single body as a greater corpse knight (in either case, any corpse to be raised must be within the demon's line of sight). Corpse servants created with a Resolve roll have the statistics listed on p. 313 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Corpse knights have the statistics on p. 312 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, but require equipping since they do not automatically rise with weapons and armor. Corpse knights only exist to kill and devour the flesh of the living. These monsters still obey their maker to the best of their limited intelligence, but can only fulfill violent tasks. Left to their own devices, they will shamle off in search of living prey. All undead raised with this Arcana lack the ability to heal in any way and suffer one level of unsoakable aggravated damage each day from decomposition.

• **Ravage Sinner (6*):** Prerequisites: Sin Eating, Torment 5+. If the demon observes a mortal perform an action that strongly resonates with his own Vice, it may touch the mortal any time later in the scene and use the Ravage Arcana on the hapless victim as if she were its thrall. Since normal mortals lack a Resolve pool, successes on the ravaging attempt immediately start by draining Willpower and move on to health levels. The demon can lure a mortal victim into debauchery to enable feeding, but the mortal must truly sin of her own accord.

• **Read the Heart (4):** Prerequisites: Read the Sin. The character may glimpse the colors of a target's emotional halo glowing around and through the darkened stains of sin. This Arcana duplicates the Auspex power Soulsight (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 177).

• **Read the Mind (5):** Prerequisites: Read the Heart. The character may gaze at a sentient being and probe his thoughts and memories. This Arcana duplicates the Auspex power Steal Secrets (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 178), but the player uses Resolve for the activation roll and need not spend Willpower to pierce the minds of supernatural beings.

• **Reaper's Hunger (6*):** Prerequisites: Spirit Sight. Whenever the fallen personally kills a mortal, the player reflexively rolls Torment (difficulty of the

demon's Torment rating). Success awards a single point of Resolve. Monstrous demons have greater bloodlust (as represented by the larger number of dice for the roll), but require increasingly cruel atrocities to make the act of killing spiritually exciting (as represented by the increased difficulty).

• **Read the Sin (3):** The character may look into the heart of a subject, perceiving the stain of her dominant Vice as an aura of the appropriate color. The player rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty of the target's Wits + 3). One success reveals the aura, while three enable the character to gauge the overall strength of the sin. Gauging strength will measure the rating of the subject's Road, Piety or Torment as appropriate, although the character understands the information much more abstractly. For characters without a defined Vice, the Storyteller should decide what color manifests. No matter what their other moral failings, vampires also blaze with the intertwined black and orange flames of gluttony and wrath and werewolves pulse with the living wrath of their Rage. Most magi glitter with pride on top of any other aspect of their personality, though not all do.

• **Shield of Spite (3):** Prerequisites: Inviolate Soul. Whenever anyone attempts magic that opens telepathic contact with the character, either to read or attack his mind or control him, the intruder suffers dice of bashing damage equal to the character's permanent Torment. This damage can be soaked with Wits. If the intruder endures any actual damage from this jolt of pain and rage, she also loses a point of Willpower. The Arcana Invocation of Name bypasses this defense.

• **Shrouded Soul (6):** Prerequisites: Read the Heart. The character blurs in the mind's eye, becoming innocuous to the point of anonymity. All who interact with her forget the encounter, or at least forget her role in matters, unless their players make successful Willpower rolls (difficulty of the character's Resolve + 4, maximum difficulty 10). It costs one point of Resolve to activate or deactivate the effects of this Arcana.

• **Sin Eating (5):** Prerequisites: Read the Sin, Torment 3+. The character can regain Resolve by indulging his Vice or witnessing a mortal indulging the favored sin. The player rolls Torment, and then immediately checks for degeneration. The difficulty is 8 if the character performs the action, 7 if witnessing a mortal's debauchery or 6 if the character directly tempted, threatened or coerced the mortal into sin. If a mortal's sin is magically compelled, the character rolls as if performing the sin himself. The

demon gains one point of Resolve per success. If Sin Eating is used more than once in a scene, subsequent activations cannot yield more than one point of Resolve per roll. This Arcana may only be attempted once per turn.

- **Soul Burn (1 or 2):** The character may cannibalize her own soul for power in emergencies. For one point, the player may reflexively spend a dot of permanent Willpower to fully refresh her pool to its new rating. For two points, she can do the same with Resolve. Lost dots of Resolve or Willpower can only be regained by spending experience points, making this an Arcana of last resort.

- **Spirit Sight (3):** The character can perceive all incorporeal spirits normally roaming invisibly through the world or the close spiritual planes reflecting the world. This includes nature spirits, ghosts and demons without bodies. The character may also scrutinize a mortal (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 5) and discern whether a spirit of any kind possesses her. Storytellers may allow Intelligence + Occult rolls for the character to identify the type of spirit he sees, with a difficulty determined by the obscurity of the subject.

- **Spirit Strike (4):** Prerequisites: Spirit Sight. For a cost of one Resolve point, the character can strike immaterial spirits for the remainder of the scene.

- **Theft of Faith (7*):** Prerequisites: Gift of Faith. The demon touches its intended victim, while the player spends one point of Resolve. The undead and thralls belonging to other demons are immune to this power, although demons themselves are not. Use of this Arcana permits the demon to Ravage the target as if she were its thrall (p. 107), but the character can only take Resolve (if applicable) and Willpower. Once the target reaches zero Willpower, the demon cannot draw any more sustenance from her soul. Use of this power on the Blessed is extremely dangerous. The target loses Conviction points in place of Resolve, and then Willpower if the demon continues feeding. Each point of Conviction a demon consumes awards two points of Resolve, but inflicts one die of unsoakable aggravated damage from the searing and holy power of the divine.

- **Transfer Vessel (5*):** Prerequisite: Abandon Vessel, Resolve 7+. By touching a prospective new vessel, a demon may attempt to transfer its being with Possession without any risk to itself. If the attempt succeeds, the demon flows into its new home and the original vessel suffers a single level of unsoakable aggravated damage. Failure does nothing except cost the demon a point of Resolve for the

wasted effort. Because this Arcana does not destroy reliquaries the way Abandon Vessel does, Earth-bound tired of immobility can use this power to steal a body until they grow weary of flesh and desire a return to their proper home.

- **Usurpation of Flesh (6*):** A demon may use this Arcana to seize control of a thrall's body, controlling the servant like a puppet. The fallen uses Invocation of Name to open mental contact, while the player rolls Resolve (difficulty 6). Each Resolve point spent adds one automatic success to this roll. Even a single success strengthens the telepathic link of invocation to last as long as the demon continues to pay attention to the thrall. During that time, the demon gains passive access to the thrall's senses (one per success) and may choose to take actions using the thrall's body with a degree of control determined by the number of successes rolled. The benefits for each level of success are cumulative, encompassing or superseding the effects of lesser control as appropriate. For one success, the demon may usurp the thrall's voice at any time, forcing her to say whatever it wants. For two successes, the demon can also force the thrall to perform simple physical actions up to once a turn using the thrall's normal dice pool for the action or the fallen's Resolve rating, whichever is lower. For three successes, the demon can take any type of normal actions (physical or otherwise) with the thrall's body; the fallen uses its own traits except for the thrall's Physical Attributes and Appearance. For four successes, the demon can spend Resolve to add or remove Arcana and/or Taints and Pacts through the spiritual link alone, though the thrall must be willing to undergo the change. The demon can also inflict agony by cruelly twisting nerves and muscles, inflicting dice of bashing or lethal damage each turn up to its own permanent Resolve. With five successes, the demon may temporarily project its own Arcana through the thrall, but each use of a power or transfer of a constant power inflicts a die of unsoakable bashing damage to the thrall. The demon may not transform the thrall into its own Apocalyptic Form or project any powers incorporated into that form.

- **Visage of Glory (4):** Prerequisites: Read the Heart, Resolve 3+. For a cost of one Resolve point, the character glows with the spark of divinity for the rest of the scene. Treat this effect like the Presence power Awe (*Dark Ages Vampire*, p. 202), save that no activation roll is required. Instead, the effect reaches an audience with a number of "successes" equal to the Resolve rating of the character - 2. If a

character places this Arcana inside an Apocalyptic Form, the Resolve cost of the visage is waived and the effect manifests whenever and for however long the character wears his infernal form.

Arcana of Fate and Portals

These powers alter destiny, time, space and the patterns of connection that bind the principles and substance of the universe together.

- **Alter Fate (8*):** Prerequisite: Foretell. The demon may stretch or even tear the destiny of an individual by speaking his name and proclaiming the changes imposed on his future. The player spends a point of Willpower and three points of Resolve and rolls Resolve (difficulty 7 if the target is present to hear the fate, 9 otherwise). Supernatural beings may resist with an opposed Willpower roll (difficulty 8). Successes create a pool of *fate points* attached to the target's future. The demon names a circumstance in which the target will experience good or bad fortune. This circumstance may be as specific or general as desired, with as many conditions and clauses guiding the effect as need. The first time the target encounters the circumstance dictated by the demon and attempts an action in response to that situation, the difficulty of the player's roll receives a modifier equal to the fate points attached to the event. This decreases the number of fate points by one. Apply the reduced modifier to the next valid roll and so on until the fate pool runs out entirely and the effect ends. Fate points cannot take the difficulty of a roll above 9 or below 4. If a mortal does not encounter a situation meeting the conditions of the fate for a full year, the pool of fate erodes by one point. Characters cannot affect demons who know this Arcana (including themselves) or alter the destinies of the Blessed.

Example: The lustful demon Maresh lays a curse on a young soldier who has spurned her attentions. She proclaims that he will die by violence, deliberately leaving the circumstance vague so that the fate has a better chance of coming to pass. Her player rolls three successes, so the curse has three fate points. Soon thereafter, her victim spars with a fellow soldier and the curse seizes the opportunity to take hold. When his opponent first attacks, the victim attempts to parry the sword but adds three to the difficulty and the curse loses a fate point. The sword penetrates the poorly executed block and shears into the victim's armor, triggering a second effect of the curse to add two to the difficulty of the victim's soak roll. The victim miraculously survives, but will spend many months away from battle recovering from the wound. He has only one more fate point left, however, and will most likely survive the curse unless he is particularly unlucky.

- **Beyond Now (8*):** Prerequisite: Foretell, Resolve 9+. Confronted with the inexorable forward march of time, the demon steps sideways out of the moment. Demons can use this Arcana to escape from enemies, bypass sentries, perfectly dodge volleys of arrows, stab an enemy in the back or literally make time to think about something important. The player spends one Resolve point, plus an additional point for every "passenger" the demon wishes to bring along. All such passengers must be within sight of the demon as the power activates and need not be willing. Indeed, some demons use this power to engage in duels with their enemies outside of time, setting aside the inconvenience of wading through retainers or armies. Roll the demon's Resolve (difficulty 8), adding a number of additional successes equal to any Resolve points spent (in addition to those spent to activate the Arcana or to bring others into the effect). The demon creates a number of turns outside time equal to the successes. From the perspective of those caught in these created moments, the rest of the world stands perfectly still. When the allotted turns end, characters outside of time reenter the flow of causality wherever they are. Those who experience turns Beyond Now may use them to do whatever they want, but immediately return to time if they physically harm someone helplessly frozen inside time. If anyone else remains Beyond Now, they witness the violent character suddenly freeze in place with the rest of the world.

- **Certainties of Chance (4):** Prerequisites: Fortunate Guess. From merely observing the flow of chance, the character may now direct the outcome with a reflexive Resolve roll (difficulty 7) or by spending a Resolve point. The character may determine the outcome of a completely random event however desired or apply a difficulty modifier of +/- 1 to a roll involving a combination of skill and luck. Only one use of this Arcana may affect a roll.

- **Foretell (6):** Prerequisite: Fortunate Guess. The character may discern likely events of the future with a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8). Each success permits the player to ask one question about a specific event or outcome yet to come, and the Storyteller must answer as truthfully as possible given her knowledge about character plans and motivations. Predictions are never completely accurate, but serve to model likelihoods. Only God sees the fullness of time with clarity.

- **Fortunate Guess (2):** The character gains an uncanny intuition for the flow of chance and destiny. He can deduce the outcome of any random

circumstance just before it unfolds with a Wits + Awareness roll (difficulty 6). The player does not choose the outcome, but knows how a die will roll, who will draw the short straw and so forth.

- **Open Gate (7*):** Prerequisite: Step Between, Portal Mastery. The demon bends or tears space into a brief portal connecting its location with another place. This requires the same roll and rules as Step Between. If successful, one “end” of the portal appears within three yards and the other opens at the destination. Portals can have a diameter as wide as three yards, but cannot intersect a solid object. Opened portals last for one turn only before contracting shut.

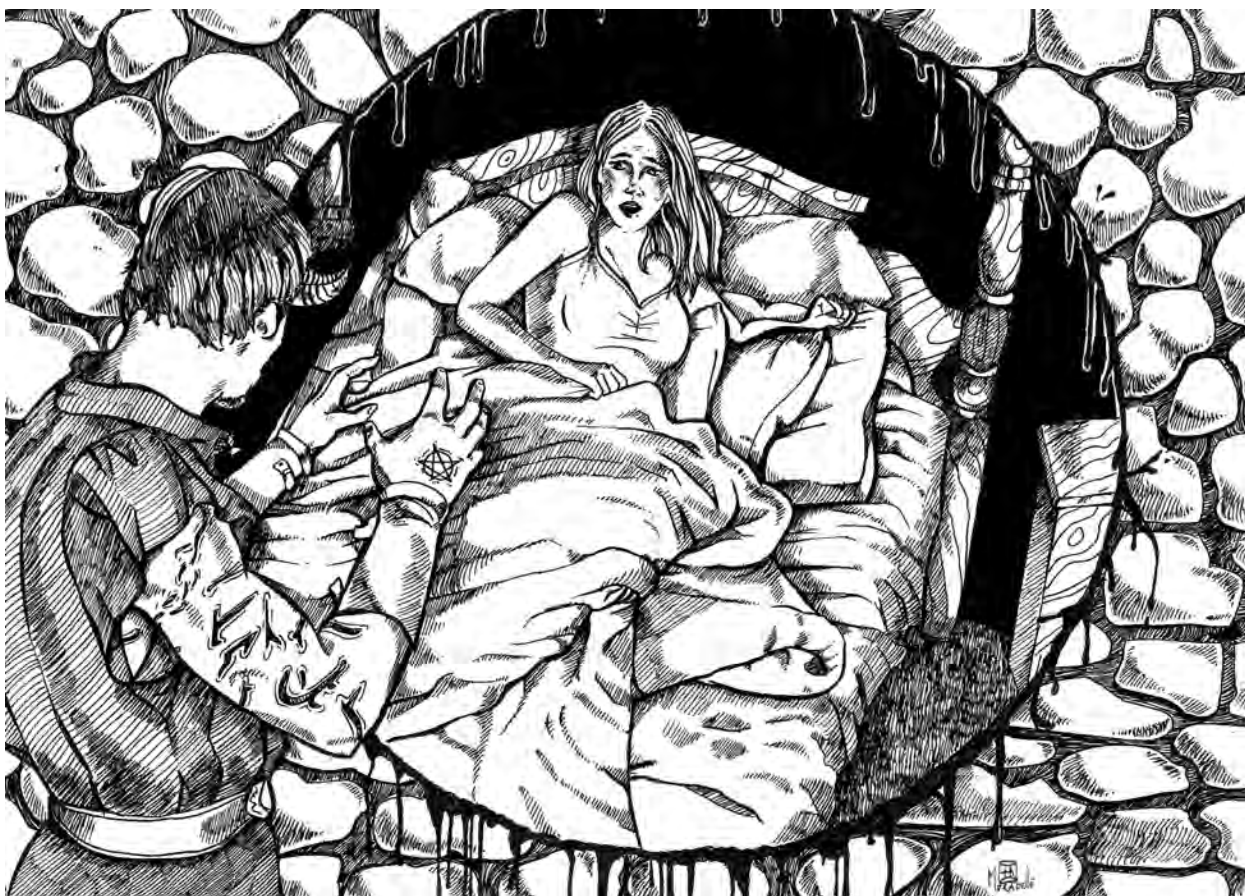
- **Portal Mastery (3):** The character lays her hand upon a door, window or other point of entry that she desires to open or seal. Her player rolls Resolve (difficulty 6–9 depending on the construction of the portal). Success unlocks and opens the portal or closes and locks it.

- **Premonition (4):** Prerequisite: Fortunate Guess. Like a spider in its web, the character senses vibrations in the strands of fate when danger approaches. Although he only receives a moment of warning, this is enough to infallibly ward against

ambush or similarly hostile surprise. He may not be fast enough or clever enough to escape the danger, but at least he can attempt to respond to it. The character adds his Resolve rating to his initiative rating, and always acts first in case of a tied initiative.

- **Scry (5):** The character concentrates and names a location, object or being familiar to her. She must have visited the location, touched the object or met the target in the past. The target must be within a number of miles equal to her Resolve or the effect automatically fails. This range may be cumulatively doubled for each point of Resolve spent for that purpose. The player rolls Resolve (difficulty 7 for locations or the target’s Willpower for beings), with each success revealing the target and surrounding location for one turn. This period can be extended to a full scene for a cost of one Resolve point. The character may use as many senses to perceive the target as the number of successes rolled.

- **Sharpened Senses (2):** The character attunes his preternatural awareness to unravel the hidden details and secrets of the world. Each purchase of this Arcana provides a cumulative –1 modifier to all Perception difficulties. A character may not pur-



chase this Arcana more times than his Resolve, and cannot reduce the difficulty of a roll below 4.

- **Shortened Path (5):** The character reaches out her will through space and pulls, guiding a specific journey to take less time than normal. The character chooses her destination and her player rolls Resolve (difficulty 8), adding one automatic success for each Resolve point spent. If successful, the character feels the tug of her destination and must begin moving toward that place. So long as she does not stop and moves of her own accord (walking, swimming or even flying if she has wings), the duration of trip is divided by (the successes rolled +1). Characters may also reflexively use the quickening afforded by Shortened Path for smaller bursts of speed, multiplying the distance traveled in a single movement action by the (successes rolled + 1).

- **Step Between (7/10):** Prerequisite: Shortened Path. Beyond the shortening of journeys lies the ability to traverse space without movement. The character must have visited or seen his intended destination in the past or viewed it remotely with magic. The player spends one point of Resolve and rolls Resolve (difficulty 6). Each additional point of Resolve spent beyond the first adds one additional success to this roll. For one success, the character may travel anywhere in his current line of sight. For two successes, the character can travel up to a mile away. Three successes increase the distance to five miles. With greater skill, the character can move 20 miles per success over three. If the character lacks sufficient successes to reach his intended destination, the effect fails. A botch transports the character in a random direction, counting every "1" rolled as a success for the purpose of determining range. The character gently warps space, vanishing and reappearing in a blur of light or wavering shadow. A character using this Arcana never inadvertently materializes inside a solid object, but appears at the closest valid location to his intended destination.

- **Touch From Afar (10*):** Prerequisite: Scry, Resolve 6+. The demon extends its preternatural will to use Arcana on a distant target. Touch From Afar is resolved exactly like a use of the Scry Arcana (see above), including limitations on range and the difficulty, but the activation roll is the demon's Resolve and each attempt costs one Resolve point. The range of this Arcana is unlimited if the character targets another demon on Earth whose True Name it knows. If successful, the demon may use any other Arcana to affect the target, provided the victim is a valid target for that power. Arcana de-

ployed in this fashion that have a radius of effect centered on the target. Without a use of Scry or a similar effect, the demon has no way to know how successful the deployed Arcana proved.

- **Twist of Fate (1):** The character inherits friends, fame or wealth by a disturbing preponderance of strange coincidence. This Arcana reflects a deliberate warping of the divine plan, whether caused by a demon for itself or invested in a thrall to the same effect. Every purchase of this Arcana awards a dot in one of the following Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Influence or Resources. Each dot obtained through Arcana takes up to a month to appear, so a pauper would need five months to "find" the obscene wealth of Resources 5. Demons can slow this rate for the beneficiary in order to attract less attention from curious and jealous authorities and clergy, or simply use the obtained power of the Background to interfere with unwanted inquiries. Characters purchasing this Arcana during character creation have already inherited their ill-begotten gains in full when play begins, and may pool them with other characters as normal. Owing to their supernatural origin, Background dots obtained with this Arcana are shielded from the vagaries of random chance. A character robbed or taxed of her infernal Resources finds that circumstances replenish her wealth at the rate of one dot per month, just as a demon stripped of Contacts by a plague will discover new information sources in the aftermath. The Storyteller should exercise creativity in arranging unlikely coincidences.

Arcana of Force and Element

These powers create or redirect the fundamental forces and elemental patterns of energy that form the primordial foundation of the universe.

- **Celestial Radiance (7/5):** The character may emit and control light by unveiling the burning power of her soul. The player rolls Resolve (difficulty 8), adding one additional success for every Resolve point spent. One success allows the character to create simple parlor tricks with light for a scene. She may conjure these effects anywhere within two yards, summoning dancing will-o-wisps, sprays of sparks or even causing her eyes to glow. None of these effects produce more illumination than a guttering candle. Two successes allow for more complicated illusions of light manifesting anywhere the character can see throughout the scene. The apparitions remain crude abstractions of light, but can have almost any shape and color. The character may alternately envelop herself in an aura of light as bright as a torch. The

aura's color normally correlates with the character's Vice; in the case of wrath, the nimbus of black fire glows a throbbing maroon the unmistakable color of dried blood. Three successes grants light with the brilliance of a bonfire, either centered on an incandescent orb or flaring around the character as a brighter and more impressive aura. Ranged attacks on a character shrouded in such an aura add +2 to the difficulty from the glare. Thralls with this Arcana cannot generate effects greater than three successes. Four successes requires Resolve 5+ and generates enough light to turn night to noon for a large courtyard or glade. The demon can be a figure of blinding brilliance or evoke spectacular effects like a pillar of light ascending nearly a mile into the sky. An aura created at this level of success adds +3 to the difficulty of all ranged attacks and +1 to close-range assaults. Five-success effects require the demon to have Resolve 7+, but can illuminate an entire battlefield from blackest night to the twilight murk of radiance diffused through the air itself. If the demon chooses to release the entire effect as a single flare, everyone who stares at the flash goes blind (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 304) unless their players make successful Wits rolls (difficulty 8) to turn away or blink in time. Blindness is permanent for mortals, who forever see the afterimage of divinity burned into their brains. Supernatural beings recover after 10 – Stamina hours.

- **Invisibility (5):** The character blurs and fades from view, shrouded from the eye of the world. The player reflexively rolls Resolve (difficulty 7), vanishing from sight for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. This duration extends to one scene for a cost of one Resolve point. Invisible characters leave a faint blur where they pass, allowing extremely astute onlookers to spot them with a reflexive Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 9) made at the beginning of each turn. Once an onlooker actually spots the blur, the difficulty of the next turn's detection roll drops to 6 and remains so until the witness fails one of the Alertness rolls or otherwise fails to see the character for a turn. Unless they spot the invisible character, opponents attempting to attack an invisible character add +2 to the difficulty of close-range attacks and cannot make ranged attacks at all.

- **Shadow Mastery (7/5):** The character may control darkness by exerting the greater darkness of his damned soul. The player rolls Torment (difficulty 8), adding one automatic success for every point of Resolve spent. All effects evoked with this Arcana last a scene unless otherwise noted. For one

success, the character may deepen existing shadows in a sphere with a radius in yards equal to Resolve, centered anywhere in line of sight. This reduces the difficulty of the character's Intimidation rolls by –1 against those who witness the effect, whether or not they actually realize anything supernatural happened. In addition, characters attempting to sneak through the darkened area reduce the difficulty of Stealth rolls by –1. One success can alternately darken the character without affecting the environment. His body dims as though recessed in deep shadow (–2 difficulty to Stealth rolls through dim environs) and his eyes may dilate into pools of empty blackness to peer through the deepest darkness with perfect clarity. For two successes, all shadows obey the character, distending at will and moving to project shapes quite different and often more fearsome than their actual sources. Mortals who see this obscene shadow puppetry suffer a one die penalty to all Social rolls from unease unless their players make successful Courage rolls (difficulty 7). Alternately, the character may darken himself to an inky silhouette, reducing the difficulty of pertinent Stealth rolls by –3. Three successes allow the character to conjure the essence of shadow as a cloud of impenetrable darkness. This effect is similar to the Obtenebration power Nocturne (**Dark Ages Vampire**, p. 200), generating a cloud anywhere in line of sight with a total diameter in yards equal to the character's permanent Torment. Those caught inside this semi-tangible darkness suffer the same debilitating sensory deprivation as imposed by Nocturne. Mortals and animals in the cloud panic as described for Nocturne. Three successes can alternately create a single wave of constricting force capable of extinguishing a single non-magical source of flame up to the size of a bonfire. Thralls cannot exceed three-success effects. Four-success effects require Torment 5+ and function like Nightshades (**Dark Ages Vampire**, p. 200), generating a number of illusions equal to the demon's permanent Torment or a zone of roiling darkness with a diameter in yards equal to the demon's permanent Torment x 5. Roiling darkness does not affect vampires with Obtenebration, infernal characters with this Arcana or beings with similar power over darkness. Five-success effects require Torment 8+, but the demon can instantly snuff out every flame and source of illumination within sight to a maximum radius of one mile, leaving that area blanketed in roiling darkness like that produced with four successes. Alternately, the demon can direct the

darkness to swallow a single target within line of sight, trapping her in an oubliette formed from the essence of Hell. The target must achieve five successes on a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to escape the effect; failure causes the closest patches of darkness to reach out and swallow her. This horrific experience drains one Willpower point and leaves her paralyzed in a limbo of absolute nothingness for a number of hours equal to the creator's permanent Torment. When this duration ends, the darkness reluctantly disgorges its prisoner at her original location. Mortals imprisoned in a shard of the Abyss gain a derangement.

Taints and Pacts

While Torment serves as the primary source and limiting trait for Arcana, infernal characters may also pay a more direct price. This infernal cost comes in two forms: Taints and Pacts. The former share the same overall breadth and diversity as Arcana, reflecting the varied ways Torment can ravage body or mind instead of pooling in the soul. Both demons and thralls may use Taints as a "quick fix" to get around the fatal side effects of high Torment, particularly for thralls lacking sufficient Resolve to survive long. Of course, this solution creates its own problems. Physical Taints tend to be highly visible, while a plethora of mental debilities make thralls considerably less reliable and useful. Fortunately, thralls have a third recourse in the form of Pacts. These oaths of fealty and devotion generate the faith necessary to sustain additional investments of Arcana, while simultaneously ensuring the thrall's obedience. Characters may not have more points of Taints and Pacts combined than (Willpower x 5).

Taints

These curses follow the same rules and format as Arcana.

- **Accursed (2–10):** The character suffers a Curse (*Dark Ages Vampire*, p. 308) with a rating equal to half the value of this Taint.

- **Altered Diet (3):** The character can no longer subsist on mortal food, but must now eat according to a more "refined" palate. She may be required to devour insects, ashes, human flesh or blood, or even stranger and more grotesque things (depending on the creativity of the player). For every day the character goes without eating a meal-sized portion of the substance, she suffers a level of unsoakable lethal damage and loses a dot of Stamina (to a minimum rating of one dot). Each day of

"proper" diet restores one of these lost Stamina dots, but damage must heal normally.

- **Apparition of Enmity (3 or 5):** For three points, the character's shadow or reflection reveals his inner Torment. Demons appear in the damned visage of their Apocalyptic Forms, while thralls generally appear savage and warped like demented parodies of humans. For five points, the Torment seeps to pollute reflection and shadow. Characters wearing angelic visages in their Apocalyptic Forms still show the accursed truth of their natures in their shadows and/or reflections as appropriate.

- **Attribute Loss (3):** One of the character's Attributes diminishes by one dot per purchase, also dropping the maximum rating she may achieve in that trait by a like amount. The character may not link this Taint to an Attribute aided by an Arcana or vice versa. Appearance may not suffer loss, since deformity is covered under Disfigurement (see below).

- **Beacon of Evil (6):** The character's Torment bleeds forth in a spiritual miasma, proclaiming his unholy presence. Characters standing within a number of yards equal to the character's permanent Torment feel mildly ill as they sense something unclean nearby.

- **Bound by Hospitality (7*):** Demons cannot enter the garden of creation without permission of humankind, as expressed through summoning. Fallen with this Taint take that restriction even further, and may not enter a mortal's dwelling without verbal permission from the owner or a legitimate occupant. Until then, an invisible barrier of force keeps these demons from entering through any open doors or windows. Once a demon receives permission to enter a particular structure, it may thereafter do so without asking again unless the owner specifically tells it that it is no longer welcome.

- **Celestial Amnesia (6*):** Only demons with mortal hosts may take or retain this Taint. The character knows its names and has a very rough idea of its original function, but remembers virtually nothing of Hell or the time before and may not access memories with Torment.

- **Consumed (10/20):** The character suffers gradual Consumption at the rate of one health level per day regardless of Torment. Characters with sufficiently high Torment decay at their usual rate. This Taint is worth 10 points for demons, though fallen who become Earthbound must remove this Taint as soon as possible. For thralls, this Taint is worth 20 points, but the Taint may not be removed once invested.

• **Dead Soul (8**):** The thrall has lost the final vestiges of mortal grace and no longer generates Resolve points through rest.

• **Derangement (1 or 3):** The character's mind decays with the growing stain of Torment, lost to frightening madness. The character receives three points for the first derangement purchased and one point for each supplementary form of madness added to that. See p. 261 of **Dark Ages: Vampire** for more information on derangements.

• **Disfigurement (1–5):** The character's mortal form undergoes metamorphosis toward abomination, though his Apocalyptic Form (if any) remains unmarred. For one point, he develops a grotesque or traditionally demonic feature easily hidden beneath normal clothing, such as a "witch's nipple" or other unusual birthmark. If discovered, this mark serves as evidence of his allegiance to Hell, but otherwise inflicts no particular drawback. For two points, the mark is either more extensive yet concealable (a patch of scales or fur on the back; living tattoos slithering and undulating beneath the skin, etc.), or subtle but difficult to hide (hairypalm, equal-length middle fingers, or a suspicious mole). For three points, the marks require effort to conceal and betray obvious supernatural origin (golden eyes like a cat, forked tongue, sharp teeth, patch of skin the color and density of rock). Mortals who notice the character's aberrations might seek aid from clergy or secular authorities to hunt the demonic character. For four points, the disfigurement cannot be concealed except perhaps by the robes and wrapped cloth of a leper, triggering fear and panic in any mortals who behold the loathsome visage (additional and perhaps uneven eyes, spider-like chelicerae, limbs withered in skeletal claws or bloated into monstrosity. The penalty to most Social rolls rises to +2 and the character cannot have an Appearance greater than one dot. For five points, the character is only barely recognizable as human, with unsightly aberrations and flesh reworked into the very mien of nightmare (Appearance 0). People run screaming from the horror of the character's grotesquerie.

Characters may also have Disfigurements that exclusively apply to their Apocalyptic Forms, but this reduces the value of the Taint by two points (so characters must take deformities normally worth at least three points to derive a single point of benefit). Characters may have different degrees and manifestations of Disfigurement in each form by purchasing this Taint twice. Demons with Disfigurements applied to their Apocalyptic Forms always appear damned and cannot spend Resolve to appear as angels.

• **Faith Seared (6 or 12):** The character suffers double damage from holy ground and relics, and makes the Resolve roll to resist at a minimum of difficulty 7. Alternately, the character loses one point of Resolve for every health level suffered. For 12 points, the character suffers both effects.

• **Greater Aura (3):** For every purchase of this Taint, the character applies a additional +/-1 to the aura modifier imposed by her Torment rating. She exudes sin as a stinking incense, a walking blasphemy against virtue. No matter what its value, this modifier cannot increase the difficulty of a Social roll above 9 or reduce it below 4.

• **Husk (3*):** The fallen remembers nothing from the host it possessed, but may only draw on its own fragmentary memories of banishment in the Abyss and time as an angel. It may not start with a modern language unless it has learned the language since its release.

• **Incompetence (2):** For each purchase, the character adds +1 to the difficulty of all rolls for an Ability he has at least one dot in. His mind recoils from intuition and learning.

• **Malefic Contagion (8*):** The demon's sin reaches out to stain other souls. Damned characters with a lower permanent Torment and lower Willpower rating than the demon must resist degeneration every hour they spend in the character's presence. Vampires must also resist degeneration if their Road ratings are greater than the demon's permanent Torment (at difficulty 4).

• **Mindless Fury (8):** When provoked or angered, the character must check to resist frenzy like a Cainite (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 263), substituting Resolve for Self-Control in the case of demons. Infernal characters do not generally regard hunger as a provocation, though the Vice of gluttony may override that limitation; and adherents of wrath may feel the urge to kill at the sight and smell of blood.

• **Nature's Bane (6):** The character experiences pain and even injury from an unlikely natural substance. For demons, this Taint represents rejection by their former dominions. Former angels of rivers may find running water poisonous, while naked stone and uncut jewels burn the skin of their former lords. Once transformed and processed by human will, the substance no longer causes the demon harm, so water trapped in a cistern would prove safe, as would cut gemstones. Storytellers should ensure that players do not select substances needed to live (unless the character has Arcana enabling continued survival without the substance).

In the case of thralls, this Taint takes the form of an extremely severe allergy. Regardless of the reason or nature of the dangerous material, characters with Nature's Bane suffer one die of unsoakable bashing damage for each turn of direct skin contact they maintain with the offending substance.

- **Nightmares (2):** As the Flaw (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 305).

- **No Legs (4 or 7):** The character has no legs, perhaps oozing along like a slug, or with a body trailing into serpentine coils or the quivering tentacles of a cephalopod. For four points, this mutation only applies in the character's Apocalyptic Form, and therefore requires that Arcana and a three-point Disfigurement as prerequisites. For seven points, the gruesome mutation applies in both mortal and Apocalyptic Form, and the character must have sufficient Disfigurement in both forms to have Appearance 0.

- **Plague Bearer (3):** The character carries a deadly disease. Although personally immune to this plague, she is highly contagious and cannot ever purge her system of the disease.

- **Sleeping Horror (10*):** Prerequisites: Beacon of Evil, Torment 5+. The demon radiates waves of palpable evil. Extremely pious characters (including the Blessed) experience vivid and disturbing nightmares concerning the demon if they sleep within a number of miles equal to its permanent Torment. Unpleasant as these dreams are, they yield cryptic clues to the demon's location, powers and identity. Dreamers can try to recall and interpret their nightmares with an Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 8). Each success reveals one useful hint chosen by the Storyteller. Demons suffering from this Taint must constantly move or seek remote sanctuaries, or they risk attracting the zealous attention of the Inquisition.

- **Sin Addict (4):** The character suffers the effects of Vice Addiction (p. 97) regardless of his Torment rating. Additionally, the minimum difficulty to resist a temptation is 6.

- **Sun-Seared (8, 10 or 15):** The character experiences the pitiless judgment of God echoed in the pure rays of the sun. For eight points, the character suffers damage from exposure similar to vampires (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 257), but the damage is lethal and rolled instead of applied. For 10 points, the damage remains lethal and may be soaked by characters capable of soaking lethal damage, but sunlight now inflicts health levels instead of dice. For 15 points, characters suffer aggravated wounds exactly as vampires, though they may resist with any aggravated soak obtained through Arcana. Unless they spend Resolve to materialize, a demon lacking a vessel only suffers one



level of damage each turn and may use its great speed and incorporeal state to flee into the sanctuary of darkness. Earthbound demons do not suffer damage from sunlight while hiding in their reliquaries or demesnes, but cannot regain Resolve while sunlight touches their vessels. Earthbound with this Taint who manifest their Apocalyptic Forms in sunlight suffer the appropriate damage but may regain Resolve normally.

• **Uncontrolled Arcana (2 or 5):** One of the character's Arcana activates on its own at inopportune moments, directed without regard for friend or enemy by his suppressed malice. Uncontrolled Arcana is worth two points if the malfunctioning power represents a bothersome annoyance or five points if the outbursts usually prove dangerous to the character or bystanders.

• **Touch of Death (2):** As the Flaw Touch of Frost (*Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 308).

• **Truly Damned (5**):** Thralls with this Taint check for degeneration according to the same rules and difficulty as demons.

• **Wounds of Pride (1 to 6):** The character suffers pain and injury when calling on her Arcana. For each one-point purchase, one of the character's existing Arcana causes her pain. For six points or upon the sixth purchase, the Taint applies to all Arcana. Powers tied to this Taint inflict one level of unsoakable bashing damage per activation. Constant and innate Arcana do not trigger this damage, nor may characters link them with the Wounds of Pride Taint. Most characters with this Taint suffer damage in the same manner as they would suffer Consumption.

Pacts

Unlike Taints, Pacts follow a set formula determining their value. The greater the demands on the thrall, the more faith her fulfillment of the agreement generates. Demons can turn that faith back to imbue their servants with the spiritual fortitude needed to absorb additional Arcana.

All Pacts have three important variables that interact to govern their final ratings: Obligation, Frequency and Consequence. These variables come together to form a crude pledge in which the thrall promises "I will/will not do (Obligation) at a regular interval of (Frequency) or I will suffer (Consequence)." Everything else merely refines or defines this pledge into an actual oath of devotion.

Obligation

This variable represents the specific action a thrall promises to perform or avoid. Since each thrall is different, acts of devotion are entirely relative. A poor farmer accustomed to hunger views fasting as an unavoidable reality, but hardly the life-changing sacrifice bemoaned by a pampered and obese merchant. As a result, the measure of an Obligation depends heavily on a character's concept. The severity of an Obligation determines its value according to the following guidelines:

- 1 The thrall promises a seemingly trivial task of no real importance to the demon or herself. Alternately, she promises to avoid something extremely rare or pledges abstention from something she already avoids for other reasons.
- 2 The character promises a task or abstention that requires minimal effort or presents little inconvenience.
- 3 The thrall swears to perform an action requiring moderate effort or slight danger. Alternately, he pledges avoidance of an action he would otherwise do, but one that he feels no particular emotional attachment toward.
- 4 The character promises an action requiring serious effort or danger to complete. Instead, she may forswear an act she enjoys or an act that requires serious effort to avoid.
- 5 The thrall promises a task requiring grueling effort or extreme peril. Instead, he may sacrifice something dear or pledge to avoid an act he enjoys immensely and would otherwise perform on a regular basis.

Frequency

This variable determines how often a thrall must fulfill her duty or avoid the forbidden act defined by Obligation. Unlike Obligation, individual concept does not adjust the values associated with Frequency.

- 1 The thrall must perform the required action once a day or abstain from the forbidden action at all times.
- 2 The character must give the promised service three times a week or avoid the banned act most of the time (exceptions decided at the sealing of the pact).
- 3 The thrall must perform the action once a week or abstain from the forbidden act approximately half the time. Obligations of avoidance cannot have a higher Frequency rating than three.

- 4 The character must perform the action biweekly.
- 5 The thrall must give the service once a month.

Consequence

A thrall can fail to meet her Obligation, either by doing something forbidden or not performing a task as promised. If the character could not fail, the Pact would require no real effort to maintain and would not generate faith. Thus, the final variable determines exactly what its name suggests: the consequence of failure. If desired, a thrall may suffer multiple consequences for a single failure. Such compound Consequences have a rating equal to the sum of their component punishments, but these cannot have a rating greater than four. Only certain death merits a Consequence rating of five.

Storytellers should only inflict the full Consequence of a Pact on a character who fails to meet his Obligation by choice. Those forced into disobedience only suffer a rating 1 Consequence as a warning.

- 1 The Pact terminates and the thrall suffers *one* of the following effects: She loses a number of Arcana with a total value no less than the value of the Pact (determined when the Pact is sealed). She gains a number of temporary Torment points equal to the value of the Pact. She manifests a Taint with the same value as the Pact (decided when the Pact is sealed). Instead of ending the Pact, the character may alternately lose a point of Resolve *or* lose a point of Willpower *or* suffer a level of unsoakable lethal damage upon each instance of failure.

- 2 The character suffers one level of unsoakable aggravated damage or gains a dot of temporary Torment.
- 3 The character suffers extreme bad luck, forcing one roll of the Storyteller's choice to result in an automatic botch. No force of will or magic can counteract this catastrophic failure. Alternately, the character permanently loses a dot from an Ability (decided at the sealing of the Pact); only experience can restore the loss.
- 4 The thrall's permanent Torment rises by one dot or she permanently loses a dot from an Attribute (decided when the Pact is sealed); only experience can restore the loss.
- 5 The thrall suffers a horrific, agonizing death.

Putting It All Together

With all variables determined, the final value of the Pact equals (Obligation rating + Consequence rating – Frequency rating). This value must be greater than zero for the Pact to have any spiritual use. Finally, the wording of the Pact should receive any final adjustment for unusual or complicated clauses. For example, a relatively minor Pact could read “I will say a prayer of thanks to my master once a day or find my soul wracked with despair (i.e. lose a point of Willpower).” This Pact incorporates Obligation 2 (a prayer of thanks), Frequency 1 (interval of one day) and Consequence 1 (lose one point of Willpower), for a final value of 2. A more serious Pact could read “I will never kill another thrall of my master or I will die.” This incorporates Obligation 2, Frequency 1 and Consequence 5, for a final value of six points.





CHAPTER FOUR: CHRONICLES OF SIN

“Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self place, for where we are is hell,
and where hell is must we ever be.”
—Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

Games centered on infernal protagonists can take as many forms and directions as games involving other supernatural beings. The fallen inherently evoke themes of damnation versus redemption, but such epic struggles of morality need not dominate a story completely. Chronicles could focus on the political intrigue of an infernalist cell struggling to avoid the agents of a hostile demon and the inquisitors of the Church, while dangerously playing both sides against one another. Conflicts could also focus on the immediate danger posed by an ancient devil who witnessed or perhaps contributed to the fall of Rome, leaving very little time to consider philosophy. Particularly horrific and mildly comical stories could address the difficulties a demon might have pretending to be mortal and keep a low profile. Then too, thralls must maintain a convincing semblance of normality to make good spies or agents.



Dealing with Torment

Steeped in their own pain and anger for countless ages, every demon newly summoned from the Abyss has a permanent Torment rating of 10. In most cases, this rating never decreases. Such fiends burn through host after host, cutting a swath of terror and death until misfortune or a sufficiently powerful enemy sends them screaming back to the Abyss. Others follow the path of the earliest demons to escape Hell, inhabiting a reliquary or demesne to hide from God's punishment. For a precious few of the fallen, another dangerous path exists.

Ritual of the Sundered Soul

Although no one knows who invented this rite or when, the underlying principles parody the sacrament of confession. During possession, a demon instinctively pushes aside the tattered soul of its new host and usurps flesh and memory. Demons who know the Ritual of the Sundered Soul may also usurp the divine grace God built into every mortal. For one horrifying and glorious moment, the demon views its own naked monstrosity from outside itself. It sees what it has become and how far it has fallen. The revelation shatters the demon's own soul, tearing away the most tainted parts and casting the diseased shards back into the Abyss. This experience is traumatic beyond human understanding of the word, sharply reducing the demon's might even as it lightens the weight of sin on the fallen.

From a rules perspective, any demon with both Occult and Theology at 2+ knows the Ritual of the Sundered Soul is possible. Performing the ritual requires a Resolve roll on the turn after the fallen successfully possesses a mortal host (difficulty 6 – the number of times the demon has attempted this rite in the past). Each success strips away a dot of permanent Torment and a dot of permanent Resolve, plus an additional dot of Resolve merely for attempting the rite. Success also removes all Arcana. This ritual cannot reduce Torment below Resolve, but *can* reduce Resolve to 0, resulting in the immediate and irrevocable annihilation of the demon. Botching the roll expels the demon from the host and sends it back to Hell.

Owing to the extreme danger of performing the Ritual of the Sundered Soul, few demons risk possible destruction and certain weakening for anything so tenuous and abstracted as morality. Demons with Torment 10 are monsters who no longer desire repentance, having fallen so far into sin that they have become sin. Of these monsters, the few who warily attempt the Ritual of the Sundered Soul do so

for pragmatic reasons, or because they do not actually understand the full risks involved. As with vampires and their precious roads, the reduction of Torment allows a demon to move more openly among mortals and provides “moral camouflage” against the Blessed and other beings capable of sensing infernal taint.

The Ritual of the Sundered Soul makes demons playable as protagonists. Such creatures are dramatically weaker than their brethren, closer to human in both power and morality. They remain damned, but the ritual opens the slim possibility of repentance. A Torment 10 demon has no desire for grace and will never seek a reduction of its bloated sin. Conversely, a Torment 5 demon has the opportunity for a second chance. Such characters can hold onto their newfound morality and even repent further toward the elusive goal of redemption, but they can also spit in the face of God's mercy and return to the bleak glory of damnation. Ultimately, penitent demons are *rare*. Perhaps a dozen exist in all of Europe, so an all-demon game involving penitents represents a miracle in its own right.

Repentance

True repentance may be possible or not, depending on the artistic vision of the Storyteller. If God's judgment is perfect and final, then the damned are truly damned and every act of atonement merely serves the cruel lie of hope. **Dark Ages: Vampire** already provides a similar system in a Cainite's road, particularly the Roads of Heaven and Humanity. Vampires can ascend to paragons of their philosophy, ironically holding themselves to a loftier moral standard than the mortals around them. Yet even they remain blood-drinking monsters unable to transcend that state. The best they can do is hold on to their tattered souls against the inevitable fall into monstrosity. How long can they last? A century? A millennium? Until the end of the world, when at last they perish forsaken and cursed? Only the elusive and semi-mythical state of Golconda permits anything more, and even that moral awakening still leaves the vampire a vampire.

So what of demons, then? Their Torment works in reverse of Road to gauge morality, but the principle remains the same. A demon can stave off and repent of Torment, but even demons with Torment 1 remain damned in the semblance of angels without grace. If a Storyteller accepts that repentance is possible, then the demon can seek absolution. It won't be easy, but nothing worth doing is easy. At the very least, the character must have a permanent Tor-

ment of 1, no temporary Torment and should almost certainly acquire the Penitent Merit (p. 100) to reflect its search for higher meaning. And then? The Storyteller can set any requirements and certainly need not reveal them in advance. Mortals in the Dark Medieval labor toward the hope of their final rewards without proof that they are right. Mortals do this because they *believe*, and their faith sets them apart from the jaded cynicism of the damned host. It stands to reason then that the fallen must also believe if they would know the blessing of redemption.

As a final consideration, what happens to a demon who actually finds absolution? If it returns as an angel to its God, does it resume its former duties? In many ways, it makes sense that repentance should mark the climactic end of a demon as a playable character. When the last link in its chains of Torment snaps, the Abyss holds it no longer. It ascends, its taint melts away and reveals... something indescribably beautiful and miraculous. The Storyteller can narrate this transformation as a touching epilogue to the chronicle as a whole. As demon vanishes and ascends in pure light, the world dims. It may find itself drawn back to Heaven to receive the welcome of angels it has not seen since the before joining Lucifer's rebellion. The Storyteller can end with the character approaching the throne of the Creator or simply experiencing His love as a force the Storyteller will not bother trying to describe.

Perhaps the prodigal angel does not leave the Earth at all, but suddenly sees the angels moving invisibly through the world. They never left. God never abandoned His creation or withdrew His angels, but those fettered to the Abyss simply could not see or interact with their brethren. Now the angel sees. Now it understands. The others stop in their flight and turn with beatific smiles to name the angel's task and receive it back into their fold. The end.

Other epilogues are possible, of course, but should affirm the hard work put in by the player instead of making redemption into a glorified "suicide" for the character.

Thralls cannot find a transcendent redemption, but neither do they *need* such atonement. Unlike demons, mortals have the capacity for grace built into their souls. God forgives any sin if confessed and repented... even the sin of consorting with Hell. Ultimately, Torment is a foreign disease introduced to the souls of thralls, not a default state. While demons cannot reduce their Torment below the limit imposed by their

Arcana, thralls who break this barrier forsake one of their Arcana to lower the limit accordingly. A thrall who surrenders all her ill-begotten blessings and falls to permanent Torment 1 and temporary Torment 0 may reduce her permanent Resolve. This costs a number of experience points equal to the current rating. With permanent Resolve and permanent Torment at 1, the thrall can perform an act of heroic virtue and spend 10 experience points to forsake Hell altogether. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of whether the act demonstrates sufficient piety, and most thralls pay for their freedom with the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. Freed thralls lose Torment, Resolve, Vice and every other infernal trait. Their former demonic masters feel a sudden pain as all Pacts shatter.

Damnation

Unlike the long bitter path of repentance, damnation comes only too easily to infernal characters. Demons emerge from Hell as monsters, and even those who undergo the Ritual of the Sundered Soul often squander their reprieve by allowing sin to reclaim them. Torment carries severe disadvantages that require managing, but the trait also represents the potential to manifest or receive Arcana. This creates a dilemma for infernal characters. Those seeking redemption eventually risk being caught powerless by enemies and killed or consigned back to Hell as appropriate, but they cannot truly atone without letting go of their fear. This fear often drives characters to hoard Arcana and covet power, but that fear quickly devolves into worse sin until they wield preemptive malice to destroy all enemies real or perceived. Other characters fall more slowly or more quickly, but all eventually succumb unless they devote tremendous moral discipline to resisting their Torment. In the end, characters who wallow in terrible glory deserve an equally terrible fate. Storytellers should not hold back the hostility of the Inquisition or older demons who feel threatened by the upstart. Sin begets sin, and the wages of sin are death. Any story featuring a damnation moral arc can only end tragically.

For thralls, the unchecked growth of Torment inevitably kills them, and they do not have the option to steal another body and begin life anew. Conversely, thralls never know the true damnation of Hell. God built the Abyss to contain the fallen, not their slaves. Whatever the final dispensation of the human soul, thralls need never fear the prison of their masters. There may be another hell for mortal sinners, or annihilation or



some other unpleasant fate in store, but death removes thralls from the dominion of the infernal.

Demons in the Dark Medieval

Despite the many intriguing possibilities inherent in playing a chronicle composed of thralls (or even demons), the infernal probably works best in the hands of the Storyteller. Any of the **Dark Ages** games can benefit by the introduction of infernal antagonists, largely for one very simple reason: Few factions in the Dark Medieval, no matter how abhorrent, cannot agree that demons and those who serve Hell are a true blight upon the world and should be destroyed.

Demons in Dark Ages: Vampire

Cursed by God to eternal hunger, darkness and the erosion of their tattered morality, the children of Caine have much in common with the infernal host. And yet for all their lamentations and arrogant use of the title, vampires are not truly damned. They dwell in the world, free to experience its sensations

and pleasures even if only through the warped awareness of their undeath. If denied the sun, then at least they see the stars and moon, feel the breath of wind on their faces and the Earth beneath their feet. Demons have no such pleasure in their prison, denied everything except pain and futile anger. Is it any wonder demons marvel at freedom, rejoice in stolen lives and indulge their urges given the first chance?

Demons make superb foils for undead characters. The fallen prey upon the souls of humanity even as vampires gorge on blood. Does that make a demon's spiritual hunger cleaner or more perverse? The fallen can tempt a vampire away from the path of righteousness and redemption, challenging an adherent of any road. How can those on the Road of Heaven pass up an opportunity to speak with a being who beheld God, and yet how can they reconcile this curiosity with the fundamental prohibition against associating with demons? The fallen could tutor Cainites on the Road of Sin, but do they lead their pupils into freedom from the laws of God and man, or into the slavery of Hell? All moral quandaries take on new elements and new urgency in the presence of the infernal.

Systems

Possession: At first glance, vampires make perfect hosts. Their feeble and tattered souls flicker with only the dimmest spark, easily crushed by ambitious demons

eager to usurp the unliving flesh for their own use. Few demons are so foolish, however. The blood of Caine carries a curse imposed by God upon that monstrous race. Such blood seethes with the poison of Torment. A demon unwise enough to attempt possession of a vampire spends one turn in agony while it automatically gains a number of temporary Torment points equal to the vampire's current blood pool. At the end of that turn, the demon loses one point of Resolve and falls out of the vampire's body, once more seized by the pull of the Abyss.

Demons can possess ghouls, but the act of possession converts the body's current blood pool of vitae into points of temporary Torment for the demon. Thereafter, the host body is a mortal like any other, now held unaging by the demon within. A demon in possession of a body who drinks vampire blood does not fall under the blood oath or become a ghoul, but gains a point of temporary Torment for every blood point ingested.

Thralls: For all that they lack souls of any consequence, Cainites make surprisingly powerful thralls. Upon becoming a thrall, a vampire loses a dot of permanent Willpower and gains a dot each of permanent Resolve and Torment. The vampire loses the aura of her road, trading it for the aura of her new Vice (often gluttony, wrath or pride). Whenever the vampire sins against her road and fails the usual degeneration check using Conscience or Conviction, she does not necessarily lose a dot of Road. Instead, she gains a dot of permanent Torment. The vampire's maximum Road rating is now (10 – her permanent Torment), meaning that continued degeneration both increases Torment and decreases Road. A vampire whose Torment rises above her Resolve does not suffer damage from Consumption, but instead must pay the difference between the ratings in additional blood points to animate herself upon arising each night. The vampire gains whatever Arcana and Taints/Pacts her master bestows, and may purchase Disciplines as Arcana for a cost of six points per dot. Unlike mortal thralls, vampires cannot produce their own Resolve and require the investment of "feeding" Arcana (such as Sin Eating, p. 115) in order to replenish their stores of spiritual power. Vampire thralls weary and wary of their Beasts can request the special Arcana "Chained Beast" from their masters for a cost of only three points. Thralls with this Arcana lose their Road entirely, but become largely immune to frenzy and Röttschreck. They retain Virtues to oppose their Torment and thereafter contend with degeneration as mortal thralls. The Beast no longer tries to gain control or impose its urges, but obeys the vampire's master like a hunting hound. At will, however, the

demon can rouse the tamed Beast to drive the vampire into either frenzy or Röttschreck as desired. The state of rage or panic lasts however long the demon desires, ending as abruptly as it began when the demon feels it has made its point.

Other: Infernal characters have an effective Road rating of (10 – permanent Torment) for the purposes of effects based on that trait. While thralls have Virtues like vampires, demons have an effective Conviction and Self-Control rating equal to their Resolve, and Courage equal to their Willpower (maximum 5).

Demons in Dark Ages: Mage

Demons and mages share a strange and often uncomfortable symbiosis which players and Storytellers using **Dark Ages: Mage** can exploit. On the one hand, many demons owe their freedom from the Abyss to a summoning ritual performed by a curious or ambitious sorcerer. On the other hand, mages often have the will, power and knowledge to bind summoned demons into slavery, a fate the fallen host bitterly resent. In turn, mages frustrated with the patience and effort demanded by their magic can always barter with demons for the easier power afforded by Arcana, but at the hefty price of thralldom and its associated Torment, Taints and Pacts.

From the perspective of **Devil's Due**, demons take credit for the existence of mages. After all, the fallen awakened humanity to full self-awareness. At Lucifer's request, they taught mortals the fundamental principles of the universe they built in the age before time. Some mortals listened and learned, and found that will and word could reshape the universe even as the Divine Word made it. Such pride rivaled the hubris of the fallen, but the seed of godhood now lay in the soul of every mortal. Modern mages do not remember; they do not suspect their powers have a demonic origin or even wonder why demons can imbue them with power so easily.

From the perspective of **Dark Ages: Mage**, demons are spirits. They are powerful spirits to be sure, locked away in an inaccessible realm of the Umbra by some unknown force or design. Perhaps kindlier spirits or gods placed them there, or perhaps early mages drove the demons from the face of the Earth so humanity could prosper. Demons have their uses as slaves or tutors, but they remain extremely dangerous; and pacts are never worth the price.

Systems

Possession: A demon can possess a mage, but the mage adds her Foundation to her Willpower to resist the attempt. Furthermore, a demon who as-

sumes control of a mage's body has only the memory of power. Nothing remains of the host's Foundations, Pillars or any other traits specific to being a mage. If the demon ever leaves and the host survives the separation, her suppressed powers reassert themselves immediately.

Thralls: A mage who agrees to become a thrall loses one dot of Willpower and gains a dot of permanent Torment. She receives one dot each of Conscience, Self-Control and Courage, plus an additional 7 dots of Virtues divided however the player decides (in accordance with the mage's personality). The mage starts with permanent Resolve equal to her Foundation, though the traits remain separate thereafter. Unlike other mortals, enthralled mages regain a number of Resolve points at sunrise equal to the successes obtained on a Foundation roll (difficulty 7). Mages receive Torment, Taints, Pacts and Arcana like other thralls; the vast spiritual potential they wield still requires the stain of swelling Torment or Taints/Pacts to permit much investiture of Arcana at first. An enthralled mage does not project the aura of her Foundation, but instead projects the aura of her Vice. Finally, whenever a mage thrall botches a casting, each dot of permanent Torment counts as an extra die that came up "1" for the purpose of determining Backlash severity. Enthralled mages can purchase dots of Pillars and Foundation as Arcana for cost of 8 and 12 points each respectively.

Demons in Dark Ages: Inquisitor

Devil's Due provides a marvelous companion to **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**. Demons assuredly lie in their assertions that angels made the world at God's behest, for Scripture teaches that God personally created the world. Demons speak more truthfully in the account of Lucifer's rebellion and the damnation of his host. The shadow Inquisition knows that diabolists summon demons to Earth, and that the fallen take mortal hosts or inhabit blasphemous icons to escape their righteous banishment from the world. Indeed, the Inquisition largely exists to root these devils out and cast them back into the Pit. Storytellers may use **Devil's Due** to create fitting and terrible enemies for games involving inquisitor protagonists, or reverse the roles for games featuring demons as the central characters. The Inquisition's ruthless hunt does not distinguish gradations of Torment or care that a demon seeks repentance, though the Blessed might well mistake a low-Torment demon for an angel. An entire demon chronicle could involve unending flight from a merciless inquisitor in the vein of *Les Misérables*, or pit the

Blessed and the damned in a high-stakes war for the souls of the innocent. Demons can perform showy miracles in a rival's territory to attract the scrutiny of the Church, or perhaps a low-Torment demon could serve as an inquisitor's mysterious patron from afar, hoping to find salvation in aiding God's chosen servant.

Systems

Possession: Although the Blessed do not understand why God allows His chosen instruments to suffer possession, they realize that they must be ever vigilant against the wiles of the Adversary. Fortunately, grace provides a measure of protection. A Blessed character adds his highest Superior Virtue to his Willpower to resist possession, and cannot be possessed at all by demons with a lower Resolve than his highest Superior Virtue.

Thralls: Should one of the Blessed forsake the grace of God for the accursed power of the enemy, then God forsakes her in turn. She loses all positive traits of her former grace (Blessings, Conviction, Superior Virtues, etc.) but retains all Curses.

Other: The Blessed may exorcise a demon from a reliquary or mortal host using the Holy Rite of Exorcism (**Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, p. 195). If successful, the *ritus* has the same effect as any other exorcism (p. 106). Some Inquisitors also know a level-three *ritus* to cleanse penitent thralls of their infernal taint (see sidebar).

Demons in Dark Ages: Werewolf

From the perspective of the Garou, almost everything in this book is a lie. Werewolves do not believe in

ABSOLUTION OF THE DAMNED

Level Three Holy Art *ritus*

This *ritus* requires the thrall to confess her sins and earnestly beg the mercy of God. The inquisitor lays on hands and his player rolls Intelligence + Holy Art against a difficulty of the thrall's permanent Torment + 3 (maximum difficulty 10). If successful, the thrall loses all Resolve, Torment, Arcana and Curses, becoming a normal mortal once more. The price of this absolution is high, inflicting one die of lethal damage for every five points of Arcana the former thrall had. This damage can and very often does kill the thrall, but at least her soul dies cleansed of sin.

an omnipotent deity attended by a host of angels. They find the very idea offensive and even laughable. After all, werewolves behold and live in an animistic world surrounded by spirits of every type and purpose. The spirit world defines them as surely as the material plane. And yet the fables of the Church deny that reality, proclaiming all spirits as demons save those who fit the impossibly narrow and rigid definition of angels. Such lies anger the warriors of Gaia, for they know that demons exist. Werewolves call their demons Banes, and refer to the hapless monstrous hosts of evil as fomori. Banes tempt mortals into perversity and worse, and the Garou war against them wherever they smell the stench of the Wyrms. The cunning Banes described in this book have found a way to manipulate the encroaching Church as a weapon against Gaia by masquerading as the very demons the Church fears. It is all too easy to play the part; with every depraved act they wreak, Banes sate themselves and draw the indiscriminate wrath of the Church and its Inquisition upon communities still loyal to Gaia. With every miracle performed in the name and form of the Christian Hell, Banes turn mortal believers away from the old gods to the Church, cultivating the convenient doctrine that *all* spirits serve the forces of evil. The world dies a little more with every blasphemy.

With all this in mind, the demons of **Devil's Due** make excellent adversaries for stories rooted in the cosmology of **Dark Ages: Werewolf**. Most of the rules stay as they are, even if they mean slightly different things. Demons unclothed in flesh are Banes, and those with hosts are fomori. Resolve translates easily to polluted Gnosis, much as Torment represents the obscene Rage of the Wyrms. Thralls serve Banes in exchange for power and raise cults to feed the Wyrms. Everything fits cleanly, reinterpreted to accommodate the way werewolves understand their universe.

Of course, what if the werewolves are wrong? Storytellers running games rooted in the Judeo-Christian cosmology of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** and **Devil's Due** may wish to incorporate werewolves on their own terms. Where do Lupines fit in this model? Like mages, werewolves may owe their existence to demons. Perhaps they claim descent from the half-breed children of demons and mortals, nephilim degenerated into bestiality. A werewolf's Rage suggests the stain of Torment and the Vice of wrath, and what is Gnosis if not misplaced Resolve? Or perhaps demons created werewolves independently of themselves, as hybrid weapons of beast and man or as a failed experiment to breed self-perpetuating thralls. Whatever their respective origins, werewolves and demons rarely mix without violence.

Systems

Possession: The souls of werewolves blaze with spiritual power, leaving no room for demons to enter and seize control. Kinfolk lack this immunity, though any inherited spiritual powers are suppressed for the duration of possession.

Thralls: Most werewolves know the dangers of dealing with Banes and no honorable Garou would ever consider making a pact with the Wyrms. Nonetheless, some werewolves fall to temptation on account of envy for packmates, Pride in their incorruptibility or any of the other Vices demons know so well. Black Spiral Dancers have no such qualms and many embrace the power of Torment with unholy zeal. In any case, a Garou who becomes a thrall loses one dot of permanent Willpower as normal. Instead of granting Resolve, the pact taints the werewolf's Gnosis. Thereafter, his Gnosis is considered Resolve for the purposes of rolls and points spent, though spent Gnosis returns as normal. Unlike mortals, werewolves may have Gnosis/Resolve above their Willpower. Enthralled werewolves also gain dots of permanent Torment equal to their Gnosis rating, though the two traits remain separate thereafter; and werewolves test for degeneration exactly as demons. The thrall's new master can invest Arcana and Curses up to the usual limits, though the higher levels of Resolve and Torment provide substantially increased potential for the demon to work with. Werewolf thralls can purchase Gifts as Arcana for a cost of two points per level of the Gift. Werewolves can have any Vice, though wrath is most common. Kinfolk become thralls as other mortals do, gaining infernal power at the cost of all their birthrights save immunity to the Delirium.

Other: The Gift Sense Wyrms (**Dark Ages: Werewolf**, p. 113) detects the presence of demons and thralls with a difficulty equal to (10 – the target's permanent Torment). This stench radiates a number of yards equal to the infernal being's Torment rating. Outside of the Black Spiral Dancers, regular use of this Gift ensures that enthralled werewolves must flee from their packmates or risk destruction as the disgraceful abominations they are. Thralls are not immune to the Delirium by nature, though their demonic masters may grant them this immunity as a one-point Arcana. Demons are immune to the Delirium, regardless of what form of host they inhabit.

Demons in Dark Ages: Fae

Demons and the fae largely avoid one another, if only because they have no particular reason to associate or make war. Demons do not remember encountering the fae before their imprisonment,

leaving the infernal host uncertain of their origins. Did one of the early Earthbound spawn the race for some unknowable purpose? Did God or His loyal angels introduce these beings after the rebellion, perhaps from another hidden world created by the hands of divinity? Or perhaps most frighteningly, did humanity as a whole dream the fae into being with the power of their collective faith? After all, the imprisonment of the fallen host left hordes of cultists without anything to worship, and the fae embody powerful belief in their strange oaths and Echoes.

For their part, the fae understand even less about demons, not that most concern themselves too deeply with the strange perversities of the infernal. As long as demons want to antagonize the Church, the Courts of the fae applaud their efforts... at least until the Church retaliates with a cell of inquisitors. Likewise, fae don't particularly care overmuch if demons build cults and take slaves so long as they don't recruit mortals the fae depend on for oaths.

Systems

Possession: Demons generally find the true fae too alien to possess under any circumstances. They are too alive to serve as reliquaries and not human enough to serve as hosts. As in so much else, they have nothing to offer the damned. Changelings can suffer possession, but may substitute their Mists rating for Willpower to resist (if that trait is higher).

Thralls: Only changelings may become thralls, trading a dot of permanent Willpower for a dot each of permanent Torment and Resolve and whatever Arcana, Taints and Pacts the demon grants. Changelings follow the same rules as other mortal thralls, save that they lose one dot from the maximum rating they can have in Mists for every 10 points of Arcana they have.

Demons and Ghosts

The souls of mortals never appear in the prison of the Abyss, but pass on to some hidden fate ordained by God. Ghosts exist between death and that fate, trapped by their inability or unwillingness to let go of life. Some demons consort with the restless dead on occasion, and many certainly contribute to the numbers of unquiet shades. Just as commonly, victims of spectral haunting attribute their suffering to demons, which sometimes draws the attention of actual demons intrigued or offended by the mistake. On the whole, the fallen consider the living far more useful than the dead, since ghosts cannot provide worship or serve as thralls. Still, some former angels of death lord over masses of the restless as grim tyrants, using cruel Arcana to enforce their reigns.

Systems

Possession: As spirits, ghosts cannot suffer demonic possession. The restless dead can also possess mortals, however, so a demon wishing to usurp an inhabited body must overcome the Willpower of its current tenant rather than the host's soul. Success drives the ghost out and turns control over to the demon.

Thralls: The dead cannot be enthralled, nor may they contribute Resolve through worship or by witnessing a Revelation. Slain thralls lingering as ghosts do not retain their infernal traits and owe no fealty to their former masters.

Baking Horrors

While the vast majority of the angels who rebelled against God still languish in Hell, a goodly number have escaped in the ensuing millennia. A few of the more active demons, their plans and their cults, are detailed here.

Belial

Save perhaps Satan himself, no demon is more powerful and more unspeakably evil than Belial. He is Leviathan, the Great Beast, defiler of all that is holy; and his power beggars human comprehension. If he were to join Lucifer in the crusade to wrest Heaven from God, then the Apocalypse would be no more than a handful of years away. Fortunately for the sake of humanity and all Creation, Belial is obsessed with his hatred of Lucifer, and cares far more about finding and destroying his former lord and master than for anything else, even usurping the throne of Heaven. In order to destroy Satan and claim his power, Belial would give up mastery of all Creation, or indeed reduce Creation to ashes.

Belial is an immensely powerful demon of pride, whose arrogance will not allow him to ever accept Satan's pre-eminence in the infernal order. He has the capacity to cause and control all manner of natural disasters, especially storms and earthquakes. He is also a creature of darkness and rage, who can control shadows and awaken uncontrollable anger, terror and madness in human minds. Because he only maintains small cults, though, Belial rarely expends his precious resources with such black miracles. Instead, he prefers to act through his thralls and pawns, saving overt displays of strength for emergencies.

Cults

Because he focuses solely on stalking the Devil, Belial's cults are small and scattered. Every new worshipper, while a useful tool, requires manage-

ment and precious resources; so Belial maintains only a small number of insular, secretive cults, who rarely seek new members. What his thralls lack in quantity, though, they make up for with quality. Belial seeks out mortals who are obsessed with secrets and the arcane, sorcerers and pagan wizards who already possess some control over the divine power within their souls. He promises them power and knowledge in return for their service, and the chance to use that dread power against their enemies. (Such important individuals always have enemies, and Belial speaks to their hunger for power and their arrogance in their own skills, for he is a demon of pride.) After supplicants join Belial's service, he "blesses" them with dreadful powers and Taints, in exchange for absolute loyalty. Should one of his cultists turn against him, no matter how powerful or trusted, Belial instantly kills him and devours his soul.

One of the largest, and most abhorrent, of Belial's cults is a druidic order called the Children of Myrrdin, which haunts the forests of Wales and Cornwall. While once part of the Old Faith, these mages split from their Fellowship centuries ago to follow Belial's teachings. Through the years the Children have maintained their numbers, recruiting new apprentices when existing members become too old and insane to continue their worship. The Children perform blasphemous, obscene rites of cannibalism, rape and torture, twisting the magic of earth and tree to create deformed servants and unnaturally extend their lives.

First and foremost, though, the cult seek to plumb the secrets of the ley lines that criss-cross the world, conduits of mystical power that the angels laid into place eons ago to aid in their creation of all reality. The Children use the lines to see things from afar, and to send magical energies to blight and twist remote locations. Belial's chief desire is that the Children use the ley lines to scry the location of Lucifer, so that Belial may finally find and destroy his hated foe. The Children do not understand the true nature of the quarry they seek; all they need know is that a rival power to their master exists, a black divinity that must be found and destroyed. To do this, the Children need to gain access to a major ley line nexus, such as Stonehenge, but most of these sites are already controlled by the mages of the Old Faith or by Garou septs, who will resist any attempt by the blighted demon-worshippers to usurp their places of power.

Activities

Unlike the other archdukes and most lesser demons, Belial's soul resides in a small, portable

reliquary, an twisted statue of black stone that disturbs and unsettles all who see it. This makes him far more mobile than his kin, and he uses this to his advantage. After the fall of Rome, Belial's reliquary was moved across Europe and Asia Minor, transported by one cult into the care of another.

Centuries ago, Belial decided to cease his wanderings and develop a stronghold in a place of power, a place to direct his minions and keep watch for his hated rival. That place was Jerusalem, the nexus of all three Abrahamic faiths. Belial's thralls secretly carved out a temple beneath the streets of the Holy City, placing his dark statue upon an obscene altar. From this secret redoubt in the Middle East, Belial's tendrils of control reach out across all of Europe and Asia, from the Children of Myrrdin in England to the Gaki-Daishi cult of Japan and everywhere in between. His power is subtle but omnipresent, and his reliquary remains safely removed from the attentions of his rivals.

In the wake of the Sixth Crusade, Jerusalem remains a city of tensions and intrigue, with Crusaders and Saracens still clashing sporadically under an uneasy truce. While Belial has no interest in mortal society or the fate of Jerusalem, he recognizes the significance it holds for European civilization — and the interest other demons have in it. Because other demons seek to control the armies of both Christianity and Islam for their own plans — plans developed in part by Satan — Belial seeks to worm his way into the power structure of those armies, as well as the diplomatic and mercantile forces of the city. With agents watching for signs of demonic involvement, he will be able to attack any demon who dares surface in Jerusalem, and rip any knowledge of Lucifer's whereabouts from the doomed monster. Belial is thus unusually active in seeking worshippers in the Holy City; and his thralls are actively seeking new candidates, men and women consumed by arrogance and greed, to serve their dark lord.

Abaddon

Another of the archdukes who were the first to escape Hell's confines, Abaddon is a blighted canker on the face of Creation, a being of sickness and pestilential might. Like Belial he has few rivals in power, but unlike the Great Beast he is willing to work with his fellow demons and Lucifer. With Asmodeus, Abaddon took control of Rome and worked to make the city into the sick heart of a corrupt Empire, commanding lesser demons and taking tribute from them in the form of followers and faith. The days of empire have vanished now, and Abaddon has little trust for his fellow demons; but he can tolerate the presence of his inferiors, and is

prepared to work with them once again if it brings greater devastation within his grasp.

Abaddon is a lord of the flesh, and of its corruption and degradation. Disease and plague are his to command, as are poisons, cancers and sores. He can reshape the flesh of his thralls, or of helpless innocents, with a whim, bursting them apart with tumors or ripping them to shreds with muscle spasms. He is a demon of wrath, although he tempers his constant rage with an inhuman intelligence, so that his true target is always the first to fall before his unstoppable rampages. He often gifts his thralls with inhuman strength or resilience, as well as both immunity to disease and the ability to spread it to others.

Cults

When Rome fell, Abaddon fled to northern Europe, and established a power base among several tribes of degenerate Viking raiders. Clustered in the desolate wastes of Norway, these tribes worshipped Abaddon in the guise of Loki, and massacred neighboring villages in unspeakably savage attacks that even their fellow Vikings found abhorrent. With the coming of Christianity to the North, though, these tribes began to dwindle in power and number; and now only a few hundred Norsemen worship Abaddon and his weyrs of sickness. Called the Black Blood tribe, they are massive and deformed warriors, and they live only to destroy.

The nomadic tribe moves across Greenland, Norway and Scandinavia in raiding parties, keeping a low profile as they travel only to erupt in savage violence on isolated villages and sometimes larger towns. Their main purpose is simple destruction, glorying in rape and murder unfettered by reason. In their wake, diseases spread throughout the survivors, and the land is left corrupt and tainted, a breeding ground for horror. Several septs of the Fenrir have come into contact with Black Blood raiding parties; the werewolves see them as servants of the Wyrms, not realizing the true nature of the evil that drives the half-human warriors.

Another cult worshipping the Lord of Filth is less overt and violent, but perhaps far more dangerous. The Tainted Saints are a loose cult of lepers, spread across the face of Europe, who worship Abaddon and the diseases that ravage their flesh. Members of the cult preach that leprosy is the Great Leveler, a divine judgment being visited upon the ruling classes and lords of Europe. When the disease infects everyone, then everyone will be equal, and the ones who have suffered the longest will rule their fellows in a kingdom of pestilence and decay. Leprosy afflicts all the great kingdoms of Europe, and leper colonies fester and rot across the Dark Medieval. The message of the Tainted

Saints, whispered from ear to rotting ear, is tempting and powerful; and Abaddon's cult grows larger and larger in the darkness.

Activities

Abaddon knows the ways of men and their civilizations, having worked his corruption upon Rome in the past. But Rome fell, and the demonic empire Abaddon had constructed rotted away. The demon lord has learned something from that, and from the failed attempts at empire building that littered the Dark Ages. He still desires to bend empires to his will, to spread his contamination throughout the workings of human society, but he does so carefully now. He is hampered by his rage, which forces him into impetuous and ill-considered atrocities, but he reins that rage in as best he can and directs it away from the prizes he seeks to win. His pawns hold rank and power in the armies of the Sixth Crusade, and send their troops to massacre innocents and commit dreadful crimes upon prisoners, allowing their master a measure of catharsis.

Over the last century, the Lord of Filth has become increasingly interested in Cainites and the empires of blood they control. Cursed by God, vampires do not possess the divine spark living humans have, and thus they can provide demons with no faith or divine strength. But while other demons ignore Cainites as irrelevant for this reason, Abaddon sees a different potential in the unliving, especially in their need for blood and their immunity to disease. If he were to gain Cainite followers, they could spread his plagues for eternity without faltering, corrupting the blood and flesh of all humanity. Early attempts to convince vampires to worship him have been unsuccessful, though, for he has little to offer them as an incentive to become his typhoid angels. Currently, Abaddon conducts hideous experiments with the blood of his thralls, hoping to make it both infectious and addictive to the palates of Cainites, and plans to unleash the results in the streets of Paris and London.

Vassago

Called the Seer of Scorn, Vassago was called from Hell by an insane Jainist cult in Golconda, India, and bound into a massive diamond of unparalleled value. From this glittering prison, he led his Saffron Eater cult to prosperity and power over their neighbors in the Chalukyas region. But Jainism began to wane, battered on three sides by Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, and the cult's power dwindled. In an attempt to rekindle his power base beyond Golconda, Vassago ordered his cult to cut away

fragments of his diamond reliquary, which he imbued with his own dread power. Cultists transported many of the fragments out of India and into Asia Minor; over the course of centuries, they were bought and sold and traded, finding their way into the treasure houses of kings and popes. Each fragment is a conduit to Vassago's spirit, allowing him to perceive and manipulate mortals in the diamond's presence. Many have been set into jewelry, rings and crowns worn by wealthy and powerful mortals, who hear the whispers and temptations of Vassago in their dreams and nightmares.

Vassago is a demon of envy, who takes a sick joy in seeing the dreams and hopes of mortals turn to ashes and wormwood. His powers are subtler than those of many other demons, but no less effective despite the lack of bloody, flaming spectacle. He has the power to foresee the future, in rough terms, and can perceive the fates and destinies of mortals (and how to prevent such destinies from being realized). He has power over dreams and nightmares, visions and portents; he can read the thoughts and memories of mortals, and plague them with curses of misfortune and madness.

Cults

Not for Vassago the public and flagrant heresy and sin of some demonic cults. He is a subtle monster, and so are those who worship him. As well as the Saffron Eaters of Golconda, he has a number of secretive, influential cults scattered across Europe. Most of these cults focus around one wealthy or powerful individual, a man (or occasionally a woman) who owns a diamond of exceptional color and value. The cults preach not just greed but vengeance; the acquisition of power and the humiliation and destruction of any who would dare compete with the members of the cult. Most are independent cells, but a number of groups in Western Europe interact and cooperate in their master's service.

Political and economic power are the weapons of Vassago's cultists, rather than overt sorcery or military might. Led by visions, his thralls invest wisely and gain further monetary wealth, while their enemies die or weaken as a result of unfortunate accidents and mishaps. Such bending of the patterns of fate leaves a mark on the fabric of reality, and several members of the Order of Hermes have detected the presence of *something* interfering with the natural order of things. The wealthy Cainites of the High Clans, while blind to such magical power, nonetheless see rivals taking over parts of their financial empires and are moving to shut out the thralls of Vassago — but they are opening themselves to far greater dangers than they realize.

Activities

Vassago's reliquary still resides in India, protected by fanatical cultists. But the cult is increasingly under attack by the caliphate of Qutb-ud-Din, who sees it as a repellent and unwelcome sect of blasphemers. In order to remain safe, Vassago wishes to transport his vessel out of India, most likely to Europe. While the diamond is relatively small, the suppression of the cult makes it difficult to transport the diamond in safety; and the lack of established trade and travel between India and Europe is another major barrier. Vassago's primary desire in Europe, then, is to open up trade relations with India, so that his European thralls can collect his reliquary and transport it. His thralls in Paris and Brussels are working towards this aim, and a cargo ship — crewed entirely by thralls, a hideous temple constructed at its heart — may be ready to sail within the year. The other primary activity of Vassago is to increase the size and power of his cults in Europe, to ensure he has many followers if and when he finally arrives.

Orobas

A warped, primal force of gluttony and physical lust, Orobas manifests as a grotesque, toad-like figure, at once slightly comical and deeply, viscerally repellent. Summoned millennia ago and bound into a statue of wet, slimy sandstone, Orobas has spent much of the last 500 years dreaming in stasis, his cult destroyed, his worship forgotten. It was only 30 years ago that a too-inquisitive Waldensian scholar, after reading ancient church documents about an abhorrent sect, discovered the demon's reliquary buried in a German bog; his descent into madness was the trickle of warped faith the demon needed to return to unnatural life once more. Now Orobas looks upon a world vastly changed from the one he recalls, but he cares not for such petty details. All that matters is his desire to feed.

Orobas is a demon of gluttony, and not a complex or subtle one. Obsessed with the pleasures (and horrors) of the flesh, he burns with insatiable and inhuman lusts. His infernal powers pertain mainly to the gross physical aspects of nature, and the appetites of humans and beasts. He is the Master of Toads, and can conjure up swarms of toads, rats, flies and other vermin. He also controls poisons, pollution and bodily waste, and can awaken uncontrollable hungers and lusts in mortals. His presence drives away most non-verminous animals, but leaves others deformed and aggressive.

Cults

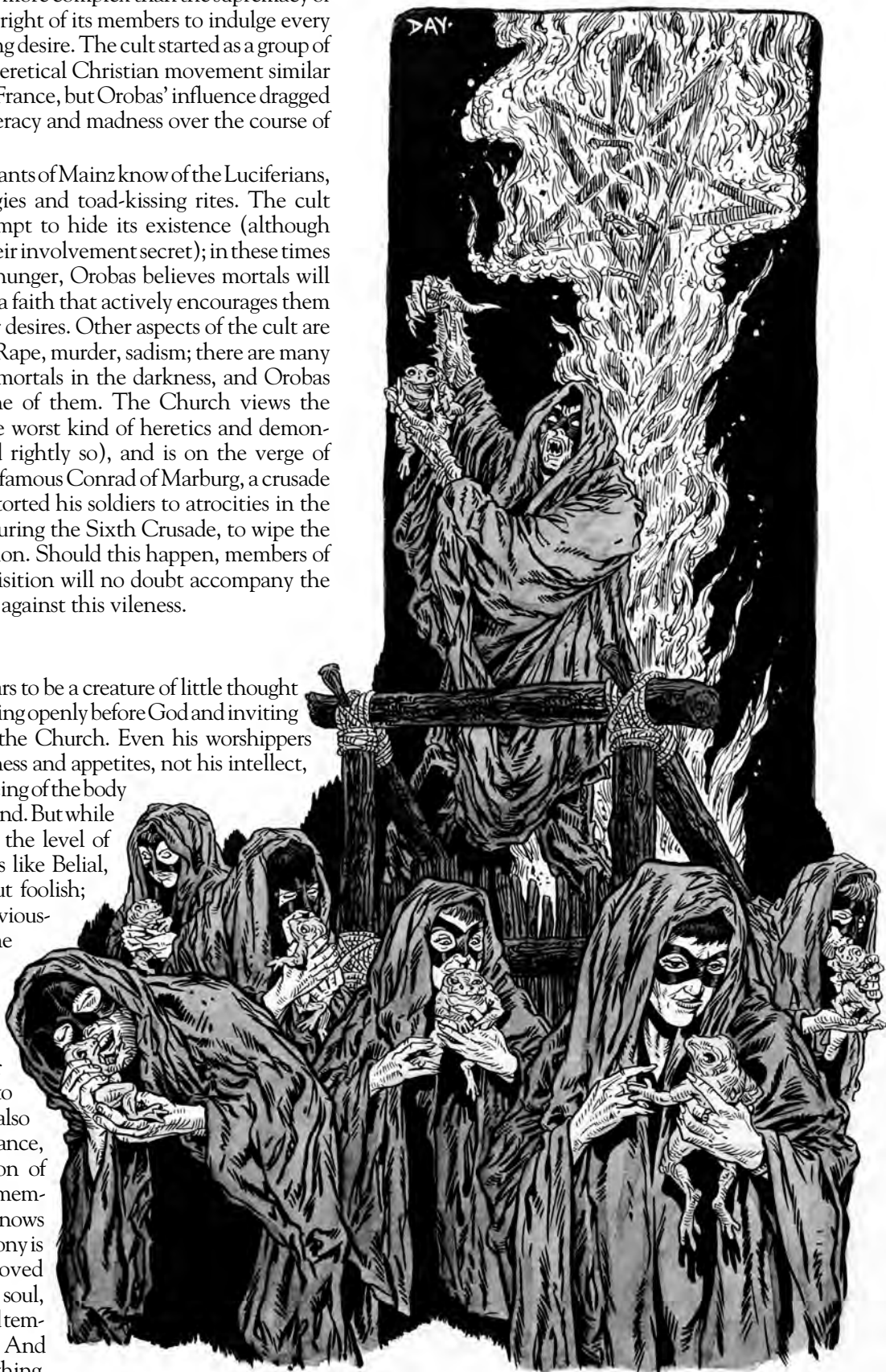
Orobas currently only has one cult, but it is widespread and quite visible. Called the Luciferians by outsiders, these degenerates lurk within the villages and towns of the Mainz archdiocese in Germany. The cult

preaches nothing more complex than the supremacy of the flesh and the right of its members to indulge every gross and sickening desire. The cult started as a group of Waldensians, a heretical Christian movement similar to the Cathars of France, but Orobas' influence dragged them into degeneracy and madness over the course of two decades.

Most inhabitants of Mainz know of the Luciferians, of their mass orgies and toad-kissing rites. The cult makes little attempt to hide its existence (although members keep their involvement secret); in these times of hardship and hunger, Orobas believes mortals will come running to a faith that actively encourages them to give in to their desires. Other aspects of the cult are even less savory. Rape, murder, sadism; there are many lusts that tempt mortals in the darkness, and Orobas permits every one of them. The Church views the Luciferians as the worst kind of heretics and demon-worshippers (and rightly so), and is on the verge of appointing the infamous Conrad of Marburg, a crusade preacher who extorted his soldiers to atrocities in the name of Christ during the Sixth Crusade, to wipe the cult from the region. Should this happen, members of the shadow Inquisition will no doubt accompany the "official" crusade against this vileness.

Activities

Orobas appears to be a creature of little thought or foresight, capering openly before God and inviting retribution from the Church. Even his worshippers venerate his foulness and appetites, not his intellect, and see him as a being of the body rather than the mind. But while Orobas is not on the level of inhuman geniuses like Belial, he is anything but foolish; and his brutish obviousness has a scheme behind it. From the minds of his followers, Orobas knows of the Church's power and intolerance to heresy — but he also knows of its arrogance, and its suppression of the desires of its members. The demon knows that lust and gluttony is never truly removed from the human soul, just controlled and temporarily ignored. And control is a fragile thing.



Orobas *wants* the Inquisition to come to Mainz, and to wipe out the Luciferians; he cares nothing for his followers, and gains faith primarily from those who worship in secret. But in order to gain more followers, he needs power and influence, and no mortal organization commands more power than the Church. By making his cult so public, Orobas makes it a target — and when the Church comes to wipe it out, Orobas will be waiting for them, promising the inquisitors the chance to indulge every repressed and denied desire within their hearts. Should he succeed, the Church will leave Mainz far more corrupt than when it arrived, and every inquisitor will carry a toad in his robe.

Notable Infernalists

Even among such an exceptional group as those who serve and command demons, certain names stand out. Fueled by the will of their masters, slaves may achieve great notoriety, while those who manipulate the fallen develop their own fame — or infamy — among infernal circles. Cults and diabolic orders both call for strong leaders, offering opportunities for social-climbers to distinguish themselves. Thralls serving powerful masters might come in contact with any number of important mortals and ancient demons in the course of executing their masters' orders. While cultists might be well known only within their own circles, thralls and diabolists both have enough potential contact with the outside world to become quite well-known.

Sinner-Saints: Hagiographies of the Damned

Hagiographies — the worshipful, idealized biographies of Saints — are a popular form of literature in the Dark Medieval. Beyond providing compelling and often dramatic stories, hagiographies or “Saint’s Legends” offer models of how devout Christians should live their lives. Stories of these saints’ lives are usually modeled after Christ’s life, including miracles and eventually martyrdom.

Infernalists in the Dark Medieval have their own stories of devout followers of perverse faith. These anti-hagiographies present two different models of the lives of important thralls, diabolists or cultists. Some follow the same pattern of the Christian hagiographies, presenting loyal servants of demons as saintly figures performing miracles through the power of their faith. Perhaps they even believe they still serve God. Others unabashedly show the debauchery of these infernal men and women who revel in their sin and dark miracles, worshipping their demonic masters as fervently as any saint ever worshipped God. Many cults

keep infernal hagiographical texts as reading materials for new members to display the might and wonder of the fallen lords of Hell.

The Passion of Brother Gratianus

May the Angel of Storms watch over his flock now and forever.

The Lord gifted Brother Gratianus with unusual talent for painting. Brother Gratianus praised God and all His angels through his brush, creating beautiful depictions of Heaven for the lowly creatures of Earth. Gratianus rejected all worldly pleasures and joined the Franciscan Order, so that he might continue to praise God free from the sins of flesh and mortal wealth. So, pleased with Gratianus’ worship, the Lord sent unto him the angel Athaniel of Storms to bless him and make him the instrument of divine work.

The angel Athaniel appeared to Gratianus in all the terrible splendor of Heaven and planted His holy kiss upon Brother Gratianus’ brow. Then Gratianus awakened to his own divine spirit and raised his brush again in praise of the angel, who brought all the colors of Heaven and Earth to be his palette. Gratianus painted the angel and His prophet Genevria, and Heaven rejoiced in the wonder of Gratianus’ art. Through his icons, mortals saw the light of immortal glory and flocked to the rightful worship of Athaniel.

The angel knew He must test His servant, and so He told Gratianus to leave His sight. Gratianus despaired, for he wished never to depart from his master’s side, but he obeyed without protest. This pleased the angel, who sent His beloved artist to spread the word of His glory and greatness to other misguided Brothers and Sisters. Through this, Gratianus was spared the wrath of the false servants of God, who descended upon the monastery to spread deceit and doubt, as Satan appeared to Christ in the desert to tempt Him with disbelief. The power of the angel was strong, and even when the heretics burned His prophet Genevria for her unwavering faith, the angel watched over her. Though her mortal body burned, her spirit ascended into the storm clouds, and as the rain fell at last upon the smoldering ashes, all knew that she resided with Athaniel in Heaven.

Athaniel spared His servant Gratianus to be His mortal hands on Earth, and though Gratianus, too, wished to stand beside his master eternally, he continued his worldly work as the angel wished. The new monastery was filled with unbelievers who had turned their backs on the truth of their faith, believing only the flawed book the false Church laid before them as proof. There Gratianus received another test to his faith in the guise of woman, for woman is the original tempter; but the pleasures of the flesh could not sway him from his faith. He denied the woman’s advances and forgave her lust, showing her the mercy of the Angel of Storms

rather than expelling her from the monastery as the other monks demanded. Through Gratianus' gift of blessed art, he brought the sinful woman into the rightful veneration of the angel Athaniel.

A veritable living saint, Gratianus has inspired the inhabitants of the monastery of Holy St. Ignatius to rescind their fallacious beliefs and to revere the true angel Athaniel.

Misplaced Passion: The angel Gratianus believes he worships is truly the demon Athaniel, freed from the abyss by the misguided demonologist Octinellus, whose body Athaniel quickly possessed. Gratianus is Athaniel's second thrall since taking a mortal host, enthralled shortly after the inspiring but ill-fated Sister Genevria. When Athaniel enthralled Gratianus, he invested him with a unique Arcana allowing Gratianus to create relics. Gratianus uses his Arcana to imbue his beautiful religious icons with the power to draw worshippers to Athaniel's cult.

When Athaniel's pseudo-angelic cult came to the attention of the shadow Inquisition, Athaniel chose to spare the obliging Gratianus rather than the more innovative Genevria, whose zealous worship of Athaniel was largely responsible for the Church's concern. Athaniel sent Gratianus to the Holy St. Ignatius monastery nearby to establish a second cell of Athaniel's cult. Gratianus woos converts with remarkable success, though he lacks the leadership skills and public presence that made Genevria such a successful, and ultimately self-destructive, prophet.

A monk at Holy St. Ignatius wrote the Passion of Brother Gratianus after viewing one of Gratianus' inspirational icons. The manuscript is often copied, and is a favorite of members of Athaniel's two cult cells. Proselytes of the cult also distribute the document in other monasteries, though additional cells have yet to form, possibly due to Athaniel's hesitancy to enthrall additional servants or appear before his cult in person. He communicates with Gratianus exclusively through their mental link, as his host body works to resist the ravages of Torment.

St. Adelard's Apotheosis

There is no God but Abaddon and the disease of the flesh which is Abaddon's reward to His faithful and punishment to bring the mighty to their knees and St. Adelard is His prophet. Once a mighty lord, Adelard was made humble by the power of Abaddon, who pulled him down from his unjust place of rule and infected him with the stigmata of all-flesh, the leprosy meant to pull kings from their thrones and make them as peasants. Then all will be equal among the ranks of men.

The Lord Abaddon sought the weak and beautiful Adelard to be His prophet, for only through the fall of the great shall the message be made clear. The Lord

touched Adelard and placed upon him the mark of humility, and sent His saint out among the people to spread His truth and His scourge. And whither Adelard walked, the common men knew him and rejoiced, and took unto themselves the divine plague of Abaddon.

When a great King said to Adelard, "Remove your filth from my kingdom," Adelard raised up his hands and rained the holy affliction down upon him. The King then saw his own foolishness and his arrogance, and knew that Adelard's gift was great and just. The King abandoned his throne to travel with Adelard and spread the message of Abaddon.

After many long years of traveling and teaching, Adelard grew too pure in spirit to wear flesh any longer. Before the eyes of a hundred witnesses, Adelard's spirit shed his flesh and fell in a rotting heap beneath the pristine whiteness of his bones, which stood proud and clean, arms raised upward in supplication to Abaddon. All those who witnessed the Apotheosis of St. Adelard took a piece of his flesh with them as they went, so that his divine teachings might spread throughout Europe, and all be made equal.

The Tainted Saint: St. Adelard never existed, at least not as his infernal hagiography portrays him. The figure of Adelard is actually an amalgamation of several thralls to the foul Archduke Abaddon, founder of the leprous cults of "Tainted Saints" who spread their disease and tempting message of equality throughout Europe. Many leper colonies claim to be founded by St. Adelard, each firmly believing the archduke's lie that the rotting disease infesting their flesh will somehow raise them above the kings of the Earth. Some of the Tainted Saints carry fragments of decayed flesh, supposedly Adelard's, as holy relics. If the stories of Adelard's apotheosis have any basis in truth, most likely these people witnessed the horrible end of a thrall succumbing to Consumption, his flesh eaten away by his uncontrollable Torment.

To the oppressed lower class, promises of social equity might even be enough to entice them to worship the Lord of Filth, unaware that this Archduke of Hell reaps their veneration and uses it to further contaminate human society, destroying it like a foul pestilence from within. The naïfs who believe the stories of St. Adelard are often desperately seeking any freedom from their hopeless, hapless lives of suffering and decay from leprosy. Believing their disease a divine affliction must offer the only modicum of comfort these poor souls ever experience.

Other Notable Infernalists

Not every demon-touched mortal deserves his own hagiography. In fact, the more dangerous ones are typically those thralls and infernalists whom no one has ever heard of at all.

Étienne le menteur

Étienne le menteur, or Étienne the Liar, is the charismatic leader of the Voleurs d'Enfer. Unbeknownst to the other Thieves of Hell, Étienne is also enthralled to a Hell-bound demon named Ereptorus. Once a pickpocket and bandit, Étienne now heads a group of skilled mortal diabolists who summon demons largely for profit. Étienne made his deal with Ereptorus out of fear for his life, not from any deep-seated belief in either God or demons. In fact, despite his many personal interactions with demons, Étienne remains pragmatic and unimpressed. His biggest fear is discovery of the hidden book containing his demonic master's True Name. Even from the Abyss, Étienne hears Ereptorus whispering threats of what will happen to Étienne once the demon achieves its freedom. Étienne does his best to ignore his master's voice and present a cheerful front, though its constant presence causes nightmares that often keep the man from sleeping. Though well into his sixties, Étienne appears as a man in his late thirties. Gray touches his black hair only at the temples, and crow's feet around his laughing eyes are the only lines marking his face.



Brother Philangelus

A low-ranking monk of the Red Order, Brother Philangelus has witnessed first hand the dangers and compelling power of infernalism. While most of his brethren content themselves with accounts of the damned and glean the workings and motivations of demons second-hand, Philangelus has dared to track these horrors to their source. He never expected or planned to devote his life to such perilous studies, and he regularly laments the path his life has taken. His fall began after the execution of the heretic Genevria, when he joined his colleague and friend Brother Timothy to perform a routine investigation of a

town suspected of hosting a demonic cult. The two wore plain brown robes instead of their distinctive scarlet vestments, passing themselves off as wandering pilgrims. They never expected danger, nor had their superiors in the Red Order prepared them for what they found. The cult had taken root in the settlement, claiming nearly all its inhabitants as worshippers of a fiend of unmatched brutality and malice. Brother Timothy perished horribly at the hands of the monster. Philangelus fled the damned settlement and appealed to the Church for reinforcements. Those reinforcements never came. Further entreaties brought only silence, but he waited patiently. That patience eroded along with his faith as he realized the Church would not avenge Timothy's death. He wondered at the reason and his fear led him to doubt and paranoia. Had minions of the demon infiltrated his own Order?

Philangelus sequestered himself in a remote monastery, growing ever more embittered and removed from his former zeal. In time, an agent of a demon found him and offered a text with a promise of answers. Philangelus resisted the temptation at first. He considered giving the book to his superiors, but feared reprisal if they suspected him of diabolism. Instead, he hid the book in the scriptorium until curiosity overpowered him. The servant of Hell spoke truth; the pages contained rites explaining how to bind a demon to service, with exacting directions on how to perform these rites.

Brother Philangelus does not realize that the rituals contained in the book are all to bind rivals of the demon who sent him the book, a covetous, power-hungry fiend seeking to recapture his former glory by destroying any opposition. Philangelus knows he could use the book. He knows enough now to perform the rites and believes correctly that he could succeed. He only waits for the opportunity, pledging himself to the dim hope that he has finally found a weapon against the scourge of Hell and wondering why a demon gave him this power.







APPENDIX: OTHER DAMNED SOULS

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

— I John 2:10

While demons enthrall mortals and supernatural beings alike, other factions in the Dark Medieval choose to bargain with Hell on their own terms. The two most prominent of these independent diabolists are the accursed Baali bloodline of vampires and the mages belonging to the Circle of Red. These factions often prove dangerous rivals and even enemies of the demons they are mistakenly believed to serve, as they ultimately care more about their own power than aiding fallen angels who would all too happily destroy and enslave them. When demons and rogue demonologists do ally on matters of mutual concern, both sides endeavor to gain the upper hand over their erstwhile partners.



The Baali

Cainite legend records the Baali as the first bloodline to deviate from the 13 clans of the Antediluvians. As for which clan owns the blame for this festering lineage of diabolists, accusations run rampant. Members of the High Clans view such debasement as beneath them and look askance to the rabble of the Low, while the Tremere in turn variably point fingers at the Tzimisce or add the crime to their accusations against the dwindling Salubri. Malkavians only smile their secret and inscrutable smiles that likely mean nothing. Whatever their origins, the Baali claim few allies, and receive the same warm welcome in most Cainite courts that mortal infernalists find among their faithful brethren: namely the warm welcome of the torch and the pyre. Baali ostensibly serve chthonic entities known as the "Children" and mock efforts to connect them with worship of Satan. Their Children predate paltry Christian mythology, or so they argue, and they refuse to bow before so pathetic an evil. Such arrogance amuses demons, who find the Baali's assertions as childish as the exaggerations of the Church.

As far as demons can piece together, the Baali progenitor belonged to the remains of an abandoned demon cult, perhaps even the vestiges of an ancient cult established during the age of rebellion before God exiled the fallen to the Abyss. In any case, the cult still clung to atrocity and sacrifice without understanding why, or entirely what, they worshipped. The cult would have died away in time, as all abandoned cults do, except that one of the earliest vampires discovered their obscene rites. Did he bring one of them into undeath deliberately, or spit blood in disgust upon the fresh abattoir of desiccated cultists cast into a pit of their own stinking organs and offal? Demons themselves do not know, for the founding of the Baali occurred before any demon trapped in Hell had yet tasted the freedom of summoning. Whatever the story, the Baali came to be, and so their mangled beliefs endured along with them. Far too quickly, the first of their number turned the foul power of his blood to the craft of diabolism. The blood of the First Murderer seethed with the Torment of God's curse, but even that power could not pierce the inviolate Abyss. It took a mortal to do that. It took mortal faith to reach across the depths of the infinite and tear a crack in that perfect prison, but it only took one seam of weakness to open the way for the nascent Baali. They spoke their rites with greater purpose and power; perhaps guided by some inscrutable hand, they called a demon forth.

After the first summoning, the Baali experienced a schism. Some sought a return to the old

worship and viewed the murderous thirst of undeath as a new form of blood sacrifice. Others looked at their new power and knowledge of demonology and dared imagine themselves claiming dominion as lords of the Abyss. This heresy grew with the bloodline, until hunger wholly subsumed the last vestiges of faith. Most of the eldest Baali continued to pay lip service to their dark masters and demanded the same of their subordinates, but their fealty was only a lie. They craved only power, and sought mastery where they once served as slaves. Others remained faithful cultists to the last, but their faith earned them nothing but slavery to uncaring abominations.

As of the Dark Medieval, the Baali remain divided and beset by enemies on all sides. No clans will defile themselves through alliance with the bloodline, though rumors persist that they quietly aid the Tremere pogrom against the Salubri in exchange for undisclosed favors. Many Cainites happily leak the locations of known Baali havens to the Church, allowing the hunters of the Inquisition to dispose of the troublesome infernalists. The irony, of course, is that Baali count more enemies among the fallen than the Blessed. Millennia of summoning, binding and stealing from the infernal host has done nothing to endear the bloodline to their long-ago masters.

Although Baali and free demons seldom come into direct physical conflict, the fallen wage a subtle war of retribution on those who would dare enslave them. Many times demons ensure the initial discovery of Baali nests by other Cainites, relying on the alerted vampires to dispose of their diabolist kin. In cases where a specific demon tracks down a Cainite responsible for its prior binding, hostility takes a far more direct and bloody form as infernal battles infernalist.

Additional information on the Baali may be found on pages 8–10 and 38–40 of the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion**. For those without access to that book, the bloodline Disciplines are Obfuscate, Presence and Daimoinon. Owing to their association with infernal evil, members of the bloodline must flee any holy symbol that has not lain dormant for at least half a century, and suffer double damage from all Faith-based powers.

Daimoinon

• Sense the Sin

In addition to the power's other uses, a single success permits the vampire to discern the Vice of a demon or infernalist.

• • Fear of the Void

Demons and thralls invested with the with Arcana Inviolable Soul (p. 106) automatically ignore this power so long as they retain at least one point of

Resolve. Against infernal characters lacking such protection, the Baali's player rolls against a difficulty of Resolve + 2. Instead of engendering panic, each success inflicts one point of temporary Torment on the victim.

••• Essence of the Netherworld

The malefic energies summoned by this power burn with the wrath of Torment. A demon or thrall struck by such a blast must immediately check for degeneration.

•••• Psychomachia

Lacking distinct Virtues, demons resist this power with their Resolve. Mortal infernalists resist with their Virtues as normal. If the Baali succeeds, the victim's Vice dominates her for the scene and she must immediately check for degeneration. For demons, the conjured illusion wears the monstrous visage of its own Apocalyptic Form, while thralls perceive the Apocalyptic Forms of their masters. The phantasm has a dice pool of the character's permanent Torment for all actions; if the phantasm kills the character, she must check for degeneration again from the conquering onslaught of sin.

••••• Curse

By allocating five rolled successes to severity, a Baali may tear a demon from a mortal host and send it screaming back to the Abyss. In addition, no magic or ritual can summon the demon back from Hell for the full duration of Curse, though this exile cannot be made permanent. Earthbound demons cannot be torn from their reliquaries by this power, though the Baali may exile fallen who lack a vessel. Banishing a demon from the world obviously earns the eternal enmity of that spirit.

••••• Hell-Born Investiture

As an alternative to the listed investments, each purchase of this Discipline awards 10 points of Arcana approved by the Storyteller. As stated, these Arcana cannot remove a vampire's need for blood or grant immunity from sunlight or faith. The vampire may spend blood in place of Resolve to power these obscene gifts.

•••••• Tear the Rift

Baali elders may direct the Torment of their accursed blood to forge a spiritual link with an invoked demon. The link only lasts a moment, but that agonizing and transcendent moment is enough to rip the demon from Hell to appear before the Cainite in a flash of thunderous fire.

System: The Baali evokes the name of a demon as her player spends three blood points and rolls Intelli-

gence + Occult. The difficulty is 7 if the Cainite only knows the demon's Celestial Name, or 5 with a True Name. Alternately, the Baali may simply reach into the Abyss without an intended target, though such meddling is extremely dangerous and increases the difficulty to 9. A single success summons the target demon or a random demon. The creature does not feel the pull of the Abyss for a number of hours equal to the successes rolled, but immediately returns to Hell after that period regardless of whether it finds sanctuary in a host or reliquary. The vampire may feed the demon a point of her own vitae at any time to add an hour to the duration, theoretically keeping the demon on Earth indefinitely with sufficient blood expenditure. This vitae does not impose automatic Torment. Although the demon cannot attack the vampire who summoned it, neither must it automatically obey her commands. Instead, the vampire's player must roll Willpower against a difficulty of the demon's Resolve whenever the Cainite issues an order. Success means the demon must fulfill the vampire's request to the letter as best it can, although it may twist poorly worded orders to suit its own agenda and cannot be compelled to reveal its True Name. Dismissing a demon before the power runs its course functions like any other order, save that the vampire's player must spend a Willpower point. Botching a summoning conjures the intended demon or a random denizen of Hell, but forfeits all control over the monster. Demons summoned by a botched use of this power do not receive a window of immunity to the Abyss, but neither do they automatically return to their prison after a fixed duration and may remain to seek a host. Botching a roll to command the demon gives the demon a full turn of unrestricted autonomy, although the vampire can attempt to reassert command on the next turn (provided the demon has not already destroyed her).

•••••• Contagion

By infecting the land around him with tainted faith, a Baali with this power may poison the souls of all within. The pall of gloom and despair conjured by Contagion spreads invisibly as an ill wind, racing to consume everyone in range. Within the affected area, incidences of crime and violence rise, mild irritation blossoms into murderous rage, relationships sour and sin runs rampant toward the defilement of everything and everyone wholesome.

System: The player rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8). Successes determine the severity of the Contagion within a mile radius, but each success allocated to range adds one additional mile to the radius. Each full day diminishes the curse by one category of severity until it wears off entirely. If the Baali's player spends a point of permanent Willpower, the Contagion deteriorates at the rate of one category per year. Once



evoked, the affected region remains static and does not follow the Cainite.

- 1 success Ill-tempered and out-of-character outbursts
- 2 successes Domestic unrest, prejudice
- 3 successes Riotous dissent and anger
- 4 successes Tavern-brawls, blood in the streets, callous murder and rape
- 5 successes A mob of bloodthirsty thugs hungry for atrocity

Within the affected area, vampires, ghouls, the Blessed, infernal characters and other beings subject to a form of degeneration add the severity rating of the curse to the difficulties of all degeneration rolls (maximum difficulty 10).

Characters with strong personalities (including those controlled by players and any with Willpower 7+) can resist the urges of the tainted land, but still add +1 to the difficulties of all Charisma and Virtue rolls from the seething infection of sin and hate in their hearts.

..... Shatter the Gate

This power only exists in apocrypha, as no Baali has ever successfully completed the rite. Only thrice in all of history has any Methuselah made the attempt, and in all cases they paid for failure with immediate Final Death. If successful, the ritual would

tear aside the door to the Abyss and free all the entire host of Hell to ravage the world. At least, that's one theory. Another theory suggests that the rite would pierce beyond the Abyss to a darkened realm outside of Creation and call forth an unknown and unknowable horror of unimaginable power. Yet another theory posits that this rite will usher in the apocalypse itself, and the final battle between the forces of the Creator and all who defy His divine will. No one quite agrees except on two critical points. First, the rite will most assuredly end the world as everyone knows it. And second, the Baali must not ever succeed in bringing this cataclysm to pass.

System: This power is simply beyond rules. Suffice to say the ritual should involve tremendous complexity, difficulty and sacrifice so that player characters may have appropriate time to save the world from certain doom.

Discipline Technique

Lesser Rite of Summoning Daimoinon 5, Presence 3

Only Baali elders can outright command the host of Hell with their accursed power, but even those of

weaker blood can widen cracks in the Abyss to call forth a fiend. As with all infernal summoning rituals, the Baali must know the Celestial or True Name of the demon she wishes to summon. Armed with that name, the vampire may draw a circle of blood and invoke the fallen into the world. As an added benefit, the vampire can consecrate a potential host, prepared reliquary or location to make possession easier for the demon. This Discipline technique only summons demons; the vampire must find other means to control or bargain with the monsters she releases into the world.

System: The vampire spends an hour preparing a circle of blood requiring five points of her own vitae. At the end of this ritual, the player rolls Intelligence + Occult. The base difficulty is the demon's Resolve rating + 5 if the vampire uses the demon's Celestial Name, or Resolve rating + 2 with a True Name. A difficulty above 10 makes the ritual impossible. A botch prevents the vampire from ever summoning the targeted demon with this Discipline technique. A failure means the vampire wasted the blood and effort, but she may try again with a new circle and a new attempt. Success opens a burning vortex in the center of the circle, from which the demon emerges. The demon ignores the pull of the Abyss for as long as it remains within the circle, or until sunlight touches the painted blood. Once either of these conditions takes place, the circle loses all power and the demon must contend with the weight of Hell. Preparing a host, reliquary or demesne requires the vampire to paint unholy glyphs on the consecrated object or person using a point of her own vitae, while the player makes a separate Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 8). This preparation also takes one hour. Potential hosts must be willing or restrained for the ritual. Each success reduces the difficulty of the demon's first attempt to possess the consecrated object or person by -1.

As stated previously, this Discipline technique only summons demons and cannot compel their service. The Baali must use other magic or have mortal acolytes present to perform a standard binding ritual (p. 102).

Experience Cost: 35

Circle of Red

The Circle of Red is an order of demonologists and diabolists. They are the antithesis of the Messianic Voices, building a foundation in the corruption and subversion of Judeo-Christian concepts like sin. The Veneficti, as these mages call themselves, believe that no knowledge should be forbidden, no matter what its nature or purpose. Practitioners of this art do not consider themselves or their order evil, justifying their actions

USING THE BAALI

While rules for playing Baali characters may be found in the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion**, these diabolist vampires do not integrate well into mixed coterie with vampires of other clans. The Baali serve far more readily as Storyteller characters, whether as antagonists, foils or mysterious and terrible benefactors.

- **The Enemy of My Enemy:** Baali prey on demons, binding them with foul blood sorcery even as they subvert demonic cults into herds for their thirst. This makes the bloodline an excellent enemy for a game centered on thrall protagonists. The thralls could wage shadow war with these vampires or oppose them directly, perhaps to rescue their master. Other diabolists might also run afoul of the Baali, perhaps vying for an artifact or tome containing a demon's True Name. Such a scenario might also create strange bedfellows out of Inquisitors or other vampires turned into brief allies against the common enemy of the Baali. Alternately, infernalists could warily ally with the Baali against a powerful Earthbound or other ancient horror.

- **Secrets of the Eldest:** The Baali have been diabolists longer than anyone else on the planet, and the undying nature of vampires ensures that some of these earliest diabolists may still walk the Earth or lie in torpor. The elders of the bloodline hoard secrets that many infernalists would trade their souls for. But what are these secrets? True Names? Truths about the epoch before the Flood? The ultimate agenda of the fallen host? A way to free thralls from their masters? Storytellers can construct entire chronicles for infernalists based on the search for these answers.

- **Infested:** A nest of Baali moves into the characters' city, and now the area seems awash with despair and crime as powerful Baali spread their Contagion (Appendix p. 145). Tempers run high and sin fills the streets, as though the very presence of the infernal bloodline poisons the souls of the people around them. As mobs begin to gather and the streets promise to soon run with blood, the players' characters are called upon to find the source of the unrest. Characters entering into this infested area must fight their own sinful urges if they wish to cleanse the region of the Baali presence and restore the area to relative harmony. If the characters lack the power to take on the formidable Baali, they might bring the infestation to the attention of the local Cainite hierarchy or the Church.

through claims that deliberate indulgence in sin removes temptation's ability to exert passive control, thus placing the mage outside the restrictions of the natural order. Just as God exists beyond sin by infallible will, members of this order seek the freedom and power of divinity by ascending beyond the control of sin.

Aura

The members of the Circle of Red alternate between periods of self-denial and carefully calculated indulgence. Their Auras reflect the exacting Control that members of this order impose upon themselves at all times. Veneficti receive their modifier to any roll that would be affected by resisting temptation or exhibiting self-control. This Aura manifests as an uncomfortable sense of confinement or minor claustrophobia.

Foundation: Sin

Denial of Obligation

By denying the power of the Judeo-Christian concept of right and wrong, the Circle of Red performs calculated acts of Sin with the ultimate goal of complete control over body, mind and spirit. Sinning deliberately weakens the temptation that leads to spontaneous indulgence. Sinning repeatedly removes the power sin holds as a tainted pleasure or forbidden vice. Sin itself loses the power to gratify or instill guilt, and so becomes meaningless. Without sin, there is only choice and consequence, the fundamental essence of control. Absent any obligation to virtue or vice, Veneficti may work without the constraints of natural, or divine, order.

- Novice Veneficti learn the nature of sin, exploring the primal forces that drive mortals to defy God's commands. The diabolist becomes aware of the inherent flaws in the divine plan, though she is not yet ready to exploit these flaws and improve upon them. She understands the steep road towards perfect self-control that stretches ahead of her. She gains preliminary knowledge of the Abyss.

- The mage begins to balance self-denial and debauchery. She develops a sense of the necessity of conquering sin and the weakness in relying upon God or others. Relationships with individuals outside of the Circle of Red are largely eliminated.

- At this state the mage has mastery over the rhythms of her body, able to ignore hunger, fatigue and other physical strains. The mage can overcome the weaknesses of flesh, adding one die per success to Stamina rolls against hunger, disease, poison, etc. Most indulgences in sin are a conscious choice. She rarely forms lasting emotional connections to oth-

ers, because love and friendship are seen as additional proof of the weakness of allowing emotional needs to influence behavior.

- The inferiority of God's design produces an inevitable feeling of superiority in the mage towards those who rely upon external sources, such as God, for comfort and direction. This can manifest as extreme coldness and detachment towards others. The mage thinks nothing of inflicting harm on others with the purpose of furthering her own path towards control.

- Now a paragon of the Circle of Red, the mage exhibits perfect self-control. Her spiritual corruption is obvious to the faithful. She can no longer be compelled to sin, and is immune to external temptation. Her permanent Willpower rating is considered 10 when resisting both passive temptation and active attempts to make her sin, though her normal Willpower rating applies in all other situations.

Specialties: Diabolism, Demonology, Corruption of the weak

Pillars: Subversions of Divine Will

The Circle of Red believes God's design serves only to limit and enslave humanity, promoting weakness in individuals who rely on faith and virtue to decide a course of action for them. The Pillars of the Circle of Red represent Subversions of Divine Will, deliberate defilements of the Creator's divine plans for both the tangible and intangible worlds. From aspects of the physical realm to fine nuances of truth, members of the Circle of Red seek to warp and distort the manifestations of divinity.

Abomination

Defiling of creation

Reliance on God's plan leads to personal weakness. Divine creation can and should be improved upon. Within every aspect of creation — animate or inanimate, physical or spiritual — lies a pattern. Each pattern contains a potential for hidden flaws, tiny potentials for sin buried in the fabric of creation. The Pillar of Abomination exploits these flaws, reworking and manipulating the pattern to the mage's will. Once a pattern has been altered, however, each additional shift becomes more difficult, as the pattern moves further from God's design. Through this increasing complexity, the Circle of Red masters control over itself and creation.

- At this level, members of the Circle of Red can sense the innate patterns of creation. This allows the

mage to perceive the hidden flaws in the pattern, as well as the potential to exploit those flaws. It is also possible to sense demons and thralls, due to Torment's distinct distortion of the pattern, and other mages, due to their ability to alter God's reality.

- A member of the Circle of Red can manipulate the patterns of inanimate objects to cause physical distortions, including properties of density, shape and substance. This changes only the physical appearance or make-up of an object. The mage can also make temporary cosmetic or substantive alterations to his body (adding or subtracting a dot of Appearance or a Physical Attribute per success).

- Upon achieving this level, the mage can manipulate the physical forms of animate objects. By reaching into the creature's pattern, the infernalist is able to discover and exploit flaws and potentials for mutation, using them to physically warp an animal or human into a monstrous beast. The mage can also make alterations to his own mental state (adding a dot to a Mental Attribute per success). This bonus can temporarily enhance memory (Intelligence), permit exacting and wary scrutiny (Perception) or aid in seizing opportune moments (Wits).

- The mage can now defile the mental states of others, inducing overwhelming emotions such as panic. The mage can induce derangements through alteration of another's pattern or cause amnesia by carving out portions of the target's memory. At this level, he can also defile his own spirit, temporarily imbuing himself with Arcana as if he were a thrall (with a total value equal to the successes x 2).

- Now a master of corruption of the pattern, the Veneficti can defile the spiritual pattern of another creature or place. At this level, the mage can attack a demon's Resolve or a Blessed's Conviction through direct manipulation of the pattern, and can also perform a physical or mental attack or alteration of a spiritual entity. The mage can also poison the energy of a cray or caern, or defile another mage's Fount.

Specialties: Creating Monstrous Beasts, Manipulating Demons

Foci: Bone, stone, carved idols, weaving tablets

Subversion

Defilement of knowledge

The Circle of Red resists any attempts to censor or forbid knowledge. Its members usually have a working knowledge of demonology. Membership to the Circle offers access to a huge variety of subversive and infernal texts, some of which can be dangerous and even deadly to read without a mind properly prepared to handle the information (and often spells) invested in the pages.

Mastery of this pillar brings with it an understanding of how languages work, allowing mages to learn many languages easily. Jealously guarding the knowledge it has acquired, the Circle of Red subverts, manipulates or profanes information used by those outside the order.

- Veneficti can read infernal literature without suffering risk of insanity or other negative effects as addressed in Chapter Two (p. 71). She has a natural understanding of languages and may use magic to translate specific texts or phrases. She can look through a simple focus item, such as a mirror or flame, to scry current events.

- The mage can scry current events without having to look through an item, or scry past or future events through a focus item. She can glean simple surface thoughts from others if engaged in direct conversation or contact with them. Her mastery of language grows to inscribe unfamiliar tongues into her mind (gaining fluency in one language for one day per success).

- At this level, the mage can read the deeper thoughts of others, including delving into buried memories, if engaged in direct conversation or contact with them. She can use another's experiences or capabilities through subtle borrowing of memories, temporarily copying one dot of any of the target's Knowledges for each success. The mage can also implant a "trigger word" in the target's mind, which, when spoken, can result in the immediate recollection of a specific painful memory.

- The mage can control the minds of others through direct manipulation of their thoughts, including implanting a word that will trigger a specific action or series of actions when spoken. The mage can rearrange memories, placing them out of sequence or skewing the outcome of events as they are recalled. She can enchant herself to understand and communicate in any spoken or written language.

- With mastery of the Pillar of Subversion, the Veneficti can bind and control demons. She can create infernal texts with the power to drive the unprepared reader to insanity, prompt him to murder or to commit suicide, or lead him to perform a series of actions through mind control.

Specialties: Altering Memories, Creating Infernal Texts

Foci: Mirrors, fire, infernal texts

Diabolism

Defilement of faith

In their deliberate pursuit of sin, the members of the Circle of Red actively seek to control and manipulate the denizens of Hell in open defiance of God. Veneficti are prolific diabolists with access to

nearly unlimited resources with which to summon and exploit the trapped Fallen. The mage's Diabolism Pillar cannot exceed his Demonology rating.

- At this level, mages can sense the presence of demons, even from far away. The Circle of Red mage can track a demon's movements through the infernal "footprints" it leaves behind, and can also feel when a Summoning ritual has been performed in the surrounding area. He intuitively understands the practical applications of Demonology.

- The mage can create wards against demons or circles in which to summon demons. He can invoke a demon by Celestial or True Name, opening a direct line of communication to the demon. In a demon's presence, the mage can hear the demon's Celestial Name as if from some infernal whisper. The mage can also summon energy directly from the Abyss, often manifesting as fire from nowhere.

- With knowledge of a demon's Celestial Name, the Circle of Red mage can invoke the demon directly without prior preparation, spontaneously formulating the summoning ritual. A mage can temporarily anchor a demon to the world without providing a vessel (one hour per success).

- At this level, the mage can attempt to banish a demon back to the Abyss at his command, regardless of the demon's power. He can create small, permanent wards against demons, or create large zones of warded space. The mage can also create summoning circles as artifacts usable by anyone. These portals to the Abyss are set up in advance for a specific number of uses (one use per success) and are usually activated by blood.

- Masters of Hell, the Veneficti can summon and banish demons without a ritual, simply by speaking the demon's True Name. He can also learn and perform the complex rituals to summon a demonic chain of command, invoking all the lesser demons in service to a master demon when the master demon is summoned. The infernal voices now whisper a demon's True Name whenever the mage is in the demon's presence.

Specialties: Summoning Demons, Warding Against Demons

Foci: Blood, flesh, flame, incantations

Malediction

Defilement of truth

The Circle of Red covets secrets while promoting the fabrication of sacrilegious lies. With this Pillar comes an understanding of the truths of the divine plan, twisting them to create new truths and make what was once true into a lie.

- At this level Veneficti become skilled with secrets and lies. They can sense when someone is lying, and are able to pierce through illusions. This allows mages to gauge an individual's overall trustworthiness, determining things like bribability.

- The mage is able to conceal lies in her speech, producing a completely believable subversion of the truth; this reduces the difficulty of a Subterfuge roll by -1 per success, to a minimum of difficulty 4. She can mentally shield herself, adding one die per success to her effective Willpower (or other appropriate dice pool) to resist telepathic intrusions that target thoughts, memories or emotions.

- Now the mage can shield herself from sight by causing herself to be overlooked. She can cause others to see her as something other than she is, casting a temporary illusion. Treat successes as an attempt to use Obfuscate 3: Mask of a Thousand Faces (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 198).

- The mage can physically become invisible or cause others to forget her existence, and continue to forget her after repeated interactions with her. She can create larger scale illusions affecting her surroundings.

- The mage can conceal her soul from others. She cannot be located by magical means. She has the ability to replicate a false emotional Aura, temporarily overriding that of her Foundation; she receives all the benefits of the counterfeit Aura.

Specialties: Crafting False Doctrine, Disguising Form

Foci: Human skin, smoke, veils

Sample Notes

Beacon of Flesh Abomination ••

A Circle of Red mage gains intimate knowledge about a specific individual's pattern through minor physical manipulation, and can leave trace marks in that pattern. The mage causes an indelible mark to blossom upon the target, which allows the caster to track the target. The mark usually appears as a blasphemous symbol or suspicious birthmark, though a vainglorious infernalist may even place his initials upon the target.

System: For each success on a Perception + Abomination roll, the mage can track the target for 15 minutes as long as the target stays within a 1-mile range of the caster. The location of the target presents itself to the mage as a magnetic pull that grows stronger and more precise as the mage moves into closer proximity to the target. If the target leaves the 1-mile range from the caster, the mage is only able to

sense the general direction in which the target left the spell's range, even if the target re-enters the 1-mile range within the time frame. The mark fades at the end of the duration, or can be extended indefinitely if cast as an ongoing spell (see **Dark Ages: Mage** p. 100).

Unmerited Gift Abomination ••••, Subversion •••

The infernalist restructures the target's memories to include a large body of information that did not previously exist. This rote can be used to implant a new Ability in the target, including the requisite knowledge and experience to use the Ability. This process is so seamless that the target is unaware that new memories have been implanted or that she previously did not have the Ability.

System: The target receives one dot of an Ability per success, to a maximum of the caster's own rating. This investment is permanent but comes at a price. The target loses one dot of another Ability or a dot of permanent Willpower for each dot of the new Ability transferred.

Twisted Name Diabolism •••••, Malediction •••••

With the demon's permission, the mage can remove a syllable of the demon's True Name, rendering obsolete all texts with the demon's original name and thwarting efforts to summon and control the demon through use of its True Name. Through this rote, the most powerful mages of the Circle of Red engage in a pattern of infighting and backstabbing. By altering the True Names of his rivals' "pet" demons, a mage achieves the double benefit of inconveniencing an enemy and often earning a favor from the freed demon. Because this is only a slight alteration of the demon's name, the new True Name is discoverable through extensive research, rendering this rote effective but by no means infallible. In many ways, renaming a demon is the closest a mortal will ever come to usurping the Word of God. Whispers of a rote that can alter a demon's True Name without the demon's consent echo through the ranks of this order — but whispers say many things.

System: Because this rote is a partnership between a demon and a mage, normal rules for magic use do not apply. If the mage succeeds, the Storyteller should provide a sufficiently epic narrative for the transformation. Fallen angels are not renamed every day. That the Circle of Red uses such a rote for infighting indicates the lengths to which this cabal of infernalists will go in pursuit of unmitigated control.

A demon who willingly undergoes a transformation of its True Name loses a dot of permanent Resolve and may experience a shift of Nature and possibly even Vice. The demon loses yet another link to its angelic past and the divinely ordained purpose for which God created it.

In addition to other costs, a mage who successfully casts this Rote must sacrifice a point of permanent Willpower as her will overrides the first Words of the Creator. Only the innermost members of the Circle of Red know the ultimate price of such hubris.

Corrupted Hearth Abomination •••••

Adept at subverting and distorting the pattern, Veneficti may even stoop so low as to taint the spiritual wellsprings of other mages or Garou. Veneficti use this rote to lay traps for rival mages and eliminate competition within the Circle, as well as to defile the careful design of these magical nexuses for other mages. This rote bears partial responsibility for the werewolves' current awareness of the Circle of Red — the mages have poisoned some caerns with demonic taint.

System: Every five successes on this rote poisons one dot of the Fount, caern or cray in question. This rote is always an extended action, and each roll requires one full day of casting (meaning it would take at least three days and fifteen successes to completely poison a level-three Cray). Multiple Veneficti, however, can cast this rote on the same source of power, meaning that a cabal of mages can taint even a powerful wellspring in a very short time.

If the mages taint the entire cray, Fount or caern, it becomes self-poisoning and manifests only contaminated energy until cleansed (this requires powerful magic, and probably months of preparation and execution, in addition to time to allow the site of power to heal itself). For every point of Quintessence a mage absorbs from a tainted cray or Fount, she suffers one die of unsoakable lethal damage. Tainted Quintessence is always the first tapped until the spiritual wound has bled itself fully clean (these rules also apply to the Gnosis of werewolf caerns).

Characters with tainted Quintessence project an unmistakable aura of sin and defilement certain to attract the hostility of werewolves and the Blessed. Though Garou do not tap directly into their caern's Gnosis, and therefore suffer no immediate harm from the taint, spending time in a polluted caern causes werewolves to stink of the Wurm, which can result in violence at the hands of other Garou.



NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE:
DEMEANOR:
CONCEPT:

VICE:
MASTER:
MOTIVE:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness	Animal Ken	Academics
Athletics	Archery	Demonology
Awareness	Commerce	Hearth Wisdom
Brawl	Crafts	Investigation
Dodge	Etiquette	Law
Expression	Melee	Linguistics
Intimidation	Performance	Medicine
Leadership	Ride	Occult
Legerdemain	Stealth	Politics
Subterfuge	Survival	Seneschal

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

____ ○○○○○
____ ○○○○○
____ ○○○○○
____ ○○○○○
____ ○○○○○

ARCANA

TAINTS/ PACTS

VIRTUES

Conscience ○○○○○
Self-Control ○○○○○
Courage ○○○○○

OTHER TRAITS

____ ○○○○○
____ ○○○○○
____ ○○○○○
____ ○○○○○

WILLPOWER

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

RESOLVE

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

TORMENT

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

EXPERIENCE

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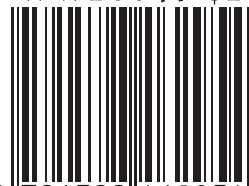
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