THREE PILLARS™

A SOCIETY SOURCEBOOK FOR VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES®

THREE PILLARS™

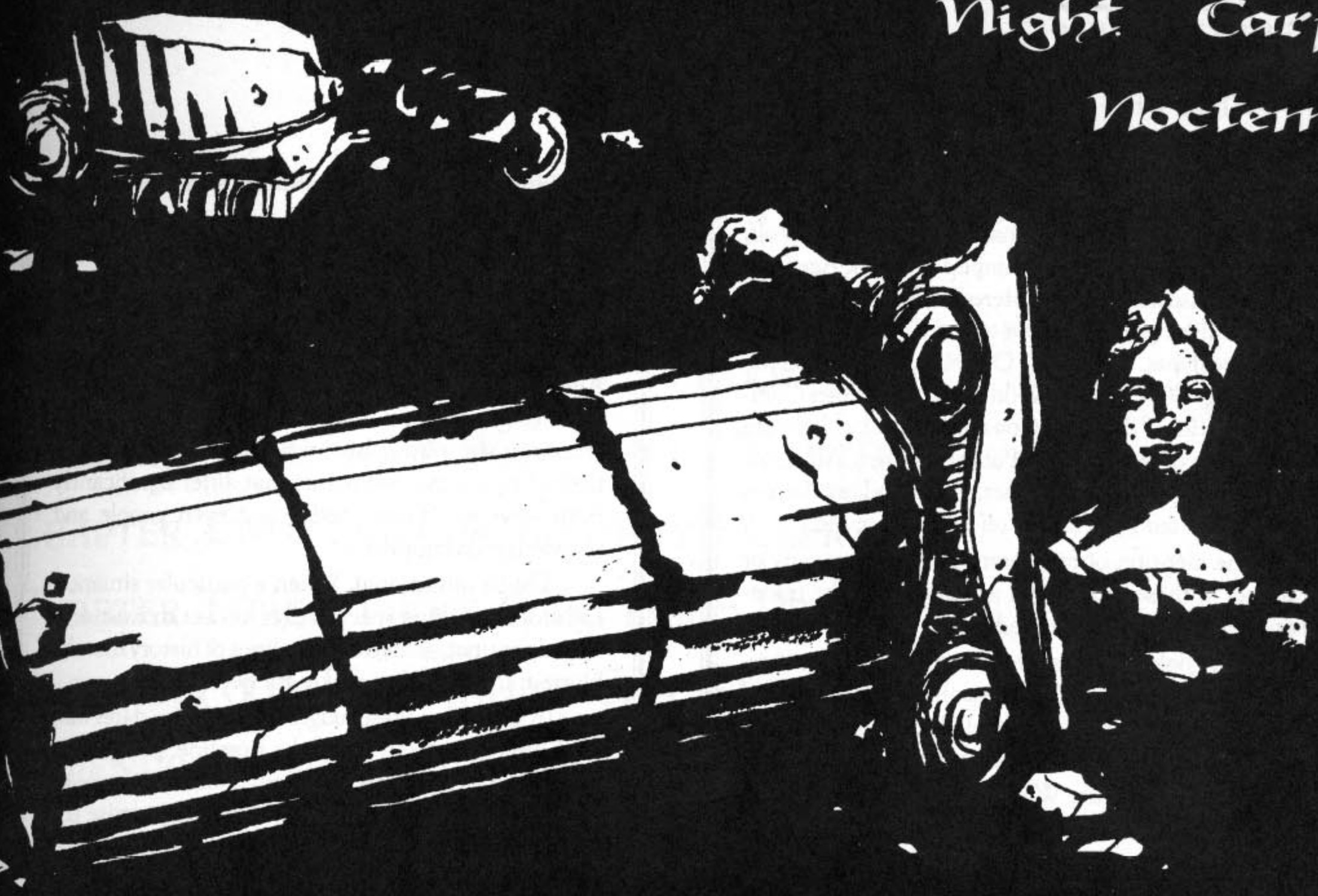
By Lea Crowe, Tom deMayo,
Eric J. Griffin and Michael Lee

Genam meam dedi vapulatori

(I have given my cheek to the smiter)

– Sir Walter Scott, Ivanhoe

Locked in a
feudal society by day and
the courts of the Damned by
night, Dark Medieval Europe
nonetheless perseveres. It is an
age of faith, an age of impend-
ing change and an age of
brutality - it is the Long
Night. Carpe
Noctem.



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A Note on Historical Accuracy

If you're looking for real world historical veracity, you've come to the wrong place.

In the process of developing **Vampire: The Dark Ages** books, certain concessions have to be made in order to preserve the drama of the setting. There are anachronistic terms, historical events taken out of their chronology, viewpoints that differ significantly from what we "know" today and even people and places that did not exist.

This is intentional. When a particular situation calls for something specific that has yet to exist or is already extinct, sometimes the lines of history must be blurred. In the end, it makes for better stories.

In sum, all of these fudges are minor — dates may be shifted a few years along the timeline, people may be allowed to live a few years longer or die a few years earlier — but no gross changes that compromise the integrity of history as it relates to the setting are made.

Relax. It's just a game.

THREE PILLARS™

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Introduction: How to Use This Book

How fine the manners are
in this barbaric country...
– Petrarch

Welcome to **Three Pillars**, the setting sourcebook for Western Dark Medieval Europe. Herein the reader will find in-depth analyses of each "pillar" that upholds the whole of Dark Medieval society as well as numerous story ideas, character concepts and general observations on the world as a whole.

This book is a resource for both Storytellers and players. Storytellers should make use of it to enrich their world, taking examples from the text and integrating these concepts into their chronicles to add depth. Players should look at this book as a "user's manual" for the Dark Medieval world — it contains much information that is common knowledge for the period, and should shed light on the night-to-night affairs of the world. Between players and Storytellers, the common ground established here provides an excellent foundation for epic stories and personal dramas alike.

The Golden Rule

As always, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of the shape of her world. Much of this book's content reflects a perspective different than our own 20th-century point of view, but only the most foolish of neonates would believe this to be a work of canon. Just because you read it here, don't assume it's true in your Storyteller's chronicle — like all supplementary material, this book is just a birthing chamber for ideas. The writers and I can't possibly know what each of you want individually, so you are hereby encouraged to take the concepts contained within and make the world your own. Remember, Storytellers, that the players choose to game for entertainment and that their input is valuable. The best worlds are joint creations of player and Storyteller alike, and the stories told in the context of those worlds acquire a depth unobtainable in an off-the-shelf product. Make your world your own.

Contents

Three Pillars contains a vast wealth of information, presented (in the grand **Vampire** tradition) from the perspective of a member of the tier of society in question. (**Note:** This doesn't mean each chapter is a first-person account, but the material is guilty of a little bias. Take what you like and run, as per The Golden Rule, above.) Efforts have been made to present information as it pertains to both vampires and the kine, as the world continues to turn even while vampires slumber away from the harsh rays of the sun.

Chapter One discusses the lords and ladies of Dark Medieval Europe — the nobility. See how vampires sway the course of government without ever revealing themselves to rivals.

Chapter Two examines the House of God and those who do His work — the clergy. How do Cainites — the Damned — continue their unlives under the stained glass and faith of the Church?

Chapter Three looks at the 98 percent of society responsible for oiling the machinery of society with their blood and sweat — the peasantry. Do you believe that all vampires hail from nobility or wear the cloth? Think again....

Chapter Four delves into that anomaly of Western Europe, Italy. The stage is set for the Renaissance, but the world is nonetheless Dark Medieval. How do the independent city-states cope with their Cainite masters while struggling to shake off the yoke of feudalism?

Appendix: Positions of Power is a simple resource that presents all of the rulers of various European countries as well as a chronology of important events. Find the king of your chronicle's home country in one convenient location.

Further Reading

When you've exhausted the information here and want to find more, the following resources are highly suggested:

The Norman Heritage 1066-1200 by Trevor Rowley — A bit Anglocentric (as if the title didn't tell you), but nonetheless valuable. Also included are numerous maps and floor plans, which are themselves incredible boons with regard to an age when nothing was ever written down.

Great Ages of Man: Age of Faith from Time-Life Books — The lite beer of research volumes, but worth a look for its photographs and art reproductions if nothing else.

The Story of Civilization: The Age of Faith by Will Durant — One of the best series of historical recordings in the whole wide world. Durant's annals include not only abundant information but also the fruit of the gods: anecdotes. If you want actual "photographs of history," Durant's *Story of Civilization* is a godsend.

Life and Work in Medieval Europe by P. Boissonnade (translation by Eileen Power) — Though somewhat dated (that's a euphemism for "a damn dry read"), this book is still packed to the gills with factual information and laboriously assembled firsthand accounts of the day-to-day affairs of Western Europe.

The High Middle Ages in Germany edited by Rolf Toman — Numerous accounts by multiple authors of life and everything that touches it in Germany between A.D. 1000 and 1500. This book is a refreshing and easy-to-read compilation, perfect for fostering story ideas revolving around medieval cities.

The Medieval Soldier by A.V.B. Norman — How to dismember your neighbors, from Saxony to the Levant.

The Italian City-Republics by Daniel Waley — This is an all-around excellent introduction to the Italian communes and was the basis for much of Chapter Four. Waley has also written numerous other books on the Italian cities — all of which are recommended (if a bit dry).

A History of Private Life edited by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby — An excellent visual resource. Volume Two has a section on living conditions in pre-Renaissance Italy. The discussion is a bit late (c. 1350), but most of the information can be applied to the Dark Medieval world without stretching facts too greatly.

Chapter One:

Those Who War

If I were king I should be a slave to policy.
– Sophocles, Oedipus Rex

Ride Out as a Boy, Return a Ruler of Men

The winter was cruel in my 15th year, howling down from the bedeviled north and lingering long past its appointed season. I remember huddling before the great hearth, feeling nothing but cold, listening to the howl of hungry wolves riding the ill winds. The chill slipped inside our stone walls and pierced my father's heart. He died a little each day, coughing and choking at the foul humors that the winter had quickened in his veins. He summoned me to the great hall on the first day of spring, and I knew it was to say good-bye.

A fire guttered in the broad hearth and my breath lingered in ghostly plumes as I crossed the long chamber to my father's dais. He sat in his canopied chair, the seat of honor, and the long fever had rendered him down to stretched skin and bone. My father slouched under piles of furs, his eyes glassy and his gray hair stringy with sweat. His hounds attended him, crouched around their master's feet as if to share their warmth with him. Sir Martin, our seneschal, and the good abbot from the village waited near the hearth, their silhouettes painted in orange light and shadow.

The hounds growled ominously at my approach, as if somehow hoping to guard their lord from the evils that beset him. I waited in silence, pulling the furs tightly around my shoulders. When he finally spoke, it was a thin, wheezing sound, a rattle like brittle chains. My father's strength was almost gone.

"The holy man tells me it is spring. Is it so, boy?"

"Yes, my lord," was all I could say.

"Then it is an ill-omened thing," he said with sudden bitterness. "But time waits for no man, and so you must do as I bid. The first seven years of your life were spent with your mother, as is proper, then I took you in hand and taught you how to hunt, ride and fight. We taught you how to live, but now you are 15, and must learn what it means to be of noble blood. Now is the time for your nourishment, and our master the Baron of Hautmont has agreed to take you as his squire. He has not forgotten his love for me, for I gave him my horse when his fell at the Battle of Clairault, and saved him from capture. Count your blessings, boy, for he is a powerful man, the equal of any baron in northern France, and he rewards faithful service. You will serve him until your 21st year, and if you are wise, you will pay attention to everything. You shall learn of life in a great castle, and the ways of a noble household, and you will see their pleasures and their pursuits, their feasts and great tournaments. Mark well how he treats his vassal lords, for one day you will be counted in their number, but also give care to his treatment of the common man, and the keeping of the law."

My father paused for breath, a thin, whistling sound that echoed in the hall. "Take my sword, my coat of mail and my tall horse, for like as not you will ride out to war more than once at the baron's side. Sir Martin will see you to Hautmont, with my gifts and well-wishes for the baron. Leave here as a boy and return as a ruler of men, my son. We will not meet again."

At that, he raised a trembling hand, summoning the abbot and Sir Martin, leaving me to my thoughts and preparations for the journey.

We journeyed from my father's lands through days of freezing rain and mist, but Sir Martin knew the route well, and found lodging for us every evening with one of the baron's vassal lords, or else in the dim, forbidding cells of village monasteries. Our hosts were courteous and mindful of the customs of hospitality, sharing news of the unseasonable winter and hungry for tales from outside their territories. We were enjoined to extend our stay a little longer at every turn. The clergy tempted us, especially with lavish gifts of food and drink, eager to know our business with the baron. Each time they made their entreaties furtively, like conspirators, as though there were more to their questions than they dared to share. My father's seneschal said that it was money they sought and managed to refuse their offers politely.

Hautmont Castle

The towers of Hautmont Castle rise white and forbidding over the treetops, visible for many miles along the trade road. Once across the river, the road continues on to the east to the county of Champagne, while another track leads north, through a gate in a large wooden palisade that parallels the road and encircles the base of the bluffs. This is the barbican, the first line of defense, and is designed not to turn back a determined army so much as to delay them in the event of a surprise attack, so that the castle proper might have time to close its great gate and man the outer walls. The gate, watched by a young castle porter, allows no more than two riders abreast.

Beyond the barbican lies a narrow field called the list, where the baron holds his tournaments in peacetime. In wartime, if an enemy forces his way past the barbican, his troops would find themselves wedged into a strip of land between the palisade and the castle proper, with the river on one side, the steep slope of the bluffs rising up on the other, and the castle's archers firing a steady rain of arrows from the walls above.

Outer Works

At the foot of the castle's outer walls is the moat, a broad ditch full of slimy rainwater. The moat and outer wall are the first layers of the castle's defense, giving the fortress a roughly triangular shape as it extends from the massive central keep along the banks of the river bend and then across the bluff's landward side. The outer wall is further reinforced with eight round towers, built a little out from the wall so anyone seeking to climb over with ladders or ropes exposes himself to a withering crossfire. Entrants into the castle cross the moat via a broad, oaken drawbridge, raised by two large, iron chains in the face of an enemy attack. Looming forbiddingly over the castle gate is the gatehouse, a squat, solidly built

fortification unto itself. A heavy iron grating, the portcullis, can be dropped from the gatehouse above to seal off the castle while the drawbridge is down; during the day it remains up to allow for the constant stream of craftsmen, soldiers and servants passing to and from the castle. The huge wooden gates, studded with iron nails to dull enemy axes, remain shut, though a door set into one gate is left open, allowing mounted men to enter one at a time. Through the gate is a narrow, low-ceilinged tunnel that runs under the gatehouse. The tunnel's other end is likewise guarded by a portcullis, and the close ceiling is riddled with apertures called "murder holes," by which arrows or burning pitch are dropped onto would-be invaders.

Past the gatehouse lies a broad stone courtyard bustling with activity. The courtyard resembles a small village, crowded with wooden buildings where most of the castle's inner workings are performed. This is the castle bailey. Against the outer wall sit the barracks for the baron's household guard and many of his servants. Rows of plain wooden sheds store grain, cloth, raw ore and other castle supplies, while shrill cries rise from a small building containing the baron's beloved hawks. A fountain bubbles nearby, providing water for the castle and a place to gossip for the servants. Amid all the mundane bustle rises a small, buttressed chapel, its iron-banded doors securely shut; opposite the courtyard sounds the thunder of bellows and the clamor of hammer on iron as the castle smith toils in his man-made inferno. The great castle ovens are also in the bailey, where both castle folk and village peasants alike come to bake their bread. The nervous whicker of horses rises from the castle's large stables nearby. Next to the stalls sit the baron's kitchens, whose huge cookfires can roast a whole pig or a side of beef at one time. The kitchens lie outside the baron's living quarters because of the risk of fire. Servants often sneak into the kitchens for scraps or leavings while running their many errands.

Inner Works

At the other end of the bailey is another high wall, identical to the outer works in every way, including moat, two extruded towers, drawbridge and gatehouse. If an enemy made it past the barbican and either over the outer wall or through the outer gate, the castle defenders would retreat to the inner fortifications and set the wooden buildings in the bailey alight. Through the fire and smoke would come a steady hail of arrows, and there would be nowhere for the invaders to hide.

Like the outer gate, the portcullises of the inner gatehouse remain open during the day to allow for the movements of the castle folk. One of the last acts of the castle seneschal each night is to ensure that the inner portcullises are lowered, keeping the lowborn servants quartered in the outer bailey from wandering their master's grounds. The flagstones are much cleaner beyond the inner gate and free of livestock. Servants in clean livery go about their duties swiftly and silently.

Across this smaller courtyard is a tall, rectangular stone building, set with high windows and gargoyles leering from the eaves. This is the baron's *palais*, the site of his great hall and the apartments of his household and chosen retainers. It is the only stone building in the castle built more for comfort than defense.

Beyond the *palais* lies a yet smaller courtyard, and looming above it all rises the great square bulk of the *donjon*, the original tower raised by the lord so many years ago and the last line of defense. When all else is lost, it is the *donjon* to which the castle folk retreat to, its stone walls over six-feet thick and approachable from only one side. All of the castle folk and the villagers could fit inside the tower, and the great storerooms within contain enough food and arrows to last for a long siege. Somewhere below ground (near the keep's infamous cells) are several great wells, fed from the rushing river. Rumors persist that Hautmont's original masters built a tunnel beneath the keep that emptied out onto the riverbank a mile or more downstream — a means of escape should the tower fall. During times of peace, the upper floors of the keep are used as apartments for guests and senior servants, or as convalescing rooms for the sick. A sharp-eyed sentry stands on top of the *donjon*, trumpet close to hand at warn of coming enemies or noble guests.

Arrival in Hautmont

There was little traffic at the barbican, and the portly steward there waved us through with a cheerful greeting. We crossed the lists and climbed the steep path to the gatehouse, where yet another of the baron's men relieved visiting commoners of any weapons before they could enter the castle. He bowed his head respectfully and bade us welcome, and we passed into the bailey.

Inside the bailey was a commotion unlike any I had ever seen before. The castle folk were busy at a hundred tasks, cooking, cleaning, building and forging. The women gossiped over jugs of water at the nearby fountain, while children, pigs and chickens scrambled heedlessly across the paths of our horses. Shouts and laughter mingled with the sounds of hammer and saw. Some of the baron's men-at-arms played dice and drank outside their barracks, cursing the stench raised as a chandler drew candles from a vat of boiling fat. A boy dashed headlong from the doorway of the castle kitchens, followed closely by a red-faced cook. Amid shouted imprecations the boy found his feet and went back to mucking out the stables, licking berry juice from his grubby fingers.

We dismounted at the stables, eager to be out of the saddle. With a few words of instruction to the grooms, Sir Martin left the stable and crossed the bailey. I followed, working the stiffness

from my legs and trying not to gawk at all the activity around me. We crossed the inner moat and stood before a bronze gong set beside the inner gate. Sir Martin rapped on the gong with a mailed fist, and a young man appeared at once, wearing a scarlet bliaut *and fine woolen hose. I realized with a start that this man was one of the baron's squires, there to receive noble guests. The squire eyed me with evident curiosity, and after a few words from Sir Martin, he bowed courteously and led us inside.*

Baron Robert and His Household

Like most nobles, Robert of Hautmont maintains a sizable family, he and his wife having been blessed with no less than two healthy sons and three beautiful daughters. For each family member there are the requisite servants: squires for the men and maids for the women. Combined with the necessary servitors and functionaries of the castle, the baron's household is a large community indeed.

Henry, the baron's eldest son, is a man with a bright future. When Robert dies, Henry will become baron without question. This is not to say, however, that the baron's second son, Percival, is without prospects, for upon his adubbment as a knight, Robert will invest him with one of the family's three castles and arrange a profitable marriage to an ally's daughter. In the case of lesser nobles, however, such largess is rarely possible. Younger children of poor lords face more limited prospects, either becoming knights and seeking their fortunes in service to a higher lord (if their father can afford it), or else finding a place in the ranks of the Church. Both of Robert's sons reside in their own apartments in their father's *palais*.

Robert's daughters have even fewer options open to them. The laws of Church and state forbid women from holding seigniorial authority over vassals, which means that while a woman can hold property, she cannot exercise its martial capacities, nor collect taxes, nor accept oaths of fealty, which essentially incapacitates the fief. If Robert and his sons were to die in battle, the lands of Hautmont would fall to his wife, Margaret. Whatever her feelings might be for this tragic loss, after a proper period of mourning she would be compelled to find another husband to rule the barony. The responsibility for finding a suitable match actually rests in the hands of the dead baron's relatives, and indeed one or more of Robert's brothers might immediately seek his wife's hand in order to lay claim to his properties. If the dead lord's kin are unable or unwilling to find a suitable match, the widow can then appeal to her *seignior* for a husband. (There is one tale of a noble woman who journeyed to the court of the king, and in his presence said, "I am the Baroness of Poitou, and I have been widowed these past six months. I demand that you find for me a husband!") It is imperative that a widow find a suitable husband promptly, for if the fief lay fallow for too long, then its *seignior* can legally confiscate the lands for himself, keeping them or giving them to another vassal.

Thus, the baron's daughters are left to wait until their father finds them suitable husbands, whereupon they will leave Hautmont and become mistresses of their own estates. Marriages rarely have anything to do with love; rather, they are a tool of political and economic influence. The baron's eldest daughter, Mathilde, is married to the youngest son of the Count of Vermandois, an investment on Robert's part because the union bound the House of Hautmont to the ruling family of the county.

The baron's other daughters, Elaine and Julianne, remain unbetrothed, though they are fast approaching their womanhood. Lesser nobles, hoping for blood ties to the baron, have made numerous proposals, but Robert has been canny, clearly leaving himself some room to maneuver in case a choice prospect for alliance should arise. In this way it often happens that young women find themselves wed to old barons past their prime, all for the sake of material advantage. It is common throughout Christendom for husbands to treat their wives despicably once the marriage has been consummated and its material benefits have been gained. Wives are sometimes cloistered, confined to their own chambers and the castle grounds, condemned to live their lives in solitary misery while their husbands seek the pleasures of other ladies. Robert of Hautmont, for all his reputation as a just and fair lord, banished his wife to chambers in the *donjon* very shortly after they were wed. Is it no wonder that so many romantic tales tell of young wives giving "their love and kiss" to dashing young knights rather than to their husbands?

Once a marriage is made, the bond is unbreakable, save for two conditions: A marriage can be annulled if a wife is unable to conceive a child, or if husband and wife are too closely related. Many times, the only option left to a divorced wife or to an unmarriageable daughter is a life of quiet contemplation in a nunnery.

The day-to-day requirements of a castle and its noble family require a large group of highly-skilled servants. In noble families, the higher the social rank of one's servants, the greater the household's prestige. The overall supervision of a lord's castle and estates is the duty of the seneschal, who makes decisions on everything from tax collection, to inventory, to the food served at mealtimes. The castle's marshal is responsible for the lord's stables, seeing to the care and breeding of the family's horses. Even Robert's master falconer is a landless knight who trains and cares for the baron's splendid collection of hawks. It is no dishonor for a noble to act as a servant, as long as it is to someone of higher rank. The last of the "high servants" is the chamberlain, who is responsible for the daily activities of the castle that do not pertain to food, drink or mealtimes. The chamberlain sees to the cleaning, maintenance, and furnishing of the castle's many apartments and chambers. The more menial tasks required at the castle are performed by "low servants" of sturdy peasant stock. From the castle's weaponsmith to the potboys, service in the castle is a privilege passed through the family, and it grants significant status over the ranks of village folk.

The personal attendants for the baron and his family are a special case of servant, consisting of young men and women accepted from the ranks of the barony's vassal lords. It is accepted wisdom in Christendom that noble children must first enter into a period of service and education before they are fit to assume the responsibilities of adulthood. This period is called the *nourishment*, beginning with a child's 15th year and lasting until they reach their majority at 21. Noble sons are sent to the house of their father's neighbor or feudal superior, and they serve as the master's squire. A squire is required to dress his master, serve him and his lady at table, curry his master's horse and care for his weapons and armor while on campaign. Daughters become ladies-in-waiting, attending to the needs of castle mistresses and refining their social skills.

Secrets Revealed

The baron's squire looked straight ahead as he made his way briskly across the inner courtyard and through the tall doors of the palais. Two men-at-arms stood guard outside, eyeing us warily as we passed. I was struck by the wan color of their scarred features and the challenging look in their eyes. For all that they were common folk serving their betters, the soldiers seemed to share a secret between them, as though they held some special dispensation that set them apart from others of their ilk.

The squire conducted us into the great hall without delay. Groups of men milled about the high-ceilinged hall, passing in and out of the long columns of sunlight shining through the high windows. Some were the baron's vassal lords, speaking amongst themselves and waiting to conduct business with their seignior. *Others were villagers, appealing to the baron to settle disputes or civil suit. In one corner, southern* trouveres *entertain a group of knights, each thespian acting out the part of some ribald story.*

Across the room, sitting in a high-backed, canopied chair, rested a short, square-shouldered figure, his brow creased with thought as he considered a proposal from a broad-bellied merchant. He held an air of inviolate authority, a sense of assurance that came from being born to rule. Yet, there was also a cool distance in his gaze, somehow removed from the events around him, as though he were merely an observer in the affairs of his own fiefdom. It seemed a strange thing for a man who held absolute power over his domain.

So it was with trepidation that I stood before Robert of Hautmont as the young squire conducted Sir Martin and I into his presence. The baron fixed me with a penetrating glare as we knelt before him.

"Rise," he said gravely, and turned to my father's seneschal. "It is good to see you again in my hall, Sir Martin. How long has it been?"

"Three years, sire, at the adubbment of Sir Henry your son," Sir Martin replied with equal gravity. "My lord, Sir Walter sends his love and a gift of two fine falcons to give you good hunting this summer."

For the first time the great baron smiled, like sunlight on stone. "What news of your master, Sir Martin?"

"He is grievously ill, sire. The winter has been a cruel one, and I fear that even now the Lord has called Sir Walter to his reward."

For a moment, the look of resignation abated a little from the baron's eyes. "It sorrows me to hear this," he said sadly. Once again those steely eyes regarded me. "Is this my liegeman's son?"

Sir Martin nudged my elbow. I stepped forward. "I am, sire." The words came out like a squeak. Someone in the hall laughed loudly.

Robert took no notice. "May God give rest to your father's soul, lad. No one in my domain ever served me better. Well do I remember his bravery at Clairault! He was a fine knight, as you will one day be. What is your name?"

"Renauld, sire."

Robert nodded gravely. "Welcome then, Renauld. I accept your service, and I will raise you to be a proper knight." For a moment he paused, and it seemed as though he struggled within himself to reach a decision. When he spoke again the words came out swiftly, as though the baron feared he might change his mind. "For the love I bear for your father you will have a position of favor, and take your rest outside my chamber door. You will keep your things with the other squires in the donjon." *Robert raised a hand, and the squire who had brought us to the* palais *came forward. "Paul," the baron said, "show my new squire the dormitory, and teach him his duties for the evening meal."*

"Yes, sire," Paul replied, and he indicated for me to follow. I gave a parting look to Sir Martin, but the old knight was deep in conversation with the baron, so I knelt and then took my leave.

I followed Paul out of the palais *and around the building, into the smaller courtyard before the keep. A wooden ramp led up to the* donjon's *second-floor entrance, an access that could be burned in the face of an attacking enemy. The interior was cold and damp, the darkness within near-absolute. I followed Paul down a broad corridor into a huge, high-ceilinged chamber, where, in times of war, the baron could address most of the keep's defenders, and places could be made for those who were wounded in the fighting. The air was dank and chill, smelling of must and mildew. I thought of the baron's poor wife, forced to spend her days in this benighted place, and shuddered.*

Paul went through an archway that opened onto a great flight of stairs. Up we climbed, past several floors until we came to a torch-lit level with a number of large apartments. Paul went inside one, a chamber containing 10 narrow beds with wooden chests at their feet. The room was empty, though it was clear that all but two of the beds were being used. Other than a large crucifix of dark wood on one wall and a table at the far end set with a big candle, there was no other furniture in the room.

I walked inside, my mind distracted by all that I had seen and heard, when Paul abruptly turned and smashed his fist into my mouth. I stumbled, tasting hot, bitter blood, and the squire

fell upon me, hammering blow after blow into my chest. For all his litheness, the squire's arms possessed terrible strength, batting aside my wild blows as though I were an infant. Finally, he stood, leaving me to clutch at my bruised ribs and pray to God for the smallest breath of air.

"See here, filth," Paul hissed, putting a foot on my chest. "We got rules here, we squires do. First rule is: I am the senior squire. I am the oldest, the biggest and the meanest. You don't do nothin' but I don't tell you to do it first. Remember that, or I'll break you like a stick." Paul bent low until his face was but inches from my own. "It's my place, outside the master's door, not yours. He thinks he can keep you from her, *but I know better.* She *knows you are here. Sooner or later* she'll *send for you. Nobody escapes."*

Paul grabbed hold of my tunic and hauled me to my feet as though I were made of straw. He was six years older, but the power in his frame went beyond the difference in our years. His eyes were mocking, as though he could read my thoughts. "Get your rags in that chest there, filth," he sneered. "Then get yourself to the kitchens. You'd best get there before me or I'll thump you again."

I swung at his jaw with all my strength, hoping to surprise him as he did me, but Paul knocked me from my feet with a contemptuous laugh. "Do as you're told, filth, and you just might live through this," he said, and left me there, fighting back tears of terror and rage.

My education had begun.

Rise at Five, Dine at Nine

Christendom sets its rhythms by the rise and fall of the sun. Fields cannot be sown, great battles cannot be fought, and long journeys cannot be undertaken except by the light of day. A wise lord rises with the first pearly glow of dawn, and his castle stirs to life around him.

The first souls to rise in a castle are typically the bakers, lighting their ovens not long past four in the morning to bake the bread with which the lord and lady break fast. Industrious lords rise at five—sometimes earlier if the day promises to be a busy one. With full dawn more than an hour away, a lord summons his squires, who open their master's clothing chests and proceed to dress him for the day. First, the lord dons linen underclothes, then long hose of fine wool, tastefully colored in black or brown. Next comes the *chemise*, a shirt of white linen without cuffs or collar. Over the chemise goes the *pellison*, a long, fur-trimmed robe, and then the *bliaut*, a loose tunic that is pulled on like a shirt. Finally, there are cloth shoes, pointed at the toe and adorned with gems to show the baron's status and wealth. If the lord's cheek is too stubbled, he sends for the castle barber, as it is the fashion of the time for noble men to be clean-shaven. Once dressed, the lord washes his hands and face thoroughly, and then begins the day by heading to the castle's chapel for Mass.

Only after morning prayers does the castle's family break their fast, retiring back to their chambers for a light meal of bread, cheese and watered wine. The master's chamber is a large room, dominated by tall windows that look out onto the inner courtyard. A single tall candle sits on a table by the bed, lit each night to keep pixies and devils at bay while the master sleeps. The room's furnishings are spartan, but beautiful in craftsmanship. The bed is large and canopied, exquisitely carved from wood and hung with fine curtains to keep out the unhealthy night air. Tall, ornate wardrobes and iron-bound oaken chests contain clothes, jewels and other valuables. Overstuffed "his and hers" chairs face one another near a window, while the baron's has a "chair of state" before the massive hearth. Like the seat in the great hall, the chair is intricately carved, high-backed and crowned with a wooden canopy, and set before it is a footstool covered in red silk. The master's bedchamber serves as both a place for rest and for conducting daily business when no formal audiences are required. Reading stands supporting books of poetry or scripture are common, as are chessboards for providing hours of diversion, and often there are perches set up for the master's hawks. There is also a table set out of the way on which sits a jeweled box. The box is a saint's reliquary, and it contains holy artifacts precious to Christian faith. Some reliquaries contain locks of hair from pious saints, or scraps of cloth from the robes of prophets. The castle's lord and lady kneel before the reliquary every night and pray for the safekeeping of their souls while they sleep.

The lord and lady turn to the business of the day after the morning meal. While any lord can leave the functioning of his domain to the hands of his able servants, it is considered a mark of indolence and foolishness. A castle is self-sufficient; the estates have their own corn lands and pastures, their stacks of hay, granaries and storehouses. There are local mills for grinding, cattle byres, slaughterhouses, and salting sheds for keeping meat. Practically every bit of food needed by the castle folk is grown locally, and the many servants wear coarse wool clothing that is sheared, carded, spun and woven on the castle properties. The smith forges all the necessary weapons and tools in the bailey. A castle lord makes daily inspections of the stables, then the smithy, and even the kitchens, mews and bakery. At each turn he asks for a detailed report from the servants and offers his comments or suggestions on how operations are to be conducted or improved. Sometimes the servants disagree with the lord's wishes and flatly refuse to carry them out. Each man and woman serving in the castle has his or her own sphere of influence, and a wise lord is obligated to treat his servants with tact and a certain respect within those spheres. Such forbearance comes from the sure knowledge that these common folk, some of whom have inherited positions passed down from generation to generation, are devoted to the castle and the lord's household and would only act in their common interest. These common folks' fortunes are as tied to the castle as the lord's.

In this way, the hundred or more souls who occupy a great castle are like a single, large family, with the castle lord as patriarch. The servants, like children, sometimes squabble, but harsh words and even blows are quickly forgotten. And the lord never fails to show his gratitude on feast days, when he opens his larder to the castle folk and the village below, and has the criers yell, "Come inside if you are hungry, and eat and drink your fill!" There is much gorging and guzzling at the lord's expense, and a surfeit of goodwill.

At the same time, a noble lord's wife is in no way idle. For all that the romances proclaim a lady to be meek and retiring, the truth of the matter is that they rule every bit as much as their husbands, and a great deal of the castle's day-to-day affairs come under their control. The mistress of a castle commands as many as 20 servant maids, some of whom are *pucelles*, daughters of vassal lords, and subject to a certain amount of consideration, the same as the lord's squires. The duties of these servants are to clean the apartments of the *palais*, wipe down all the stools and benches, feed the chamber animals (the hounds and caged birds), and then receive tasks of sewing, weaving or cutting of fabrics. In addition, the mistress of the castle sees to the training of her daughters, ensuring their education in the Scriptures, in romantic stories and poems and in courtly behavior. In times of peace, the ladies of the castle provide pleasant company and diversion, especially during the long, shuttered months of winter when everyone huddles within the walls. They are also charged with making guests welcome; in some regions it is the responsibility of the ladies to conduct guests to their rooms, assist them in removing armor and boots and wash their feet and hands.

This is not to say that the baroness and her daughters are ignorant of the larger business of the castle. When the lord rides off to war, the lady commands the castle, and she must be able to check up on the provosts' accounts, adjudicate the complaints of peasants, arrange alms for the poor and manage the relations with the local representatives of the Church. Most castle ladies know as much about defending a castle under siege as their husbands, and they can ride, hunt and handle a spear as well as most men. Additionally, most noblewomen learn the arts of medicine and healing, and they are expected to set a broken limb or suture a sword wound with skill and fortitude.

But for all these duties, the tasks of the lord and lady consume no more than a morning's labor. By dinnertime, commonly served at nine a.m., most day-to-day business is concluded, leaving the lord and lady with the rest of the day to spend at their leisure. To this end, there are a good number of pleasant diversions for the noble folk, sedentary pastimes such as checkers or chess, or more active pursuits like swordplay or hunting.

Gentle Diversions

Indoor games are in great demand when bad weather makes outside sports impossible, and bookish diversions are somewhat limited. Backgammon is a favorite game, but most popular among the men are games of dice. Often the Church censures the use of dice in all its forms, complaining that not only is the act of gambling a risk to the soul, but the blasphemies constantly uttered by losing dice players serves as a means of populating Hell! In fact, laws in some parts of France state, "Dice shall not be made in this dominion, and those using them shall be looked on as suspicious characters."

Of course, such laws are most difficult to enforce, and are usually limited to punishing the makers of loaded dice. Dice are often the ruin of many a noble and honest villager alike, yet the games continue.

Outdoor sports enjoy equal popularity, particularly among young nobles, who while away many hours playing such games as *guilles*. In this game, nine pins are set on the ground and players take turns knocking them over with a thrown stick. Tossing the ball is a common pastime, and sometimes lords and ladies alike spend hours in the fields shooting crossbows at birds. None of these diversions, however, match the sheer spectacle and excitement of hunting.

Falconry is the definitive sport of the nobility. Carrying a hunting bird on one's wrist is a mark of status and privilege. It is known for nobles to take their birds with them even on short journeys, and for lords and ladies to witness Communion with falcons resting on their arms. Hawks are prized gifts between noble men, and there is no swifter way to the gallows than through the theft of a hunting bird. A baron would sooner forgive the theft of gold than the loss of a single falcon! If a bird becomes lost, a peasant who finds it can reap considerable reward for its safe return. But woe to the varlet who would keep such a noble possession! If caught, he must either pay a ruinous fine or else allow the hawk to peck six ounces of flesh from his breast.

Falconry is not the only type of hunting favored by nobles. Stag and boar are prized for their meat and the challenge they provide in the chase. The equipment for hunters is simple: The most expensive articles are the hunting horns, those great oliphants whose high, clear notes can be heard for miles. They are made of ivory and chased with gold, and hung from the hunter by a cord of silk or fine leather. The weapons of the hunter are bow and arrows, a small hatchet called a "Danish axe," a broad-bladed boar spear and a large knife in case of emergencies. Hunting boar is a dangerous business, for these creatures are large and very fierce, and their thick hides enable them to scorn all but the fiercest blows. Hunters use great boarhounds to run the creature to earth; the chase can go on for miles, and the hunting party often becomes separated in the confusion. If a chase leads across a farmer's ripe fields, then so be it; it is a lord's especial privilege, and to complain against it is considered treason.

Of course, a lord and his sons devote much time to the practice of the arts of war in addition to these other activities. Skills and reflexes must be constantly honed, and every few days most nobles can be found trading blows with blunted swords and practicing their shield-work. The game of chess is also encouraged by many, for it instills the value of patience and the art of strategy. When a lord and his sons keep company, the talk often turns to stories of bloody conflict and discussion of the finer points of conquest. But it is possible to have too much practice, too much preparation. The vital humors heated by the clash of arms, even in play, create a pressure that demands release. Too many ruinous feuds are fought by nobles for no other reason than boredom and a willingness to test the sharpness of their blades.

Sup at Five, to Bed at Nine

Appetites are keen and spirits high after an afternoon spent hunting or wielding sword and shield. By five, the sound of trumpets cry from the *donjon* and the castle folk assemble in the great hall for the evening meal.

The great hall is lined with long, heavy tables made of oak — their dark, scarred surfaces testament to years of feasting and celebrating. The tables are arranged in a horseshoe-shape, with the castle folk taking their places along the long "arms." The master's table, where the lord eats with his family and any honored guests, stands at one end of the hall. Seating arrangements are very important; one's status in the household determines how far down the table from the lord one sits. As much as possible, a lady sits beside each man, particularly at the master's table.

As the castle folk file in, each takes a turn at the lavatory beside the entrance, where washstands with pitchers and basins allow for the cleaning of the hands and face. No one is exempt from washing, and the process follows a set order of precedence: first, visiting clergy, then visiting nobles, then the lord's family, after which the commoners take their turn. The long tables in the hall bear carefully laid tablecloths, with a drinking vessel, knife and spoon set at each place. While the knife is made of steel for serious cutting, the other tableware is of gold or silver and represents a large fraction of a noble estate's portable wealth. Cups for the noble folk often resemble fantastic beasts: dragons, griffins, unicorns and great dire wolves. The common folk make do with more simple cups of wood or cured leather "jacks."

The moment that prayers are finished, a procession of servants carries dishes of food and drink into the hall. Great loaves of bread are laid at regular intervals, made with fine wheat for the nobles and coarse, black grain for the commoners. Additional loaves follow, which the men cut into thick slabs and share with the ladies beside them. Later dishes of meat are served upon these bread *tranchoirs*, rather than setting the greasy foods on the table itself. The "trenchers" themselves are not eaten; rather, they are gathered into great baskets at the end of the meal along with the meat scraps and distributed to the beggars who line up each dawn outside the barbican. The lord's dogs devour whatever food does not make it into the alms basket. Guests are wise to toss a choice morsel or two to the master's favorite hounds.

In the space between the tables, the castle's kitchen hands serve a steady procession of courses. The presentation of both dinner and supper is intended to provide the diners with a large variety of choices and to ensure that everyone eats their fill. The meats are sliced expertly by the kitchen carver, and taken first to the master's table, where the lord and his family choose the choicest cuts for themselves. Squires fulfill their role at mealtimes, carrying great trays of food to their master and

keeping his and his family's cups full. All the while, a continuous stream of lesser servants runs back and forth between the hall and the kitchens, keeping the food coming.

Food arrives in four courses, and meat dishes abound: Pork is by far the most common on ordinary days, as is chicken or most any other kind of bird. A favorite way to prepare the meats is in the form of a pasty. These meat pies are something of an art form with castle cooks, and they can be made with eels, geese, pigeons, venison, salmon and other meats. Fish is in abundance, as are frogs children catch in the castle's moat. There are a wide variety of soups — a staple dish in common and noble households alike — spiced with sweet basil, marjoram, sage, and the most favored spice, pepper. An abundance of vegetables and cheeses round out the meals.

Castle folk keep their cups full of wine, or in the case of some common folk, beer. While the castle has vineyards for its occupants' usage, most lord's cellars also contain imported tuns of exceptional wines from as far afield as Spain, Germany and Italy. A brewhouse in the outer bailey makes a considerable quantity of beer, both *godale*, or "double beer," and the more common "small beer." Since the crusaders returned from the Holy Land, there has been an increasing interest in spiced beer, and many castle brewers experiment with gentian, juniper, and cinnamon beers.

At last, after everyone has eaten their fill, the lord signals for the *trouveres* to begin. These traveling entertainers wander the length and breadth of France, stopping for no more than a day or two at a castle or village, and pay for food and lodging by performing epics and romantic tales. Their performances delight the hall for hours, while the castle folk digest their heavy meals. This is the only chance the kitchen folk and squires have to retreat to the kitchens and eat their own suppers, the only consolation being that with the mass of food served each night, no one goes hungry.

Finally, the lord rises and bids one and all a good night. The squires escort the lord, his wife and children to their chambers. The morning routine is performed in reverse, as the lord washes, says his prayers, and undresses for bed. By nine, he and his family settle into sleep.

The squires at this point head for the *donjon*, to wash and see to getting clean clothes for the morrow. For the senior squire, one final task remains: meeting with the seneschal just after the tableware has been accounted for and then making the nighttime rounds of the castle. Starting with the *donjon* and proceeding all the way down to the barbican, seneschal and squire make certain that the sentries are at their posts, that the armories are secure and that none of the common servants remain in the inner courtyard. All the drawbridges are raised and the portcullises dropped. Only then does the seneschal relinquish the great ring of keys at his waist. Outside the master's door, the seneschal passes the keys to the senior squire who carries them to a hook beside the bed in the master's chamber. After that, the great castle sleeps, and the cycle begins anew the following day.

THREE PILLARS

A Resident Evil

A lord's favored squire sleeps like a hound outside his master's door, one ear cocked for the slightest sound or summons. In those first weeks I made many clumsy mistakes while tending to the baron, but while he never hesitated to correct me, Baron Robert did not dismiss me to the donjon dormitories. The baron kept me in the favored place, almost out of defiance, it seemed, though at what I could not imagine. The honor meant little to me whenever Paul caught me alone in the castle halls.

Every aspect of the castle had its hierarchy. The lord (who himself must answer to a feudal superior) commanded his high servants, who themselves commanded lesser servants, and even the least of these, down to the pot-boys, had a clear pecking order of who defers to whom. Everyone, it seemed, had at least one person beneath them to lord over. It was no different with the squires. Baron Robert maintained no less than eight, a sign of his wealth and power. The squires with the most seniority terrorized those beneath them, heaping abuse and labor upon their juniors daily. It was no secret to the baron, whom I imagine suffered much the same way when he was a squire. I bore up under Paul's torments and fought back by holding onto the favored place outside the baron's door. In years to come, the seniors would pass on, receiving their knighthoods, and despite many bitter promises made after beatings or demeaning tasks, I found myself terrorizing the new lads junior to me with equal viciousness. It was simply the way of things.

We squires were the baron's closest companions, near him every hour of every day. In the process of attending him, we observed the ways and means by which he ruled his domains, and he discussed matters of rulership with us many times, gently guiding us to insight and maturity. We were like sons to him, which meant that all too often if we made a step amiss, Robert did not hesitate to correct us bluntly and sometimes harshly. We were nourished in this way, made ready for our future responsibilities, and we were fortunate that our lord took his responsibilities so seriously. In some parts of the land, there were evil lords who used their position to inflict hideous abuses on the boys in their charge.

Three months passed before I set eyes upon the baroness, Margaret. One evening she came to supper in the great hall unannounced; I remember how all the tumult of the feasters fell silent, like birds startled to stillness by the tread of a hunter.

I had never seen anyone so regal before. She was tall and pale as alabaster, with only the faintest rosy blush on her lips. The rushes crackled faintly with her delicate tread, and the baron's great hounds hung their heads and shied away from her approach. The baron rose to welcome his wife. She stood before the master's table and made a slow, deliberate bow. Even I could see the mockery there, but Robert made no reply. The baroness took her place beside Robert, and slowly — tentatively — the meal resumed.

I felt her gaze upon me while I performed my tasks, setting my nerves on edge. Never did the baron offer her a cut of meat or a drink of wine. Her plate sat empty; she watched everything and everyone around her. When the meal ended and the trouveres began their tales, I hastened from the hall. Even in the kitchens my skin prickled with waves of heat and cold. It still felt as though she was watching me.

When we gathered back in the hall for the baron to bid everyone good night, the baroness was waiting. Baron Robert summoned me. There was a terrible weariness in his voice, a hollow sound of despair. "Conduct my wife to her chambers, boy," was all he said, and the sound of defeat in those words left me cold.

The night was dark as the Devil's heart as we left the palais. Margaret made her way through the garden effortlessly, leaving me to stumble along in her wake. She laughed softly. "My husband thinks much of you, placing you outside his door. Why is that, Renauld?"

"I'm sure I do not know, my lady," was the best I could manage.

"No? How disappointing. I had hoped it was because you were someone special, someone with promise." The guards at the entrance to the palais hung their heads meekly as she passed. Stung by her words, I followed her inside.

"My father was a great knight," I ventured, as we set our feet upon the great stair. "He saved the baron's life at Clairault."

"What a pity the son cannot match the father. I hear that the other squires beat you. They handle you like a calf." She turned, and it seemed as though her eyes flashed like a cat's in the torchlight. "I think my husband holds you close because he fears that you could not survive sleeping in the dormitory, and he has pity for your father."

My cheeks burned like hot coals. Shame and anger tightened my hands into fists. My fear of the baroness was forgotten as I followed her inside a dimly-lit chamber. "I am my father's son. I will not fail him, or my lord, the baron. And one day, Paul will not dare raise his hand to me."

"Oh, such bold words," Baroness Margaret laughed. "Such bold, empty words."

With a start, I realized we stood in the baroness' bedchamber. Barely a handful of candles burned in the large room, guttering in unseen drafts and throwing wild, contorted shadows on the aged walls. This light gave only hints about the room, the outlines of a large bed, formed of dark wood. Ragged tapestries, tables covered in earthenware jars or old, ironbound books. The baroness went to one such table. "It takes courage to be strong, Renauld. The courage to do what must be done. I fear you haven't the heart." She drew a chalice from the tabletop and turned to me, a smile on her face. "Better you should return to your tower. Live out your life behind stone walls. Your father is dead, and will not know."

Her eyes glittered with merriment, and my rage slipped its leash. "I will show you courage! Name me a task, my lady. Anything."

Baroness Margaret smiled. She was playing with me, like a child with a new pet, and I burned for the chance to prove her wrong.

She held up the chalice. "Then drink," she said. The cup brimmed with dark wine. "Have you the courage to empty my cup?"

I took the chalice without hesitation and raised it to my lips.

My mouth filled with blood. Hot, bitter, fresh from the vein. Blood. My mind reeled with revulsion and horror. But there were her eyes, boring into mine, certain of my weakness.

I thought of Paul, and the beatings, and her mockery, and I swallowed. Again, and again, gulping the abominable drink. Blood dribbled down my chin, soaking into my bliaut. And still I drank. May God have mercy on my soul.

Knights in Training

In addition to acting as bodyservant and confidant to the baron, a squire spends part of nearly every day training for a knight's chief function: combat. A noble son first holds a sword at age seven, becoming accustomed to its weight and the punishing shocks of dealing repeated blows against wooden targets and blunted blades. He learns to deliver strikes from horseback as well as on foot, and then later, to handle the knight's oval-shaped kite shield. By 15, an aspiring squire has developed enough strength and basic familiarity with the tools of battle that he can begin to refine his art under the tutelage of the castle's master-at-arms.

During the afternoons, while the lord and lady of the castle are taking their leisure, the squires are sent to the inner courtyard to practice swordplay. They fight in full armor: a hauberk of mail and leggings that covers their torso, arms and legs, plus mail "mittens" that cover the hands and a *coif* that protects the head. Over the *coif* goes a heavy steel helmet, called a great helm, which offers ample protection at the cost of limited visibility and poor ventilation. Squires and knights alike wear thick padding under the armor to provide some modicum of comfort and added protection against blows. Owing to all this protection, it is uncommon for knights to be slain on the field of battle. The rules of chivalry require that a knight accept the honorable surrender of a fellow knight when offered it, in return for payment of a ransom of gold or property rights. Thus, there is a powerful incentive to beat a foe into submission and take his surrender.

In addition to several hours of sword work, squires must practice the skills of fighting from horseback. It is the horse and the power of a mounted charge that makes the armored knight the master of the battlefield, and it forms the foundation for the authority of the noble class. Noble children, sons and daughters alike, learn to ride as soon as they are old enough to remain in a saddle. During their nourishment, squires perfect the ability to strike targets from horseback with both sword and lance. Squires practice first against straw targets representing men on foot, then try their hand against the quintain, and wood-and-straw mannequin clad in armor, and made to represent a mounted knight. Squires must control their horses, hold their lance at the correct angle, and properly react to the shock of their lances' impact against the target — all in all, a feat of intense coordination.

At the time of a squire's knighting, he performs two feats to prove he has mastered the necessary skills to become a knight. First comes a feat of strength: The squire, in full armor, must run and vault onto the back of his horse, without the assistance of stirrup or saddle. Once mounted, the squire must ride out onto the lists, where the quintain awaits. The second feat requires that the squire take a lance and make a single charge at the quintain, striking it solidly, so that the lance penetrates the target's shield and mail covering. A squire can fail one or both of these feats and still receive his adubbment, but his reputation for martial prowess will be severely stained.

Learning to fight is only part of a knight's training, however. *Chevaliers* are expected to be paragons of virtue and courtly behavior. To that end, the squires bear the responsibility of escorting the lady and her daughters when outside the castle, and entertaining visiting noble dames with stories, songs and games. The castle ladies take the young men in hand and help them to become charming and well-versed, smoothing their rough manners and making them mindful of the dispositions of the gentler sex. If a squire is very fortunate, the castle mistress will also insist on teaching the young men their letters, which allows them to broaden their education as well as to better oversee their estates in years to come.

Blood Curse

I had drunk a chalice of blood before the Baroness of Hautmont, gorging on damnation while she looked on and smiled. Too late, I learned that the madwoman had not been so mad after all, and that darkness indeed had come to dwell in my master's castle. Baroness Margaret was not cloistered at all. She was a vampire, and fearful of the light of day. She haunted the stygian vaults of the castle donjon, *surrounding herself with castle walls and men-at-arms to protect her daytime sleep. And the castle folk served her, whether they knew it or not. I suddenly understood the haughty looks of certain castle servants, and the weary distraction of the baron. Baron Robert no longer ruled in Hautmont, if in fact he ever did.*

Her blood had made me stronger and faster than I had ever been before. I felt no fatigue, had no need for much sleep, and my senses grew sharp. There was not a single squire who could best me with sword or lance, though I found that horse and hound alike grew skittish of me, as though they could sense the foul taint at work in my veins.

But after a month, I felt the fire in my blood begin to wane, and my strength waned with it. The other squires noticed, and took their vengeance out upon me on the practice field. My arrogance gave way to despair. Like all evil things, the gift of the baroness did not last. If I wanted to keep my prowess, I would have to seek her out again and again, so long as I lived.

I resisted as long as I could. The baroness welcomed me like a lost son, and gave of her blood, with a mocking smile that shed no warmth. She knew that I was hopelessly ensnared. I drank, and grew strong, and my misery knew no bounds.

Afterward, the only pleasant hours of my nourishment were spent in the garden attending on the fair Elaine, reading poetry and entertaining her with song. As I came to know her, I found my seignior's daughter to be more beautiful and refined than any other lady in Christendom, and the very image of gentle nobility. She seemed entirely innocent of the monster that her mother had become, existing only for her sisters and her books. I grew ever more protective of her, determining that if I were to be Damned, I would save her from the same fate, to the

last drop of my blood. After I had waited on her for a year, one day she favored me with a smile and a coquettish laugh. "If you were a knight, would you wear my scarf in the tournaments, Renauld?"

My heart swelled, with sadness and a terrible, hollow joy. I bowed to her deeply. "Fair damoiselle," I replied gravely, "I shall be a knight, and your father's man. It would be my honor to wear your token in the lists, if you deem me worthy." To which she let out a high, musical laugh. Her eyes glittered like sapphires.

"Then I shall make for you a garland," she said, "to wear upon your helm, and a scarf of silk for your lance. And you will joust for me." Then her face became serious, and she leaned close, placing a tiny white hand on my own. One of Elaine's maids frowned disapprovingly. "What if I should be taken," she said, "captured by my father's enemies and ransomed like a king? What then?"

My breath felt hot in my lungs, and I could hear the blood rushing like a river in my ears. "I would ride to your rescue, through darkness and death, against all the knights in Christendom. As any true knight would," I added hastily. It would not do for the maids to tell Elaine's mother that I presumed upon her daughter's affections.

The maids shifted about like fretful hens, but Elaine had eyes only for me. "You are my Roland," she said softly, and from that moment forward, I was.

Law and Order

Despite the best efforts of enlightened men there is not yet a central code of law throughout the kingdoms of Christendom. Since the time of Charlemagne, local lords have bore the responsibility of meting out justice and punishments as they see fit, asserting this right as the privilege of their God-granted nobility. To some, this duty is a burden, borne with solemnity; to others, it is a license to inflict pain upon their helpless subjects.

A noble's capacity to dispense justice depends, like everything else, on his rank. A landed knight or petty noble has the power of *low justice*, the right to judge petty infractions such as public drunkenness or quarreling, and can sentence guilty parties to minor punishments such as the stocks or flogging. More serious offenses, such as murder, theft or rape, are adjudicated by the local baron. The barons of Europe (and their superiors) have the right of *high justice*, giving them the absolute power of life and death over all the peasants and vassals within their domain. How these forms of justice are applied depends on what rank of society the accused comes from. Ideally, nobles enforce the laws of the land harshly but fairly. In reality, there is no equality under law, and individuals are presumed to be guilty unless it is proved otherwise. A peasant accused of a high crime is often executed after a swift and arbitrary trial. A priest,

however, can declare that his holy station makes him immune from earthly judgments, and demand that his case be given over to the church for adjudication (often leading to an acquittal or at least a lessening of punishment). In the case of the nobility, the law becomes less binding still. To begin with, a high noble can only pronounce judgments on those lords who owe him fealty. The reasons for this are practical as well as political. Punishing another baron's vassal can be taken as an act of war, leading to dire repercussions. Short of killing a noble criminal outright, the only other punishments that can be levied are fines or confiscation of property, neither of which can be legally enforced since a baron's legal recourse stops at the boundary of his territory. Like accused clergy, nobles who are accused of crimes in another baron's territory must be sent elsewhere for judgment, in this case to the court of the baron's *seignior*. The baron's noble superior, in theory, has authority over not only the barony in which the crime had been committed, but also the fief from which the accused hails, giving the *seignior* the power and authority to make punishments felt. The end result is that many unscrupulous knights errant and other traveling nobles are tempted to brutal abuses of power that they might not normally entertain on their own lands.

Any noble accused of a crime has the right to demand a trial by his peers. This trial, called an *assize*, is announced far and wide, giving as many nobles a chance to attend as possible. The jury of peers hears the case and decides the guilt or innocence of the accused, and the local baron must abide by the decision. Even then, however, a guilty verdict can be reversed. If a member of the jury believes that the verdict is unjust, he may demand that the judgment be settled in a trial by combat. Thus, a knightly duel must be fought, not between the accuser and the accused, but between the accuser and the juror, and God will give victory to whomsoever champions the truth. The clergy disapproves of such trials, perhaps suspecting that more than one guilty man has gone free by virtue of a well-meaning ally's sword arm, and so the Church has managed to limit the use of trial by combat to only the most serious trials.

Criminals awaiting trial or execution are held in the subterranean chambers of the castle *donjon*. Prisoners of noble blood are entitled to a decent-sized cell and reasonable food. If the crime is not especially severe, a noble has the option of paying a moderate bail that would allow him to avoid imprisonment altogether while awaiting trial. The peasantry have no such privileges. They are thrown into cold, wet cells infested with vermin, and they are lucky to keep their clothes. The dark places beneath a castle *donjon* are host to a grim assortment of confinements; there are little-ease chambers, rooms where prisoners have room neither to sit nor stand, or *chausses de hypocras*, cells where a man's feet are constantly kept in water. There are even *oubliettes*, the "chambers of forgetfulness," remote cells in the lowest levels where prisoners are sealed up and left to die. Yet, these are the least of the *donjon*'s terrors. Throughout Europe, it is the custom to call a castle's master hangman by the name of the *seigniory* that he served (e.g., *Maitre'* Hautmont). These men attend not only to hangings, but also to beheadings (the proper method of execution for the nobility), tortures, and they act as master jailers. The position involves considerable social stigmata; hangmen's families marry amongst themselves, from fief to fief, and sons follow in the footsteps of their fathers. It is a job with good security and not much work.

Torture is common even in a humane noble's castle, used often to extract confessions from criminals, including nobles if the accusations relate to treason. The methods of persuasion vary from region to region. In Brittany, the accused is tied to an iron chair and gradually brought closer to a blazing fire; in Normandy, a criminal's thumbs are squeezed in a kind of screw. At Autun, a particularly ingenious method involves placing the prisoner's feet in boots of spongy leather. Boiling water is then poured over the boots, which penetrates the leather and eats away the flesh, granting a foretaste of Hell itself. At Hautmont, the preferred torture is known as "squasations." The criminal's hands are tied behind his back and then fastened to iron rings. Chains attached to these rings lift the man off the floor. If the crime demands extraordinary torture, weights of up to 250 pounds can be attached to the accused's feet. The victim is then hoisted all the way to the ceiling and allowed to drop with a jerk, dislocating his limbs.

There are many simpler and more convenient means of torture at a hangman's disposal as well: injecting boiling water, oil or vinegar into the accused; applying hot pitch or placing hot eggs under the armpits. Lit candles are sometimes tied to the hands so that they are consumed along with the wax, or water drips from a great height onto the victim's stomach. Oddly, this method is said to break down the most stubborn criminals, as is watering the soles of a criminal's feet with salt water and allowing goats to lick them. Of course, the most common method of torture is the rack. Victims lie on long wooden trestles and their hands and feet are tied to great wooden wheels, which are then turned in order to stretch the body and slowly dislocate the limbs.

The execution of a condemned criminal is carried out swiftly and efficiently. A peasant sentenced to hang is placed in a wagon and carried out of the castle to the neighboring village or town. There the wagon stops at the local church and the condemned man is allowed to beg forgiveness for his crimes before God. The abbot performs the final unction, and then the criminal is paraded back through town to the gallows. The only hope the peasant has for reprieve is the slim chance that the hangman's rope might break. If this happens, it is taken as a sign from God proving the peasant's innocence, and he is allowed to go free.

The only cause of execution for a noble is the crime of high treason to the kingdom. A convicted nobleman is allowed a final meal on the morning of the execution, then he is conducted to the castle chapel to confess his sins and receive the last rites. Unlike the hanging of a peasant, the execution is commonly carried out in private. There is also no hope for reprieve — an executioner's axe never breaks.

Dark Designs

I was trapped in service to the Damned, giving up my soul for an unholy communion of stolen blood. The baroness had deathless strength and ancient guile to turn me to her will. Worse still, the law of the land favored her.

My second drink of the baroness' blood lent me even greater strength and stamina than I had felt before. In return, I served the baron's needs during the day, and the baroness' after dark. At first, I looked upon the foul creature that was Baroness Margaret and thought her nothing more than a Hell-spawned monster haunting the dark places of a venerable castle. As time passed, however, and I learned more about the ways of the vampires, I realized with horror that she took a keen interest in the management of the estates, with keeping the law and following the tides of politics. Baron Robert was little more than a mouthpiece giving voice to her commands.

For a time this confounded me. Why would a creature possessing immortality, ageless intellect and supernatural vitality have a care for mortal law? Then, when the troubles began with neighboring Courtrace, I had my answer.

The raids began in late summer. Courtrace men stole across the border and attacked isolated farms, putting families to the sword and setting crops alight, then retreating back to their lands before Hautmont soldiers could arrive.

The baroness was enraged by the news. The raids, should they continue, would put a considerable strain on the barony's resources, limiting its capabilities in almost every aspect. "It is Guy de Montpassant!" Margaret declared. "He has crept like a rat into Courtrace's halls and has set them against me. Nothing else explains this sudden belligerence."

That was when I understood why the baroness ruled Hautmont as any mortal noble might. Even a vampire's great powers could reach no further than the length of her arm or the sound of her voice. They could only affect what was immediately nearby, the same as any man. But an army gave a vampire influence for many miles, and coffers of gold could sway minds all over Christendom. The resources of a fief gave a vampire a long reach, indeed. What was more, by taking control of a great fief such as Hautmont, a vampire gained not only the resources of a noble family, but also the allegiance of the vassal lords who owed them fealty.

The baroness controlled Hautmont as surely as if it had been hers by birthright. The tower and the lands my father had passed to me were also, ultimately, hers as well. That was the basis for my fealty. Even if I had the strength to resist the baroness' temptations, even if I did not love Elaine more than life itself, the cursed creature that ruled Hautmont could still have threatened to take my lands from me if I did not obey her wishes. Many strands comprised the cord that bound me to Baroness Margaret.

Of course, not all vampires desired the trappings of nobility. In fact, as I came to learn, many of the Damned were solitary creatures, leery of the company of their fellows and tormented by their own inner demons. A vampire who haunted the nighttime fringes of the noble classes did so because the need for power blazed in the core of their being. Most often, these creatures had been nobles themselves and had been raised with the expectation of rulership, so even in dark damnation they were drawn to what they had known all their lives. I came to know of one vampire bloodline, the Ventrue, who perpetuated themselves almost exclusively from noble families. Other vampires took hold of the reins of power simply because they could, for vengeance, for greed or to escape the desperate boredom of immortality. Such was Guy de Montpassant, a madman even in life, who twisted the minds of mortal lords to do his bitter deeds.

The baroness was one of the Ventrue, seduced into darkness shortly after the birth of her last child. She never spoke of the fiend who turned her, or how it was done, and it was never my place to ask. Why Guy de Montpassant desired her destruction, I never knew. It was enough to me that he meant Hautmont to fall. For that alone, it was my duty to oppose him.

Vampire nobles maintain the laws of the land as earnestly as their mortal peers, for it is the law that keeps their lands secure and establishes alliances and obligations that they can make use of. I have heard that in some benighted Eastern lands these creatures of Hell disdain any subterfuge and rule openly, becoming a law unto themselves.

Like their mortal counterparts, vampire nobles preserve the law in order to twist it to their own ends.

So it was with Courtrace. The raids continued into autumn, until finally the Hautmont vassal whose farms were being hardest hit set an ambush and captured a band of the raiders. In his rage, the vassal hung the raiders without trial, taking high law into his own hands. Without delay, the Baron of Courtrace demanded the arrest of the vassal, Sir Morgan, and within the bounds of the law, Baron Robert had little choice but to comply. The repercussions of the arrest would be far-reaching. Courtrace could potentially seek claim to Sir Morgan's lands in redress for the hanged knights. At the very least the legal suit would leave Sir Morgan's fief seriously weakened, which left the barony vulnerable.

"Montpassant seeks to goad me," Baroness Margaret declared when she heard the news. "He wants to bring Hautmont into conflict with Courtrace. Clearly it is a trap. Damn Sir Morgan! The impetuous fool! If he had kept his head, we would not be facing this problem at all."

I listened, feeling my heart grow cold. Twelve peasants were killed, for the sake of a legal maneuver. The baroness spoke of the affair as an annoyance, no more. What did that say about her feelings for the men she commanded? Were we all nothing more than pawns for the Damned?

The baroness turned to me. "We will give the madman no satisfaction. Tell my husband to arrest Sir Morgan. Sir Morgan is to be encouraged to demand a trial by his peers." Baroness Margaret smiled. "If Montpassant goes so far as to provoke a trial by combat, we may turn this situation against him. Also tell my husband that I think now is the time for us to conclude our business with Hugh of Artois."

Their Day in Court

In addition to impromptu judgments presented as necessary, all high nobles must set aside one day each month when the subjects of their domains can gather and appeal a case before their *seignior*. These court days are important because they allow faraway vassals a predictable time to plan their trips to the castle and be guaranteed an audience. It also lets lords take action on matters that require a collection or quorum of nobles to participate in, such as an *assize* or a council of war. Every vassal lord is required to be present and offer support and counsel to their *seignior* for each and every trial set before the baron, but such is the distance most vassals have to travel to court that this duty is seldom fulfilled except in special circumstances.

Another important function of court day is the swearing of allegiances or fealty. The oath of fealty is more than a simple ceremony. It is a symbol of loyalty, a commitment of support both physical and spiritual that runs in both directions. As a vassal swears to uphold his *seignior*, so too does the *seignior* accept the vassal as his charge, with the inherent obligations of respect and support.

Fealty is in many ways the coin of the nobility, and obligations exchanged for lands or privileges can sometimes lead to conflicting of loyalties. It is entirely possible for a noble to owe fealty to more than one lord. Baron Robert himself owes fealty to his longtime lord, the Count of Vermandois, but Robert's father accepted a gift of choice hunting lands from the neighboring Count of Champagne in exchange for free use of Hautmont's river bridge in times past. Thus, Robert owes different levels of fealty to two masters. As Hautmont castle lies on the Champagne side of the Meuse, if the two neighboring counties ever went to war with one another, Robert would be obliged to allow the count's armies past the castle and across the river, then do battle with them on the other side! While the peasantry is enjoined never to look a proverbial gift horse in the mouth, a nobleman must always be wary of another's generosity.

There is more to inheriting a fiefdom than merely a young man coming into lands and wealth. The law of the land states that when the son of a vassal takes possession of his father's title, the vassal's *seignior* is entitled to a monetary payment called a *relief*. The *relief* is usually a fairly large sum, a means of establishing a formal debt between the new lord and his superior even before the oath of fealty has been declared. In the case of Sir Henry, Baron Robert's son, the challenges of succession are greater still. Being the eldest entitles him to the family castle and most of the baronial lands, but not all. A small part passes to his brother Percival, and should his younger brother dispute the claim, Henry would have to count on the loyalty of his vassals to support the division of land. This in itself is no small feat, as many of the vassal lords would be tempted to test their new *seignior*'s resolve, making their own demands of land and privileges in the hopes of feathering their own nests. At the same time, neighboring barons, who make

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threats and demands of their own, often bully concessions out of young and inexperienced rulers. New rulers find themselves beset from all sides by opportunists and insubordinate vassals, and a powerful domain may come apart at the seams in a few short months under a weak and incapable master.

Blood Feud

By the time came for Sir Morgan's trial, the blood of the baroness was fast fading from my veins. As my strength waned I found myself longing for its unholy vitality with a desperation that unnerved me. The baroness declared that if I were to drink from her a third time, she would require an oath of fealty from me. At last, the trap had sprung. I could not refuse. When I acquiesced, the baroness declared that the oathtaking would be made before her assembled court.

It came as no surprise to me that the baroness would hold a court of her own, a dark, forbidding mirror-image to the daylit business of Hautmont. The trappings of power attract supplicants and hangers-on, and the reality was no different for the society of the Damned. Had she wished, Baroness Margaret could have surrounded herself with a deathless entourage the envy of any mortal count.

During my months of servitude I had witnessed several other vampires come and go through the castle donjon, *slipping in through the tunnels beneath the castle or entering brazenly through the gate. Within the bounds of Hautmont and beyond, the baroness had vampires in service to her, whether by oaths of fealty or other obligations. They acted as her eyes and ears, helping to protect her domain and make her wishes felt. Some vampires served her for the sake of her patronage. In my time I saw more than one pale* trouvere *take gold or blood from the baroness in exchange for nights of ancient song and poetry.*

The law of fealty is a double-edged sword to vampire nobility. While a vampire could subvert a mortal household and lay claim to its vassals indirectly, by the same token these supernaturally powerful creatures assumed obligations of their own to the household's seignior. A knight held his lands on behalf of a baron, who held lands on behalf of a count, who in turn ruled considerable domains at the behest of a duke, and so on back to the king. Baroness Margaret was an immortal, a servant of darkness, but if the mortal Count of Vermandois demanded support from Hautmont, the baroness would be obligated to give it, or else risk forfeiting her lands. It sometimes gave me bleak amusement to wonder how many mortal nobles could unwittingly command creatures whose powers were beyond human comprehension! The game of thrones has its rules, and even the undead must abide by them.

The subsequent court day saw nearly a dozen nobles come to speak with the baron, on subjects ranging from crop blights to castle building, to a wild report of huge wolves stalking the forests south of Belvain. There also arrived the Baron of Courtrace and three of his sons, demanding redress for their peasants whom Sir Morgan had slain. From beyond Courtrace came an even more distant baron, Hugh of Artois, along with his eldest son to conduct some private business with my master.

It was a long, tiring day, and the great hall of the palais *was always full. In addition to the nobles, many common folk had disputes to be settled, or merchants desired some agreement for their river trade. Even several village friars came to ask for material assistance for their parishes. With only a brief pause at dinner, Robert listened to each case with care. Whenever possible, he gave a clear and immediate ruling. "Your subjects must see that you are confident and decisive," Robert often told me. "They must feel that their disputes are of worth to you. Even those whom you ruled against then return home with the belief that you are a conscientious ruler, of strong character and clear mind, and this reputation will spread throughout your domain."*

When all of the barony's petty business was done, the Baron of Courtrace stepped forward and declared loudly, "Justice! I have waited this entire day to hear what the Baron of Hautmont intends to do about the murder of my peasants!" John of Courtrace was a tall and fierce-looking man, with the pale skin of the Celts and hair as black as night. He was a fearsome baron, a man who held power over his vassals like an iron club, and there was no man in Vermandois who would gainsay him. His anger filled the hall like a cold wind. "Where is your justice, Robert of Hautmont? Give Sir Morgan to me, and I shall show you how Courtrace deals with impertinent vassals!"

Cries of outrage resounded throughout the hall. I watched the assembled faces, seeking out those who held their composure, those who knew as I did the true players behind this game. Baron Robert answered his neighbor coolly, "My knight has demanded a trial by his peers, as is his right. The assize will be called on the morrow. Until then, I welcome you as a guest in my hall, so you may satisfy yourself that justice will be done."

John of Courtrace did little to conceal the disdain in his voice. "Oh, well said. Slippery as an eel. We will wait for as long as it takes, and when tomorrow comes, my sons will help decide Sir Morgan's fate." The baron's three sons, clad in blackened mail, had the languid look of snakes about them. "And any knight who dares say that Morgan is not guilty of murder shall feel the bite of Courtrace steel!"

Baron Hautmont was sorely troubled that evening, drinking more than his usual share of wine. As I readied him for bed, I saw the haunted look in his eyes and I asked him if he feared that Sir Morgan would not have a fair trial.

"I fear he will not, Renauld," Robert said wearily. "The man insulted me in front of nearly a dozen of my knights, and they sat as timid as church mice..." The baron's eyes grew distant, and I saw in their unguarded depths a terrible, bleak helplessness. He could no more defy the monster that was his wife any better than I could. "Well, take this as another lesson, boy. Keep a careful eye on your possessions, be they land or men, for someone always seeks to take them from you. Ambitious nobles will try to expand their domains by taking yours. They lure away your vassals with gifts, bribing them to break their promises of fealty or promising better protection and prosperity under their rule. They employ devious means to turn your people against you, sowing discontent, then if they see you are weak, they march in and take what they want."

The baron gave a bitter laugh. "In the peasantry, we call such a thing thievery," he said and took a deep breath. "Enough prattling. Attend to my wife's commands," he said bitterly, waving his hand in dismissal. "Tomorrow will come too soon, I fear."

The assize gathered in the great hall after Mass, and the knights of Hautmont and Courtrace assembled to hear Sir Morgan's case. The knight was summoned from the donjon, and he looked his accusers in the eye as he told of repeated raids onto his lands by Courtrace men. Cattle had been stolen, as well as grain, and in one instance, a farm had been put to the torch and the entire family murdered. At that point, Sir Morgan declared, he considered the raids to constitute an invasion of the baron's land, and when he finally caught a band of raiders, he treated them like invading troops and killed them.

Throughout the trial, the sons of Courtrace were vocal and derisive, challenging every statement Sir Morgan made and accusing him again and again of usurping his seignior's privilege of high law. Finally, Simon of Courtrace, the baron's eldest son, rose angrily from his seat and cried, "Enough! We have heard this man's excuses! The fact that our peasantry might have raided Hautmont lands is not the issue here. Sir Morgan took the high law into his own hands and must be punished. What say you all?"

"Guilty!" cried Simon's younger brothers. Once again, their gaze swept the hall, and from the silence that followed, it was clear that none had forgotten the threat of John of Courtrace.

One by one, the knights nodded their heads in acquiescence, cowed into condemnation of their fellow lord. All except one. Henry, the baron's eldest son, rose slowly from his chair. "I will not sit idle while a man is condemned for his loyalty," the young knight said. "Sir Morgan is right. The men of Courtrace struck repeatedly at his fief, and he was within his rights to take action as he would against any invader. What difference if the raiders die by sword or rope? As Sir Morgan has sworn to defend my family's lands, so too have we sworn to defend him. Your judgment is wrong, Sir Simon, and I demand it be settled by an Ordeal of Battle."

I expected Simon to erupt in a towering rage, but he only laughed, a frighteningly merry sound, as though he were being asked to join a hunt instead of fighting a duel. "So be it! I shall see two Hautmont men die today. We shall meet in the inner courtyard after you have made your peace with God."

The two knights met in the inner court, wearing full armor and wielding sword and shield. All the nobles gathered in attendance, including the baron's daughters. Elaine's face was pale with fright, and I longed to be able to reassure her of her brother's triumph. The truth was, I feared for Henry myself. Was this what the baroness meant by turning Guy de Montpassant's schemes against him? As near as I could tell, Sir Henry was entirely ignorant of his mother's damnation, and had nothing but his God-given strengths to call upon. I was certain that Simon of Courtrace had the blood of a vampire singing in his veins. He was certainly as much a ghoul as I was.

The two combatants faced one another, their expressions unreadable beneath their heavy helmets. Father Mortimer stepped forward, raising his arms to heaven. "Lord God of Hosts, be with these valiant knights—" Whatever else the priest intended to pray was drowned out in a roar as Sir Simon charged headlong toward Sir Henry.

The battle was swift. The man from Courtrace moved with a speed and strength that surprised even me. He fell upon Henry like a storm, hammering his blade against shield, sword, and helm, all in a frenzy of blows. Sparks flew from Henry's helm and great cracks appeared in the wooden face of his shield. It was a terrifying sight to behold; in that moment I did not blame those knights who feared to face John of Courtrace and his kin.

Henry's shield dropped a heartbeat later, faltering under the withering assault, and he left his head unprotected. Simon did not hesitate, swinging a terrible blow at Henry's helm.

I think Henry knew he was outmatched from the beginning. He called for the Ordeal because he felt it was his duty to support the innocence of one of his family's vassals. He did not desert that duty.

Even as Simon's blow fell, Henry thrust forward with all his strength. His sword extended parallel to Simon's sword arm and penetrated the vulnerable spot at the knight's armpit. Henry's blade went deep, shearing through lungs and heart, even as Simon's sword split Henry's helm asunder.

Henry fell to his knees, pulling the shattered helmet away. Blood poured freely from a terrible wound at his temple. My lord's son looked down at the twitching body of Simon and spoke in a quiet voice. "God's will is done." Then his eyes rolled back in his head, and Henry fell to the ground.

Elaine let out a despairing wail. We Hautmont squires rushed to Henry's side. Sir John and his sons came forward. They gathered up Simon's limp form, wrapping the knight in a cloak, and John turned to my master. There was rage in his eyes, and a helplessness I knew all too well. His face was cold and dead, and his words ground one against another like gravestones.

"We will not forget," was all the nobleman said, and the men from Courtrace turned away, bearing the body of Simon back home.

Squires escorted Henry to his room in the castle, watched over by his sisters and Father Mortimer. No one knew if the baron's son would live. That night I went to pledge my fealty to the creature whose schemes had brought Henry to death's door.

The baroness called her court in the cavernous assembly chamber of the donjon, presiding from a dais every bit as regal as her husband's. Some 20 vampires assembled there, called from all over the barony and beyond to discuss events and plan against the threat of Courtrace. For all that their numbers were fewer than Hautmont's sunlit court, the supernatural power of the collected nobles made them greater still. I could only wonder at how these vampires traveled from abroad — some by nocturnal processional, perhaps; others through cunningly transported coffins or covered carriages. They watched with varied expressions, some amused, some somber, others disinterested as I bowed my knee before the throne of the baroness. Another

vampire came forward, his face and form a blasphemous horror, holding the brimming chalice in his hand.

In keeping with their origins, vampire nobles invoke solemn ceremony when making oaths and allegiances. The Blood Oath requires no words to take its terrible effect, but like many of her Ventrue peers, the baroness favored the substance of ritual. She rose from the dais and took my hands, in dark mockery of the oath of fealty.

I took a deep breath, feeling my insides twist. I could not keep the quaver from my voice. "Baroness, I enter into your homage and faith and become your man, by mouth and hands, and I swear and promise to keep faith and loyalty to you against all others."

Baroness Margaret smiled with the pride one reserves for a well-trained hound. "I do promise to you, vassal Renauld, that I will guarantee to you the rights and privileges worthy of your station, against any creature with all of my power, and shall reward your faithful service in full measure."

She drew me gently to my feet and kissed me on the mouth. Where a mortal would then have sworn his oath on a holy reliquary, for me there was only a sacrilegious cup of blood.

I drank, completing the ritual. The baroness held my gaze with hers all the while, but my thoughts were only for Elaine. If the baroness would risk her eldest son to further her goals, what might she do to her daughter? I had long resigned myself to damnation, but I vowed then and there to keep Elaine safe, to somehow free her from her mother's clutches, even if it cost me my life.

Henry died just before the dawn.

Betrothals, Weddings and Celebrations

The importance of the institution of marriage to the nobility of Christendom cannot be overstated, for the linking of powerful families through ties of matrimony cements lasting political and economic relationships that can decide the course of fiefdoms for generations. Noble children are often betrothed while still in their cribs, as parents look to profitable alliances in the short-term and broadened resources in the long-term. The feelings of the child-brides never come into consideration in most cases.

Marriages begin as an offer, either from a suitor to the father of a lady, or from the father of a lady to the father of a prospective husband. Fathers of eligible ladies must provide dowries, financial incentives to make the marriage worthwhile to suitors. Dowries consist of gold, gifts of land and livestock, or other property rights that go to the bride's husband after the wedding. As marriage is a commitment for life, many noble fathers put great effort and thought into providing their daughters with suitable dowries. A nobleman with many daughters is a fretful man indeed.

The betrothal is a ceremony to solemnly declare the intention of marriage. It is the final step in the negotiation of a marriage contract, like the signature on a treaty or charter.

It is not the same thing as marriage, as the Church hastens to point out, because the particulars of that union are spiritual and should not be concerned with matters of state. Nevertheless, once a noble bride becomes the "intended" of a lord, it causes a great scandal if either family tries to back out of the agreement.

Traditionally, the father of the bride hosts the wedding at his castle, and if the bride's father is a wealthy man, a tournament sometimes follows to celebrate the union. Messengers scatter like crows, taking word of wedding to all the neighboring households. The father of the bride and his seneschal open the castle coffers, and gold that had been hoarded there for such times flows like water, summoning a never-ending stream of merchants, craftsmen and entertainers. The first noble guests arrive up to a month before the ceremony, coming from many miles away. Great tents and pavilions to house the many guests sprout up like a field of huge, colorful mushrooms outside the castle walls.

The castle enjoys a wondrous rebirth as the day of the wedding draws near. Walls get a good scrubbing and the courtyards and moats are cleaned, while the castle mistress conducts her servants like an army, ruthlessly attacking the dirt and dust of the long winter months. New clothes are made for all the servants. The filthy carpet of rushes laid out to cover the floor of the great hall is swept away and replaced, blended with roses, lilies, flag and mint, making a soft, fragrant carpet for the guests to walk on. In honor of the festivities, the bride's father directs the seneschal to set out some of the castle's greatest treasures: grand tapestries of precious silk or Venetian wool, blazing with color and life, hang in the hall and other parts of the *palais*.

In the bailey, the cookhouse enters a seemingly never-ending frenzy of preparation. Feeding all the guests and their retinues is a task that even the castle cooks find daunting. The baron's huntsmen ride forth daily to scour the countryside for game, and village boys receive a copper penny for every bird or young hare they can trap. Every day until the wedding, the great ovens blaze at all hours.

A store of gifts is assembled for the guests, each one is carefully chosen to honor the recipient and all are very expensive. Care must also be given to ensure that no recipient receives a gift more valuable than another noble of higher rank. It is enough to drive the mistress to distraction.

The weeks prior to the ceremony teem with many formal greetings and long afternoon hunts as the castle population swells to three times its number. When the blessed day dawns, the guests convene in all their bejeweled splendor, forming a procession that follows the bride and groom down from the castle and into the large church outside the castle village. Before the procession rides an entire troop of *trouveres*, filling the air with a joyous symphony of flutes, harps and viols. Behind the *trouveres* rides the bride, on a black mule with extra long ears and a carefully curried coat. The bride's father leads the mule, and the animal wears trappings of gold and scarlet samite. Then comes the groom, riding a white palfrey with a saddle of blue leather. Behind him comes his mother and the bride's mother, and all the female relatives of both families, their mules led by squires. Next, all the noble guests follow, with the father of the groom and the highest-ranking noble at the head. Along the road stretches the cheering multi-

tude of the peasantry, free from their day's labor in honor of the occasion. As the nobles pass, they toss coins into the crowd to show their wealth and generosity.

Finally, the procession reaches the church, and the highest-ranking clergyman the bride's father can summon to officiate the ceremony stands outside. The bride, according to custom, descends from her mule by a truss of hay. Standing before the sacred portal of the church, in the full light of day, bride and groom exchange their vows. Once they are said, the couple scatters silver deniers into the air to the cheers of the assembled peasants, and then the doors of the church swing wide, as the nobles make their way within.

Bride and groom sit in places of honor in the church's exalted chamber, while the priest intones the solemn Mass of the Trinity, and pronounces a special blessing over the couple. "Let this woman be amiable as Rachael, wise as Rebecca, faithful as Sarah. Let her be sober through truth, venerable through modesty, and wise through the teaching of Heaven."

The Mass finally ends. The Agnus Dei is chanted, and then the bridegroom advances to the altar and receives the kiss of peace from the bishop. The groom then turns to his wife and embraces her under the shadow of the crucifix, transferring the kiss to her, and with that the marriage is complete. Emerging back into the sunlight amid more cheering and coin-throwing, the procession returns to the castle, where the guests gather in the great hall to present their congratulations to the couple and give their gifts. After several hours, a fanfare of trumpets announces that the bridal feast is ready.

Even the great hall is too small to feed so many important guests, thus, the feast is served outside. The highest-ranking guests and family sit with the bride and groom under a great tent of blue silk, while the other guests are seated at enormous tables beneath the afternoon sunshine. The common folk are included, for on this day anyone who wishes to may come inside the barbican and eat their fill; no one from baron to beggar shall go away hungry. In the bridal tent, the wedding couple are served by two barons as servants of state. A great cup of wine is passed to the groom, who must drink half of it, then pass it to his wife, who must drink the rest to complete the ceremony. Then, the feasting begins.

The revelry lasts for hours, as the sun wanes and the music of the *trouveres* wafts through the warm night air. Down by the common tables, peasants dot the lawn as on a battlefield, lulled into sleep by food and wine. Those of the noble guests who are themselves not too overcome rise from the bridal tent to dance, their steps light and quick despite the hours of heavy eating. Finally, well into the night, the priest once more appears, and the wedded couple retires amid cheers to a great pavilion. Within, the cleric blesses the rose-strewn nuptial couch, while the newlyweds kneel piously before it. On the morrow, husband and wife are expected to attend a special morning Mass devoted to the virtues of marriage, and exchange promises of fidelity, patience and compassion.

Ominous Nuptials

The day following Henry's bitter victory, Baron Robert solemnly announced the betrothal of his daughter Elaine to Etienne, the son of Hugh of Artois.

The match was well-made, for the barony of Artois was a rich one, blessed with exceptional vineyards that allowed them to further benefit from the river trade. Robert agreed to allow barges with Artois wine free passage down his stretch of the Meuse for Elaine's dowry, and he promised to send 50 knights to help defend Hugh's lands in time of need. (As Artois was another sworn vassal of Vermandois, Robert reckoned it unlikely that Hugh and the count would find themselves opposing one another, though such things had been known to happen in the past.) In addition, a sum of gold would be paid equal to a year's revenue of the baron's properties, which by any accounts was a very generous sum. For his part, Robert knew that Artois was cousin to the heir of Vermandois, so Hautmont's ties to the count's family would be even further strengthened, and Elaine's children would sink Hautmont roots into the land and estates of their rich neighbor. The betrothal ceremony would be held in the chapel that evening. I spent the day trying to find some reason not to attend.

That evening, amid a blaze of candlelight, Elaine stood beside Sir Etienne at the altar, and after prayers, said their promises in the presence of their parents and the holiest of saintly relics. "I will take you for my wife," Etienne declared in a loud voice. "And I will take you for my husband," Elaine replied.

Watching from a shadowed alcove I felt a chill pass through my heart. I had hoped, for at least a glance from her, the smallest look of regret, but there had been none. After the ceremony the marriage was announced for the first day of spring, and a tournament would be held in honor of the blessed event. It promised to be an event the likes of which Hautmont had never seen before.

Often I had wondered why the baroness' children remained untouched by her taint, of all the people in the castle. Now I understood. Noble children are too valuable as bargaining pieces, too useful for the marriages they can make. That was why Henry died believing he was doing his duty as a high lord, instead of being sacrificed like a chess piece. That was why Elaine had been kept innocent, so that she could lay her hand on a saint's reliquary without hissing in torment.

When at last the wedding day arrived, I and the rest of the baroness' oathbound servants were ordered to watch over the proceedings in case Courtrace tried to interfere. I could not refuse. I watched Elaine pledge herself to Etienne of Artois and felt a bit of my heart die.

The baroness appeared at the bridal feast, sitting beside her husband with an air of cold, regal bearing as she accepted the guests' congratulations. Over the course of the night, I saw the pale faces of her vampiric court mingling amid the revelers. Doubtless they attended to their lady's business, but I also saw many a look of longing in their empty eyes. It was as if the celebration was the closest they could come to the warmth of mortal companionship. Every time one of those fiends refused a cup of wine, every time I caught one of those creatures looking stricken over the throngs of merry dancers, I felt a savage little spark of joy.

The Tournament

Throughout Christendom, tournaments are reckoned as "little wars themselves, and the apprenticeship to great ones." Though the Church objects vehemently to the practice, most nobles believe that without good tourneys one cannot train good warriors: "A knight cannot shine in war if he has not been prepared for it in the tourneys. He must have seen his own blood flow, have had his teeth crackle under the blow of his adversary, have been dashed to the earth with such force as to feel the weight of his opponent, and disarmed 20 times; he must 20 times have retrieved his failures, more than ever set on combat! Then he will be ready for actual war and can hope to conquer!"

In fact, early tourneys were little more than small wars, a series of battles fought at a certain location and organized as much for training as entertainment by nobles bored by years of relative peace. In those days there were no more rules to the tourney that one would expect to find on the field of battle, and many men were maimed or killed. Since then, high nobles have sought to make of the tourney a more "gentle" sport, for the enjoyment of participants and spectators. The tournament is a festival day for the common folk, who can put aside their labors and enjoy the spectacle. Cutpurses and scandalous "joy women" ply their trades amid the rough crowds, while merchants set up tents at the outskirts of the field and add their voices to the clamor. For the knights themselves, there is more than merely a chance to gain glory in combat, as every defeated knight must pay a ransom for his horse and armor to the victor. For this reason, many poor knights become professional jousters, going from tourney to tourney and living off ransom money. Because most captured armor is rarely cared for and often returned filthy and tarnished to their owners, professional jousters are sometimes referred to as making their living by "black mail."

In the days before a tournament, a small army descends upon the host field. Long lines of gaily-colored tents spring up near the castle lists, and squires run to and fro among them, stacking lances and readying tall warhorses. Men move amid the garish tents, sunlight glinting off the polished rings of their armor. The fields both within and without the barbican vanish under a sea of vibrant colors: blue, red, white, orange and royal purple. The only clear place is the site of the tourney itself, where two vast walls 100 yards long stand 50 yards apart. One wall is shoulder high, and behind it are the canopied and carpeted lodges of the noble spectators. The common folk have their place on the ground and jostle and shove to see the action. The inner wall is a barrier almost chest-high, with many openings along its length. Behind this barrier wait the squires with fresh horses, weapons and bandages.

As the first pearly glow of dawn touches the misty air on tournament day, the castle heralds move among the many tents, and lonely voices echo through the early-morning fog, "Jousters make ready! Jousters make ready!" Some knights, mostly young men touched with nerves before their first match, have long been awake, but now a general stirring arises, and before long squires busily prepare for the day's events. A good number of knights make their way up to the castle chapel for prayers. It is considered best to go to tourney with a clean conscience, because men still sometimes die on the jousting field.

After breakfast the sun looms high and bright, burning off the mist from the river, and the lodges are abuzz with gaily laughing ladies and the jovial talk of less martial nobles. At their feet swirls a giddy mass of commoners, shoving and shouting "Largess! Largess!" to their betters. From time to time a noble responds, tossing out a handful of coins and watching with amusement the scuffling it causes. Everyone wears their finest clothes, rich with fur trim and glittering with gold and jewels. Brightly colored pennons flutter everywhere, filling the air with a sound like beating wings. Then a bold fanfare of trumpets resounds, and everyone responds with a hearty cheer as the tournament begins.

The procession begins from the end of the lists, lead by four heralds in richly colored silk *bliauts*. Behind them comes a *trouvere* on horseback, tossing his sword high into the air end for end and catching it with the other hand. Then come the combatants, knights resplendent in their jousting array, riding two by two. Their chain hauberks gleam like ice, and their helms display wings or horns, or the figures of outlandish beasts. Their shields are painted and their horses' harnesses glitter with medallions of gold and silver. The professional jousters in their midst stand out like bare patches in a saint's reliquary, their plain, functional armor and tack giving them the gaunt, foreboding look of storm crows. The tourney knights take their parade down the length of the list, and then back again, each man competing for the admiration of the ladies. Riders prance and curvet their mounts as they pass someone worthy of special attention, and the gentle ladies, heady with the spirit of the joust, fling "gages of love" to them. Knights take up the ribbons or garlands and wind them around their lances. The showers of affection continue throughout the day as the ladies' favor switches like the wind from one cavalier to another. In the end some women are left with nothing but their pellisons and chemises!

As the procession ends, the knights take their positions, some mounted near the ends of the list, others dismounted with their squires behind the inner wall. Once all the knights have found their places a herald cries out, "Let him come to joust who wishes to do battle!" On cue, two trumpets answer, and from either end of the list come forth the garishly-colored pursuivants. The pursuivants are *trouveres* who have taken the coin of a jouster and are sent forth to loudly advertise their employer's martial prowess. Immediately the two entertainers begin to verbally spar with one another.

"Here is a bold cavalier, Ferri of St. Potentin! He is a brave knight of a noble house who will teach a lesson to his enemies!" cries one.

"Here is Pierre, eldest son of the most puissant Count of Maurevay! Watch now his deeds, all you who love brave actions!" cries the other.

"*Pierre?*" cries the first man, sounding as though he has stepped in something. "He is the son of a crow! His friends should be ashamed of him! Let him go and get his ransom money, for he'll soon have need of it!"

"Silence your boasts, you pursuivant of a listless master!" comes the retort. "Sir Ferri, if he should outlive the shock of defeat, shall have his spurs struck from his heels as an insult to knighthood!"

The crowd roars their approval, and the pursuivants quit the field as the two combatants are led into position by their squires. When all is ready, the marshal raises his white baton and calls loudly, "In the name of God and St. Michael, do your battle!"

The two knights lower their lances and charge. Three passes compromise each joust, and a knight who first unhorses his opponent is the clear victor. In the event that both knights keep to their saddles, the one who has the most solid hits wins.

For the most part, the jousters are paired against one another by mutual agreement and the decision of the tourney marshals. However, some matches are declared to settle a feud. It is these fierce duels that often see the most fatalities, for the jousters continue their battle until one man gives his yield. Most such fights begin on horseback, then continue on foot if a knight is unhorsed but can continue to do battle.

The second day of the tournament sees the grand finale, the *melee*. After a night of feasting and sharing tales of jousts past and present, those knights who can still fight lead the spectators to a large meadow nearby, and there separate into two even groups. Each side has a banner, usually held by the best fighter on each side, which the opposing side must capture to claim victory. The two forces start some ways apart, both a considerable distance from the shouting crowds, and with an angry cry of horns, both bands lower their lances and charge.

The knights come together in a deafening crash, and the air above them fills with the shards of splintered lances. Men from both sides are pitched from the saddle, and the squires must then rush into the chaotic battle. The danger in a tight-pressed *melee* is worst for the dismounted knights, who can easily be trampled in the confusion. The squires must drag prone fighters out of the press, much as they would be called upon to do in actual battle. Once the energy of the initial charge is spent, knights fight stirrup to stirrup with blunted swords, trying to force their way to their opponent's banner. The great battle often runs the length and breadth of the meadow until one of the armies is finally victorious.

After a dinner served on the battlefield and much praise offered for the many jousters and their gracious host, at last the tourney is done, and the many noble guests filter away, striking their camps and beginning their various journeys home. Over the following months, knights defeated in the jousts will have to provide ransoms in gold to the victor in order to reclaim their horses and armor.

The Tourney at Hautmont

A week after Elaine's wedding, the number of guests around the castle seemed to triple with all the knights and their retainers who came to joust for the baron's gold. Baron Robert offered 100 silver deniers to the man who won the most jousts, and the news spread like wildfire across the countryside. Elaine's sister Julianne and her maids swooned for days at the prospects of so many earnest knights competing for their favor.

Some 84 knights presented themselves on the day of the tournament, parading down the list in a brightly-colored procession like a fairy army. Even I found myself hard-pressed not to be carried away with the excitement of the jousts.

I and another of the baron's squires wagered which of the knights would likely win our lord's gold. We considered each of the knights in turn. Then, at the end of the procession, my eyes fell on the grim faces of John of Courtrace and his sons. Their armor was blackened, and the helms hanging from their saddles resembled the heads of dragons. They paid no mind to the cheering throng and the taunts of the fellow jousters. They had not come for friendly rivalries. Courtrace had come for blood.

Throughout the day, the ghoulish strength of John and his sons left splintered lances and senseless knights in their wake. Finally, at the end of the day, John of Courtrace took to the list and vowed to joust against all comers. A gasp went up from the crowd, but none of the knights dared to challenge him. Finally, it looked as though my lord the baron was considering sending for his armor, when Sir Percival raised his lance and entered the list amid cheers.

My lord's young son and the baron took their places. On the first pass, both knights struck cleanly, shattering their lances. Percival's struck the baron's shield and turned, while the baron hit Percival on the helm and flung him from the saddle.

"Dead! Dead!" went up the despairing cry from the lodge. Elaine screamed, and I ran to Percival's side, heedless of the baron's rearing horse. The baron's son was alive, but his helm had crumpled under the blow, and a piece of the eyeslit had been driven back into his left eye. He lay there clenching his teeth to keep from screaming. "Help me up," he groaned, and I shouldered his weight. Percival gave a weak wave to the crowd and his family, who were too far away to see how he had been maimed. Baron John looked down from his horse and smiled. "Well struck for a stripling," he sneered. "Now if you will excuse me, your father owes me a bag of silver deniers."

Baron Robert paid the prize to John of Courtrace, and howled his anguish behind closed doors. That night, my lord went among his men, offering great rewards to the man who could draw blood from the Courtraces in the melee the next day. Baron Robert looked as though he had aged a hundred years since the secret feud between the baroness and Guy de Montpassant had begun. I wondered how many more prices the baron would have to pay before all was said and done.

Many of the Damned moved amid the mortals that night, passing through the jousters' encampments and making conversation or congratulations. The more martial vampires watched the tourneys,

perhaps longing for the excitement and the challenge of combat now largely denied them. No vampire could ever ride at the head of an army, or win a lady's favor on a bright, sunny day. Many of the creatures tried to live out the glory of battle vicariously, choosing one or more mortal knights and making wagers on their performance in the lists. Some of the Ventrue spoke of undead tournaments, hosted by vampire lords, with jousting and melees under the cold moon. If these tales were true, such affairs seemed empty and forlorn by comparison. For what is a tournament without the crowds, the passion of young maidens and the vulgar joy of the common folk?

The baron himself took the field the next morning, leading one of the bands against John of Courtrace in the melee. For all his fury, and the exhortations he made to his men, my lord was defeated, driven from the saddle just short of the enemy banner. The men of Courtrace took their leave at the end of the day, but I knew that we had not seen the last of them.

Later that afternoon, Sir Etienne took his leave of us, returning to Artois with his new wife. The castle began the slow task of returning to its normal affairs, and I wondered if the scars on my heart would ever heal.

It was three days later that the messenger arrived, on a staggering and lathered mount. One of Elaine's maids had stumbled into the village of St. Anthony, the broken stub of an arrow in her back. Before she died she spoke the name "Courtrace." The villagers found the rest of the bodies half a league down the road. Horses and mules laid slain, wagons overturned, and the rest of the servants slaughtered. Etienne of Artois hung from a tree, pinned there by a lance. Of Elaine, there was no sign. The men of Courtrace had taken her.

When the baron heard the news a deadly calm fell over him. He thanked the messenger courteously and saw to the man's needs, then turned to his white-faced seneschal. "Call out the levies," was all he said, and with that Hautmont went to war.

A Knight Shall Ride to War

Throughout Dark Medieval Europe, baronies go to war with their neighbors frequently, often for reasons as simple as disputed borders, hunting privileges or logging rights. The right to settle any dispute by force of arms is a tradition as old as kings or emperors, and it forms the very foundation of the noble estates, where every vassal lord accepts his land and rights in return for military service to his *seignior*. In Christian lands, these feuds last for only short durations and are usually fought with very specific objectives in mind. Most battles are small-scale skirmishes, typically raids against an enemy's villages or farms, or attacks against weak castles along the border. The reason is because the obligations that allow a lord to raise his army are only good for a specific length of time, which limits the duration of the warfare, and beyond the basic loyalty to their feudal obligations, little discipline exists among the rank and file. A baron's army is made up of individuals, often rivals or sometimes outright enemies who have only their feudal duty keeping them civil with one another. A wise baron thus learns to make short work of his wars, keeping his army in the field no longer than absolutely necessary. Not even that most holy of causes, the liberation of the Holy Land from the heathen, is able to keep crusading armies united for very long.

A knight's feudal obligation requires 40 days of service to his lord during times of war, after which the lord must in some way compensate the knight for being so long away from his land and family. A knight supplies his own weapons, armor and horse, as well as a limited amount of provisions to sustain him in the field. If he should be captured in battle, it falls to himself and his family to provide for his ransom. Higher-ranking nobles who maintain a number of vassals must provide a specific number of troops to their *seignior*'s army, under their command. The Baron of Hautmont, for instance, provides the Count of Vermandois with 50 mounted knights and 200 peasants when called to war. A vassal who fails to answer his lord's call can have his dwellings burned according to feudal law.

In addition to the knights, the common folk also aid their lord in wartime. Every able-bodied man must come when the trumpets are sounded, to likewise serve for 40 days, though they stand little chance of any recompense if they serve longer. Common folk who provide their own horses (usually the high-ranking servants of a lord's house) are employed as sergeants and equipped with weapons and armor from the castle's armory. These sergeants support the knights in mounted combat and command peasant formations on the field. The rest of the common folk come to their lord's castle on foot, carrying whatever implements they may use as weapons. Axes, sledge hammers, pitchforks and simple clubs are common. A lucky few might be better equipped with a rusty sword or spear, and a dented helm looted from a battlefield from years past. In battle, these footmen are undisciplined and weak of spirit, but who can blame them? Without real armor and no training, only a fool stands his ground before a charge of knights with steel-tipped lances! The real use of peasantry comes during extended campaigns or sieges, where they forage for food or build camps, fortifications and siege works. In short, their menial skills give them value.

A Damned Resolution

The horsemen rode out that afternoon, ordered to spare no horses as they sped across the baron's lands, carrying their message to every village and tower. At every crossroads, they paused and gave wind to their trumpets, the sound carrying across the miles and reaching every hand at work in the fields. To the vassal lords went the message, "Come with all the men you are bound in duty to lead, seven days from today, to Hautmont Castle, armed and provisioned for service; for your seignior's daughter has been taken by Courtrace, and the baron would see the end of this feud."

At Hautmont, the hammers rang long into the night as the smiths repaired weapons and helms for the coming battle. The baron and his senior knights sat until the wee hours, debating their

strategy. A protracted war was impossible. After the great extravagance of the wedding and tournament, there was no money left to tempt the vassals to remain past their 40 days. Where normally the baron would simply strike into Courtrace and begin burning towns and farms until the enemy came out to stop him, in this case this strategy would do him little good. He could burn every crop and hamlet from border to border and it would not get Elaine back. Robert saw very quickly that he would have to march to Petitmur, Baron John's castle, and storm the fortress, because his army would not hold together for a protracted siege. Doubtless the Courtrace baron expected the same thing, and he would have engineered some form of trap for the invading army.

But all was not in Courtrace's favor. While the Hautmont vassals gathered with their levies, Robert sent messengers to the aggrieved Baron of Artois, then sent a rider to the Count of Vermandois, explaining the heinous actions of the men of Courtrace, and calling on his relatives by marriage to support his actions in ending the rule of so wicked a house. Four days after the summons, every one of Robert's vassals camped outside the castle. The mood was one of righteous wrath, for John of Courtrace had broken nearly every law of conduct that feudal law applies to war. Tradition and custom required that warring nobles issue a week's notice before actual hostilities commenced. Further, a warring noble must wait for 40 days before attacking the family of his enemy, giving them time to make their own peace, preparations for war or declare neutrality. Finally, all nobles must respect priests, women and minors. The men of Courtrace had violated all these in one foul deed, making a surprise attack on the wedding party, slaying Robert's son-in-law, and killing their servants, many of whom were under the age of 17. With one impetuous action, the House of Courtrace had gone from cunning provocateurs to savages. It was not long before the rider dispatched to Vermandois returned with a good part of the count's army behind him.

The baroness watched the preparations with grim satisfaction. She had tempted Courtrace into overstepping themselves and used Elaine as the bait. Now instead of a feud with a single neighbor, the pawns of Guy de Montpassant faced the combined forces of an angry county. Never once did she show any concern for her captive daughter, thinking only of revenge against her rival.

For my part, I went about my preparations with deadly earnest, cleaning my lord's armor as well as my own and preparing sword and lance. A squire was not supposed to fight in war, only acting if their lord were to fall, but in the confusion of the melee, such rules are often forgotten. I spent the days praying to a vengeful God for the chance to try my sword against John's vile sons.

Within five days, the army was ready. Two hundred knights, 100 sergeants and 450 footmen gathered outside the castle walls, along with twice that number of squires, servants and baggage handlers. Hautmont's folk lined the castle road as the baron rode to the head of the armored column of knights. We marched off to the cheers of the commoners, our line stretching for more than a mile.

We reached the border two days later, marching through a misty rain that turned the roads into quagmires of clinging mud. There three of Baron Robert's best huntsmen and a messenger from

Artois awaited us. The news on both fronts was good. According to Robert's wishes, Hugh of Artois attacked Courtrace from the north, burning everything he could find. Though not normally a domain with a large army, the rage Hugh felt at losing his son persuaded him to dig deep into his coffers and lay out a sizable sum for mercenary soldiers. Though no lord willingly trusted any warrior who sold his loyalty for coin, these men would stay in the field for as long as the gold held out, which was a considerable advantage over a regular feudal army. Hugh had acquired a company of German cavalry and another company of Genoese crossbowmen to stiffen his ranks, and as yet Courtrace seemed unwilling to oppose them.

The huntsmen brought tidings gladder still: Sent into the countryside ahead of the army to spy out the lay of the land, these woods-wise men had found the trap laid for the baron and his men. Courtrace, too, had spent a king's ransom in gold to raise his own mercenary army of beggar knights. Nearly 150 of them lurked out of sight near Petitmur, ready to swoop down on the rear of an invading army. Robert showed his teeth like a hound with the scent of his quarry, and he sent Hugh's messenger back with exhortations to spread his destruction from one end of Courtrace to the other. With that, our army marched on to Petitmur.

When we reached the castle, Robert ordered us to flank it during the night, settling into a valley nearly a mile from the fortress. There the baron bid us wait, and pitch our tents. We stayed for three days, while the rains fell and my lord's vassals grew bored and restless. Quarrels broke out among rivals, and dice games escalated into blows. The army had frayed a bit around the edges when my lord's scouts rushed into camp. Sir Eustace, Baron John's second son, had gathered the Courtace mercenaries and left the castle, rushing north to stop vengeful Baron Hugh. They were heading right for our camp. Robert gave a shout of triumph and ordered the army to form into lines.

Robert set his army astride the valley road, with his footmen 50 yards to the front, and his knights and sergeants arrayed behind them. Many of the knights thought this an insult. "Why should common folk stand before us?" But the baron bid them watch and wait.

Before long, the enemy army came into view, marching in columns down the road. Great was their amazement at finding us there, waiting for them! Sir Eustace led them, and we watched him rein in and consider our formation for a moment. All he could see were footmen and a thin line of knights behind them. It was clear that if he tried to retreat back to the castle, we could fall upon his rear and cause untold havoc, so in truth, the Courtrace man was left with little choice. The pale-skinned fiend drew forth his sword and ordered his beggar knights into hasty formation. They fanned out into a line, until each man's calf touched that of the man beside him. When they were ready, Eustace lowered his sword, and the line began to advance, lances held high.

A groan went up from our footmen, and more than one fellow stole a nervous look back at us. Someone raised his pitchfork and shouted a curse at the enemy.

When the Courtrace line was within 60 yards, their horses cantered, picking up speed. The horses' hooves rumbled, and the ground shook. Our footmen began to look at one another in fear. At 30 yards, the enemy knights lowered their lances, a glittering thicket of deadly points.

At 20 yards, the enemy let out a roar, and their horses went into a fast trot. Now they sounded like a roll of thunder bearing down on our hapless peasants, and it was only our presence behind them that kept them in place. Then at 10 yards, a trumpet blew a high, wild note, and the Courtrace knights went to the gallop. A wall of horseflesh and steel lance points crashed into the footmen, and the peasant formation shattered like ice. Men were run through or trampled in the press, and in moments the forelocks of the horses glistened in red. The knights let their lances go and drew their swords to hack their way through. Here and there a brave footman fought well; an axe cut through a horse's neck, or a pitchfork found a gap in a nobleman's armor. Within moments, however, the footmen fled in every direction, throwing down the weapons in a headlong rout. But the enemy line had been scattered in the melee, and all the impetus had been taken from their charge.

Now Robert drew his sword; now came time for our revenge. His blade swept down, and our line surged forward, close-knit as Courtrace had been. We covered 10 yards, and stirred to a canter; 30 yards, and lowered our lances. Our enemy had seen us and now knew that the footmen had hidden much of our numbers, but it was too late. Our trumpet called, and we sprang into the charge.

I rode beside my lord, lance in hand, and roared my rage along with the rest. In the moments before impact I picked out a man for my target, who had turned to pull a lance from one of our fallen men. He was not fast enough. My lance took him in the chest and lifted him from the saddle; moments later my horse crashed into his, and all around me rose the din of battle. I let the lance go and clawed out my sword, twisting in the saddle to find another foe. There was no time for fear, or even anger. Everything happened in the blink of an eye.

No other knight challenged me, and looking back, I was lucky for it, because for all my wrath, I was yet only a squire, and not a match for a knight with years in the saddle. The battle concluded in moments. Not a single mercenary knight had escaped. More than a score were captured, battered and broken, and were set aside to be held for ransom. Sir Eustace had met with my lord the baron, and such was Baron Robert's rage that he hacked the younger knight to pieces. The baron ordered the enemy knight's head to be placed on the end of a spear. Sergeants rounded up the scattered peasants while we rode on to Petitmur. For our part, not more than 20 knights had been slain, thanks to our strong coats of mail. It was the peasants who bore the brunt of the killing. Nearly a third of our footmen were dead, and a third again sorely wounded.

We came upon John's castle late in the afternoon, and Baron Robert threw his army against the fortifications at once. There was a fever in the ranks, the fury of warriors who had tasted blood and were hungry for more. We cried Elaine's name and "Hautmont! Hautmont!" as we stormed the barbican and rushed the castle gate. The air sang with the flight of hundreds of arrows. Twice we pressed forward, and twice the Courtrace men drove us back, leaving a pile of bodies in our wake. Finally, the baron called the army back, and the remaining footmen were put to work fashioning battering rams. We would wait until nightfall.

The baron called his squires and the knights of his household to his tent as night fell. Baron Robert's face was drawn, his eyes sunken, but a fierce gleam burned there. When we assembled, he looked into each face in turn. "Darkness has fallen. You know what we will face when we make it inside the castle. Leave your shields behind, and fight with a torch in your left hand. Stick it in the monsters' faces and strike for their necks. My…wife commands that the man called Guy de Montpassant be taken and bound in chains. So be it, but if you love me as your lord let your first command be to rescue my daughter." The baron pleaded with his eyes. "Find Elaine, and let not one Courtrace man live through the night."

With that, we left the tent, and the baron commanded the trumpets to be blown. We threw ourselves headlong at the gates of Petitmur, piling our dead in heaps. By midnight the gates gave way with a crash, and the real battle began.

Our armies tore at one another like maddened beasts, beating a bloody path to the foot of Petitmur's donjon. When its doors at last gave way, the undead vassals of Guy de Montpassant waited within.

No word can describe the slaughter that followed. While we had forced our way inside the castle, John of Courtrace and his sons had surrendered themselves to Guy's dark Embrace, and fully a score of vampire knights awaited us in the donjon. These were men who had known nothing but the pursuit of arms since their boyhood, and now had the strength of 10. Their blades flickered like lightning in the dim light, and our knights fell, reaped like grain to a scythe. Our ranks wavered, and a great cry of despair went up from our men. All might have been lost there and then, but Baron Robert took up a boar spear and rallied our knights around him. We bore the enemy back with sheer numbers, and one by one, the fiends were pulled down and hacked to bits.

It was nearly dawn before the battle was done. The fighting spread deep into the bowels of the donjon, and there in the darkness, Guy de Montpassant and John of Courtrace escaped, through some hidden passage we never could unearth. One barony lay in ruins, and our combined army had been decimated. And still the baroness' rival went free. The feud continued.

It was I who found Elaine, some time later, after the sun was high in the sky. She had been left in an oubliette, wearing nothing but her chemise in knee-deep water. I called for the baron and then dropped down into the horrid chamber. Her body was like ice after so long in the water, and she barely breathed.

Someone from above held down a torch, and the lady I loved opened her eyes. She hissed in fear of the torchlight and clung to me. The baron's daughter seemed to writhe in my arms, her face nuzzling into my neck. Then I felt the fangs, like two thorns pressing against my throat.

My heart broke at that moment. I looked up at the entry-hole to the oubliette, and saw the baron's anguished face. I was ready to die, to let her feed and at last leave this miserable existence behind, but once again, Baron Robert's gaze pleaded with me. "End it," he said. "For the love of God, end it."

They say I screamed like all the tortured souls of Hell as I pushed Elaine away and raised my sword. Guy had not been so subtle with Elaine as the baroness had been with me. He had forced damnation upon her and left her to starve. There was no hint of comprehension, no hint of sanity in her eyes as I bore down upon her. The woman I loved was long gone, I told myself, as I began the butcher's work. She was not here. She was not here….

We left Petitmur that day, a broken and bloody host. Baron Robert ordered the castle to be put to the torch, and we turned our backs on the nightmares we had seen.

Much later I stood before the baroness and recounted every detail of the campaign. I waited for her to fly into a rage once she learned that Guy had escaped. But instead, my mistress only smiled.

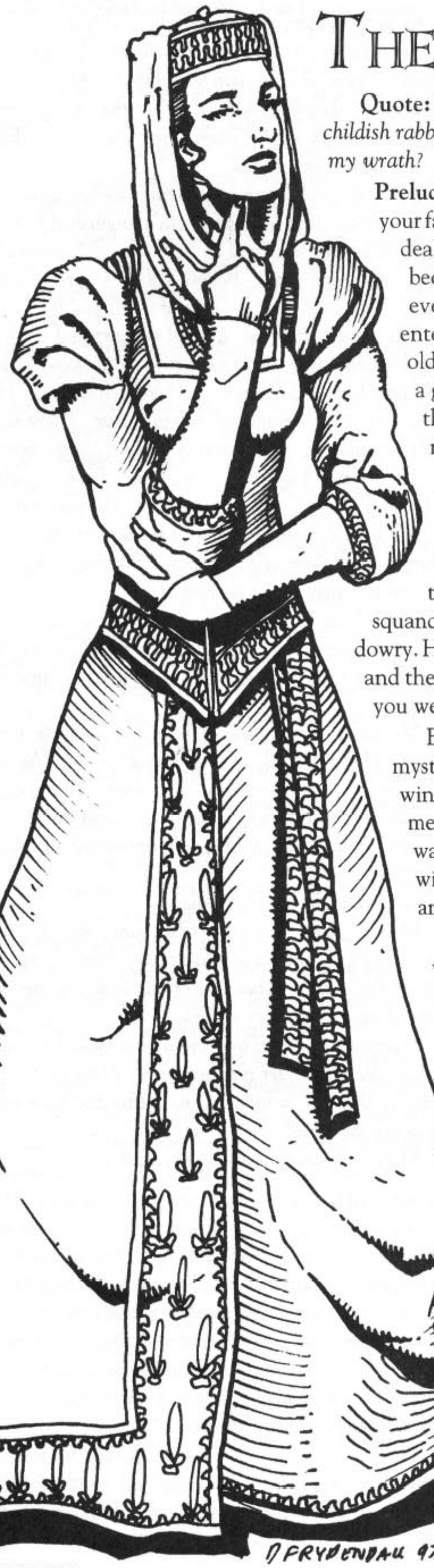
"In truth, I had little hope of catching the weasel. It was enough to humble him, to send him scurrying like the dog he is. He'll not be a problem any time soon. You have done well, Renauld. I think that you have earned your knighthood. Now go and rest. Tomorrow I have an important errand for you to undertake."

With that she dismissed me.

My body seemed to move of its own volition, carrying me out into the night. I thought of Elaine, and Henry, and of the bloody heaps at Petitmur. All because of the rivalry of monsters, and the games of vengeance they played.

I went to the top of the donjon and looked out at the north of France, sleeping under a silver moon. How many more of them were out there, I wondered, haunting the halls of power and advancing their cold schemes?

May God have mercy upon us all.



The Baroness

Quote: *You dare trespass in my halls and call me an abomination? Dismiss this childish rabble and remember your station, priest. Or are you fool enough to tempt my wrath?*

Prelude: Your life was charted out in a conversation over your cradle, as your father proposed your marriage to the son of a powerful neighbor. The deal was arranged, and from that moment forward you were raised to become a fitting wife for a baron. You learned to read and write, and eventually memorized a wealth of romantic verse and literature to entertain your prospective husband and castle guests. As you grew older, your mother taught you about the practical aspects of managing a great castle and its subjects. You learned the lessons well, wearing the mantle of authority like a comfortable cloak. Of course, your mother abjured you to cling to the womanly virtues of subservience and meekness, but you never really believed your husband would dare demand such things. Subservience was for the common folk.

Your marriage came as a slap in the face. The baron took you, wedded you, and promptly tried to forget about you. The truth was that your husband was a fool, a gambler and a drunk who had already squandered much of his family's wealth and was only interested in your dowry. He sequestered you in one of the most inhospitable parts of the castle and then returned to his life of iniquity. According to the laws of the land, you were powerless to oppose him.

But one night a stranger appeared, asking for hospitality. This mysterious knight came to you, after your husband had lost himself in his wine, and spoke with outrage at the way you had been abused. You were meant to rule, he said, not to serve. And there was a way to claim what was your right and privilege, a way to power that had nothing to do with petty mortal laws. He held out his hand to you, offering his gift, and you did not hesitate.

Concept: You were literally born to rule. Your earliest memories were being cared for by servants and issuing commands to the household staff. Your entire childhood was spent learning the practical issues of leadership and estate management. Then, after more than 10 years of rigorous training, you were married to a fool and expected to sit idly while he ran the estate into the ground. Damnation seemed a small price to pay to escape from the living Hell of shame and humiliation your life had become.

Roleplaying Hints: You are ambitious and arrogant, with the kind of overpowering self-confidence that comes from having the God-given right of life or death over your subjects. Vassal lords and common folk are possessions, to be cared for as such, but also to be used or sacrificed as necessary.

Equipment: Aging castle and estates

Vampire™ The Dark Ages

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Tyrant*
Demeanor: *Autocrat*
Clan: *Toreador*

Generation: *11th*
Haven:
Concept: *Baroness*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●○○○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○○
Stamina ●●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●●○○○
Manipulation ●●●●○○
Appearance ●●●○○○

Mental

Perception ●●○○○○
Intelligence ●●●○○○
Wits ●●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Acting ●●○○○○
Alertness ●○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○○
Dodge ●○○○○○
Empathy ●●●○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○○
Larceny ○○○○○○
Leadership ●●○○○○
Subterfuge ●●●○○○

Skills

Animal Ken ○○○○○○
Archery ○○○○○○
Crafts ●●○○○○
Etiquette ●●●○○○
Herbalism ○○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○○
Music ●●○○○○
Ride ●○○○○○
Stealth ●○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○○

Knowledges

Academics ●○○○○○
Hearth Wisdom ○○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○○
Law ●○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○○
Politics ●●●○○○
Science ○○○○○○
Seneschal ●●●○○○

Advantages

Disciplines

Auspex ●●●○○○
Presence ●○○○○○
Dominate ●○○○○○
○○○○○○
○○○○○○

Backgrounds

Generation ●○○○○
Resources ●●●●○
Retainers ●○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Virtues

Conscience ●●●○○
Self-Control ●●●●○
Courage ●●●○○

Other Traits

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Road

Humanity
●●●●●●●○○○

Willpower

●●●●○○○○○○
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Blood Pool

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Weakness

Chapter Two: Those Who Pray

O lord, our lord, thy name how merveillous
Is in this large world ysprad, quod she!
For noght oonly thy laude precious
Parfourned is by men of dignitee,
But by the mouth of children thy bountee
– Geoffrey Chaucer, Canterbury Tales

Heaven and Hell are certain.

You will spend perhaps 70 years in this world, and forever in the next. *Forever*. The forever may be an endless ecstasy, or an eternal torment. It is your piety during your three score years and ten that determines your fate. And while piety is owed to God, it is only through his earthly agency that it may be expressed. That earthly agency is the Church Universal, the Church of Peter.

This is no threat. The Church does not seek to scare you into acceptance of its claims — it has no need, for everyone *knows* that what the Church preaches is true. And since no man can afford not to consider how he may spend eternity, all men must express their piety to the Lord through devotion to His Church on Earth. For a man who does not do so faces the very real risk of Hell; while a pious and godly man may dare to hope for Heaven.

The Church's power is absolute and all-encompassing, for it comes from God Himself. It transcends kings and princes — creatures of sand, whose time comes and goes like any man's. It exposes false gods — creatures of air — for the deceivers they are. It is the source of the only eternal truths the world knows.

Eternal truth. This is the rock of faith upon which Jesus built his Church.

Who else can claim such an estate?

The Rock of Peter

It would be misleading to say that the Dark Medieval Church is built on certainty, for the same reason that it would be misleading to say that the 20th century economy is built on money. Everyone — except heretics and heathens — takes certainty for granted: It is an assumption so basic that it goes unsaid by all right-thinking people. The people of the Dark Medieval world *know* that God exists, and that the Bible is a source of unquestionable truth.

The Church's role is instead to manage that certainty. It is an intermediary between God and humanity: It is granted a knowledge of the divine that is denied to the ordinary man or woman, and it uses that knowledge to lead humankind closer to God.

The Church is at the center of the Dark Medieval world. It affects almost every aspect of the life of every man, woman and child in Europe, from cradle to grave. Most people, rich and poor alike, are baptized in church, attend Mass every Sunday of their lives, are married by a priest and are finally buried in Church ground.

This universal influence derives from the absolute certainty that people have in the Church's teachings. Life on Earth is nasty, brutish and often short, and only by being a good Christian is it going to get any better after you die. People know that after death their souls are literally weighed on the balance by God, and they will be carried off to Heaven or Hell according to how they have lived. Dark Medieval society feels a genuine terror of Hell: It is no mere scare-story, but a real place, only a heartbeat away at any time.

Faith

Faith is like a beacon, frightening creatures of the night back into their shadows. The Church keeps the beacon burning bright. Not only are the men and women of the Church strong in faith, but their preaching and teaching inspire faith in others — and the Church is therefore the one force in the Dark Medieval world that even the vampires cannot bend wholly to their own purposes. They would love to see the light extinguished and the world sunk into a truly dark age.

Faith in God is all that stands between mankind and a fate in which human beings would be cattle — mere meat animals to be culled for food or entertainment — and the vampires would be unchallenged lords of the night. With the Church dismantled, subverted or rendered impotent, the power of the Cainites would be unchecked.

Faith is the rock on which the red tide breaks. It is a rock that most vampires would desperately like to see eroded.

Theme and Mood

The Church can play many roles in **Vampire: The Dark Ages**. In some chronicles, it exists as something of a cipher, part of the scenery that never comes to the forefront of the story. In others, it plays a significant role, at least part of the time, and the Storyteller needs to consider how to depict it. Is the Church the friend of mortals and the enemy of vampires? Or is it a corrupt, power-hungry political force to whom vampires are simply more powerful allies or victims?

As a player, you may wish to portray a character with a Church background. In this case, you should make sure that your ideas coincide with your Storyteller's. It's no good creating a character who was excommunicated for exposing systematic high-level corruption in the Church if the chronicle relies on the concept that the Church is basically benevolent and honest.

The mood of these essays is a positive one: renaissance. The 10th to the 13th centuries, for the Church at least, was a time of massive renewal and growth. A weak and aging institution rediscovered itself and its sense of purpose, and it rode a wave of religious feeling to become the greatest kingdom in Europe since the fall of Rome. In the wake of this renewal — and perhaps helping to lead it — came a great spiritual, cultural and philosophical rebirth. When you come to involve the Church in the chronicle, whether as player or Storyteller, you cannot help but take account of the vast changes going on in the religious landscape. The Church swaggers with confidence: A few years from now, the great Pope Innocent III demands fealty from kings and princes, and he receives it.

This very confidence has, however, led to stagnation and arrogance in Dark Medieval Europe. Arrogance, in turn, leads to absolutism, and absolutism to terror. The same confidence that enables Innocent III to claim rulership over the kings of

the world enables him to demand a crusade into Europe itself, to bloodily wipe out a heretic sect. The glory of Rome bears a shadow of the darkness to come.

In all too many ways, the Church's renaissance is an empty one, driven by greed rather than by faith. It stands to reason that many Church officials are not particularly faithful Christians — historically, one Italian bishop even admitted that he did not believe in Christianity, and that he had taken the office "because of its riches and honors." This is a tempting way to portray the Church in your chronicle, but remember that Christian faith is what makes the Church distinctive, and think carefully before discarding it.

More honest is the renaissance at the Church's humble roots. While great cathedrals and monasteries spring up around Europe, the Cistercian heirs of Benedict pursue a truer spiritual aesthetic on the dark edges of civilization. This is renewal with a difference — a rebirth of the soul rather than of the flesh.

For vampires, of course, the Church's renaissance is easily seen as a dangerous tide of faith. Instead of glorious religious art, literature and thought of the period, or the purifying determination of the Church reformers, the Church may embody a dark, threatening force, systematically driving Cainites out of the civilized lands into *terra incognita*. The Church is vast, monolithic and seemingly unstoppable. Although this depiction of the Church appears to fit the mood of **Vampire: The Dark Ages** very well, it may be overly familiar to some players: Try to find a new and interesting twist on it. For example, instead of a slow, inexorable tide, model the Church on a wild fire — leaping from place to place, unexpectedly flaring up again after being suppressed and illuminating even the darkest corners of Europe with the flames of faith.

There are two main themes in what follows. The two are closely related.

The first theme is the dilemma with which the Church presents vampires. Vampires have always known the power of religion to control mortals — witness the number of them who have posed as pagan gods. In the Catholic Church, this power is doubled: Not only does the Church hold total religious control over Europe, but it also dominates lay power politics. It can make or break imperial candidates, influence the course of empires and force monarchs to come to it as vassals. Any Cainite with a power-hungry bone in her body would love to seize the papacy for her pawns, but she would find it more difficult than she anticipated. With the renaissance has come new faith — still rare, it is true, but enough to make the Church a very uncomfortable place for a vampire to be. The Holy City of Rome itself is braved only by those truly consumed by a desire for power — or, of course, the truly pious. In this is an accurate metaphor for the Dark Medieval Church as a whole.

The history of vampires in the Church is one of tentative approaches, brief successes and sudden disasters. Lust and fear balance delicately in the Cainite mind, and the Church excites both emotions to extremes. A vampire lusts after the power that is there to be seized — and fears the danger involved in seizing it.

The second, closely related theme is the triumph of human faith and integrity over vampiric corruption. In many spheres, mortals have been the unwitting pawns of Cainites in their endless plots. Because of the Cainites' difficulties in penetrating the Church, it has largely remained free of their influence. Its present success is the result of human inspiration and the human spiritual urge, not merely the outward sign of some vast vampiric plot. The Church is a reminder to vampires that their power is not limitless, and that mortals cannot always be relied on to remain as cattle.

This threat disturbs some Cainites. Their docile kine have inadvertently taken up arms and marched against their secret masters. To others, however, it is an affirmation. Clans like the Toreador and the Ventrue see their role as farmers as much as predators, while factions such as the Prometheans go even further in their belief that mortals are the Cainites' near-equals. The triumph of the Church proves to them that their human protégés are worthwhile subjects, not mere cattle, as other clans like to treat them. Free of vampiric intervention, humans have proved themselves capable of great feats of inspiration and leadership — and their talent should be treasured rather than oppressed.

Story Seeds

The theme of dilemma is an obvious story hook. All stories need tension, and the tension between desire and fear is a classic character issue. It recurs in every story where the hero must take risks to achieve his ends. In a way, the stories are almost too obvious: Lasombra characters want to make inroads into the power of a Ventrue baron, so they plan to turn the bishop of the diocese, but they fear that some of the bishop's assistants have True Faith; Tremere characters want to raid the library of a great abbey for sorcerous manuscripts, but they fear becoming trapped even for a day in a busy community of holy men and women. Dilemma is an effective theme for stories, and it will certainly be an important element in many, but it is rarely enough to sustain an entire story on its own. (By the way, it is important for the Storyteller to remember that True Faith is a rare merit, even in the Church. It is tempting to beef up Christian antagonists with "just a dot or two" of True Faith, but this is not only cruel to the players, it devalues the background. And when you do give a character True Faith, be scrupulous about playing that faith.)

Just as obvious is that the human success story that is recent Church history can lead to confrontations between vampires and mortals — or between rival vampire factions. Cainites attempting to subvert the Church, or a Church office, expect human opposition or opposition from entrenched rival clans, but what if they discover that the Brujah

who held them off has been equally hostile to her own clan's infiltration? Further investigation might lead them to a conspiracy of Christian vampires who, far from trying to gain ascendancy over the Church, are fighting a secret war to defend it from manipulation by *any* faction. Perhaps they are Prometheans who don't want the Inconnu to gain control of a new pawn, or perhaps they are honest Christians who don't want to see God's work corrupted by soulless cadavers.

Many subsidiary themes can also give rise to stories. The contrast between asceticism and luxury — the purification of the spirit and the pampering of the flesh — could motivate either spiritually-minded characters or those who want to defend their creature comforts.

For advanced troupes, the Church is also a rich source of metaphor and symbolism. Churches and other paraphernalia of Christianity could symbolize a thematic aspect of the chronicle such as the triumph of hope over despair, or a concrete one such as a Promethean conspiracy. Alternatively, a symbol such as a censer or the sign of the fish could symbolize the influence of the Church. Metaphorically, the Church represents history and learning — and, by extension, memory and wisdom — as well as religion itself. If you want to pursue this metaphorical angle, then root all of your Church-related stories in history — make every character, every artifact, every text resonate with the ages. For more about this, see the discussion of wraiths in Church chronicles, on page 51.

The Mills of God

The Dark Medieval Church has, as an organization, little or no knowledge of Cainites. Nevertheless, by its very presence, it is a threat to every vampire in Europe. Its inexorable growth inevitably means that it frequently, if inadvertently, claims vampire territories for its own.

Don't make the arrival of the Church on the characters' doorstep a one-off conflict. The gradual encroachment of the Church into the domain of a Gangrel or Tzimisce coterie could make a chronicle in itself, beginning with the appointment of a priest (probably swiftly dispatched) and with the founding of a small Cistercian house (which, being protected by some measure of faith, proves more difficult). Then, working up through increasing popular acceptance of the Church and the rise of a firebrand populist preacher, and ending with a titanic clash of wills between the region's Cainite predators and the Church incarnate in one of its high officials, come to bless a grand new church.

In more civilized areas, the Church is already universal in a spiritual sense, but its holdings continue to grow. Nobles, for example, frequently donate land to the Church in order to ensure their salvation. Once in a while, the Church will find itself contesting its new acquisition with the resident vampire. More sinister is a Cainite who has managed to acquire high influence within the Church and who could visit nobles and "persuade" them — for the sake of their souls — to make donations, indirectly denying her rivals their hunting grounds.

Lexicon

Abbey — A large monastic house.

Anchorite — Someone who has retreated from the world in order to pursue spiritual contemplation. Female is anchoress.

Curia — The papal court.

Double house — A monastic house that contains both monks and nuns. Needless to say, the sexes are rigidly separated, though liaisons are not unknown.

Liturgy — The ritual forms of public Christian worship. Liturgy is a catch-all term covering words, actions, music and symbols.

Monachus — A vampire who has made a monastic house her haven. Plural is *monachi*.

Oblate — A child entered into a monastic house for education, who will take vows on her majority.

Postulant — A man or woman seeking to take monastic vows.

Priory — A monastic house, smaller than an abbey and possibly dependent of or subject to one.

Rector — The priest incumbent in a particular parish, responsible for pastoral care of the parishioners.

See — The office of a high clergyman; and, by extension, the area under the influence of such a clergyman. The Holy See or Apostolic See refers to the papacy.

Vicar — The priest incumbent in a parish church that belongs to a religious community. Unlike a rector, who receives all the income from his parish, a vicar receives a stipend from the religious house, which keeps the rest of the income for itself.

Unholy Blood

From its very beginning, the children of Caine have sought to exploit and subvert the power of the Church. Religion has always had a profound grip on the human heart, and the vampires, supreme manipulators that they are, have never failed to take advantage of this.

In pre-Christian times, early Cainites set themselves up as gods on Earth, commanding cults, sects or even nations. Christianity was not conducive to this particular technique, of course, but hungry vampires soon found other ways to take advantage of this new religion. The secrecy of the early Christian cults of Rome — and their fondness for meeting in underground catacombs — made them natural herds for vampires. Charismatic and compelling, vampire "priests" brought many converts into the cults they had taken over. These cults grew large and influential, though the vampires' understand-

able reclusiveness means that Church history has little to say about them. Their leaders prospered, feeding off an endless supply of converts and building their secret principalities.

This was the beginning of vampiric power within the Church, but it demonstrated the same factionalism that would forever deny the vampires effective control. Each tiny cult formed around one vampire, and each vampire bitterly fought the attempts of other Cainites to gain influence over his circle. (The leaders of the vampire cults were almost exclusively male, though female vampires were able to cultivate the cults of the Virgin Mary.) An effective federation of the Roman cults could easily have enabled vampires to seize the future papacy, but deep mutual distrust between both individuals and clans prevented any chance of alliance. As a result, it was the mortal majority who cleaved together to control the early Church.

They never lost that control. The Church, despite constant infiltration, always remained stubbornly resistant, a bastion of the mortal — or perhaps of the divine. The rock of faith on which the Church was founded always proved too durable.

The Underground Stream

Despite their inability to win control of the Church, Cainites have been involved in the Christian religion ever since it first arrived in Rome. Their presence in the Church has been significant, but submerged, only occasionally surfacing to become visible.

The Early Days

Although St. Paul, the first great Christian missionary, came to Rome in A.D. 60, the authorities vigorously opposed the new religion for a long time. The Roman Empire was religiously tolerant in general, preferring to assimilate and espouse the gods of the people they conquered. But Christianity could not be treated that way. First, it was stubbornly monotheistic, insisting that all gods except its own were false. Secondly, Christianity challenged the authority of the Roman state. Christians insisted that the kingdoms of God and the world were quite different. They refused to make sacrifices to the emperor or (in later days, when emperors began to claim godhead) to acknowledge his divinity.

Christianity took root in Rome in the years after Paul, but it was repeatedly persecuted by the state. Just four years after Paul, Nero began the suppression of Christianity. From A.D. 81 to 117, Domitian and then Trajan continued the work. Christians responded by going underground — often in a literal sense. Because few others went to the catacombs of Rome, the early Christians frequently met there. Inevitably, some met with the other inhabitants of the darkness — those who saw a means of subverting their enemies above ground in these mortals.

Rome was a stronghold of the Ventrue clan in the immediate post-Christian era, and though many other clans could be found there — the more refined vampire lords, for example, gladly accepted the Toreador as decorative but not dangerous — any attempts to usurp control of city and empire were crushed without mercy or compunction. The Ventrue's hold on the machinery of temporal authority, though fractious (witness the many internal conflicts of the Roman Empire), was nigh absolute. Most clans accepted this, taking advantage of the Ventrue's success rather than trying to upset it. Apart from the usual flies in the ointment — the perpetually anarchistic Ravnos and the pernicious Followers of Set — the only clans seeking to overturn Ventrue power were the Brujah and the Lasombra. The honest warriors of the Brujah attacked Rome via an endless, hopeless series of minor uprisings and border wars. The Lasombra sought a safer, subtler and more effective method — through the Christian cults.

Therefore, while they were by no means the only clan to exploit the increasing popularity of Christianity, the Lasombra certainly did so in the most systematic way. They regarded the nascent Church not only as a valuable feeding ground, but also as a trap into which they could lure powerful victims. Once "converted" to the Lasombra's peculiarly self-serving version of Christianity, these citizens sought tirelessly to bring their fellows round to their new religion, and they worked against the authority of the traditional gods — thus, subtly undermining the authority of the Ventrue.

Inevitably, other clans were also active in the early Christian community. The Nosferatu, of course, had lived below ground for decades and gladly took advantage of the fearful, secretive Christians' use of the catacombs. The infernal Baali labored ceaselessly to pervert the evolution of Christian dogma. (Their main efforts, however, were concentrated in the Near East rather than in Rome. They, therefore, had more influence over fringe cults and heresies than over the main Church.) The Toreador, recognizing a beautiful tale of transfiguration when they saw one, became inadvertent proselytizers. But it was the Lasombra who saw Christianity's potential as a rival power structure to the secular authority of the Ventrue. The Lasombra worked hard to draw new recruits, especially from the upper classes, into their cults.

The Lasombra scheme had, however, one fatal and ironic flaw. Christian converts had a great deal of faith in their God — they had to, in order to stand by Him while their religion was persecuted by the Roman authorities. Although the vampires had abused this faith and turned it to their own ends, the converts' belief and certainty was still genuine. The very piety on which the vampire priests played repelled them, making them uncomfortable in the presence of their own circles, and even prevented them from drinking the blood of their herds.

As they had seized the best of the early pickings, the Lasombra faced the worst of this new crisis. The Baali had so distorted the divine message that their cultists never came close to any true faith. The Nosferatu understood and sympathized

with the persecution of the Christians, for they too had been hounded and driven underground by their fellows for the sin of being different. In Christ's promise to take the sins of the world on his shoulders, and in his transfiguration from mortal flesh to perfected spirit, they saw hope of redemption. Many Nosferatu were therefore touched by the faith of those they preyed on, and they came eventually to espouse it. But the mortals' religion was nothing but a convenient bait to many Lasombra, and they were utterly unprepared for its true power.

Over the years, the Lasombra were slowly driven out of the cults. Even as their followers begged the "priests" to remain, their faith forced the Cainites away. Meanwhile, the growing network of Christians came together into what would become the Church of Rome.

The opposing urges of hunger for power and fear of faith characterized the attitude of most vampires, especially Clan Lasombra, toward the Church for centuries to come. Tantalized by the possibilities of control, but unable to penetrate the walls of faith that surrounded the Church, vampires hovered around the edges, claiming minor positions in the hierarchy and corrupting a few major officials.

The Death of the Old Gods

The Ventrue, too, had fatally miscalculated. They believed initially that Christianity was yet another cult, one that would attract only a few crackpots and trouble-makers before quickly fading away. If it did become successful, they reasoned, they could always accommodate it — after all, the Roman state religion had served them well, and it would hardly be difficult to change horses in midstream. The infighting between the Lasombra cults and the doctrinal crises of the second century disguised the true influence of Christianity in Rome and its growing hold on the city's mortal masters; and, of course, the Lasombra did not tell the Ventrue of the dangerous faith that Christianity inspired. The Ventrue were therefore shocked when, some 250 years after the birth of Christ, they discovered the true extent of Christianity in Rome — and the vast threat it posed to their own control.

The first general persecution of Christians began under Decius's rule in A.D. 249, and this lasted two years. The emphasis was not on wholesale slaughter — comparatively few Christians were martyred — but rather on driving people away from the faith. Valerian carried out a second general persecution in 257-8, with similar effects. In 260, the Ventrue apparently felt the threat had been contained: They allowed an Edict of Toleration to be pronounced, and 40 years of peace between the Roman state and the Christian Church followed.

They were wrong. In those 40 years, the Church not only recovered, it consolidated its position and converted the leaders of Rome with ever-increasing zeal. At the beginning of the fourth century, the desperate Ventrue initiated a final persecution through Diocletian. Although it lasted eight years, it could not save them.

THOSE WHO PRAY

THREE PILLARS

The conflict ended with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. He issued the Milan Edict of Toleration in A.D. 313, which guaranteed religious freedom and equality for Christianity, returned Church property and abolished the cults of the state. The Ventrue still held many levers of power, but Christian faith meant that Rome would never again be unconditionally theirs.

After the Fall

After the fall of the Roman empire, temporal and spiritual power in Europe diffused. The declared primacy of the Roman bishop and the legacy of the empire meant that Rome retained some vestiges of authority, but this was mainly symbolic. In practice, local and national churches were largely independent of Rome. More importantly, they were greatly dependent on lay authority. Although kings and lords supported the Church — after all, they risked damnation if they did not do so — they preferred a Church that answered to them rather than some other authority. Appointments therefore rested in the hands of relevant local rulers.

The Lasombra clan, already deeply entwined with both Church and nobility, used this period to reinforce its presence in the Church. Although clerical faith made direct control difficult, it was easy for Lasombra counselors to "advise" a king to make the correct appointment. Once a mortal puppet was in place as a bishop or other high Church official, he could make further appointments to spread Lasombra influence.

Why did the Lasombra care about infiltrating the Church? First, the clan understood the tremendous hold Christianity had over the mass of people. If the religion that now dominated Europe could be bent to their will, their power would be unlimited. Secondly, many nobles looked to the Church for confirmation of their authority — their rule was affirmed by divine right. Thus, with the Church under their control, the Lasombra could use this seemingly harmless piety to challenge the Ventrue on their home ground. In their great game of politics, the Lasombra saw the Church as a secret weapon. The voice of God could strike at any target — unexpectedly and without fear of contradiction.

The Lasombra were not, of course, alone in the Church. Many pious Nosferatu continued to find sanctuary there, while some Brujah and Toreador saw it as the best hope for preserving the knowledge and culture of Rome through a barbarous age. (Defending the remnants of the hated destroyer of Carthage was a bitter pill indeed for the Brujah to swallow, but better that than see centuries of art and learning wiped out altogether.) But it was the Ventrue who represented the main opposition to the Lasombra's schemes. With their influence in the nobility of Europe, they also sought to appoint their own candidates to Church offices.

Because both of the major factions were only partially successful, and because each spent as much effort undermining the other as building its own power base, vampiric influence over the Church remained intermittent and fragmented throughout the ninth century. The outcome favored the Lasombra in Southern Europe and in many of the higher Church offices, with Ventrue candidates occupying several bishoprics in England, France and Germany.

Scholars and Soldiers

From the fall of Rome through to the end of the 12th century, the Brujah have felt obliged to defend the Church because it has always been the last repository of the learning of Greece and Rome. At the same time, they have been acutely aware that in doing so they are defending the remnants of Rome itself, the city that destroyed their beloved Carthage. The Zealots quarrel over their clan's attitude toward the Church — the more scholarly ones value it as the one source of education and culture in a barbarous world, while the warriors of the clan insist that the destruction of Carthage must not go unpunished.

Most Brujah feel a mixture of the two emotions. Those who are active in the Church generally promote its intellectual and philosophical activities, while trying to restrain its insatiable growth into a new Roman Empire. As Innocent III comes to the throne, the Brujah learn that the hated enemy is once again at the zenith of its power.

A New Dawn

Toward the end of the 10th century, Europe pulled itself back together after the chaos of Rome's collapse. In the process, the Cainites of the West found the *status quo ante* almost restored: The Ventrue wielded the majority of political power, and the Lasombra had a slender, but potentially telling, grip on much of the Church.

The major change over the course of the 11th century was the emergence of the Toreador as an important faction within the Church. The Artisans gained a great deal of influence in the English Church behind the backs of squabbling Ventrue nobility, consolidated their power in France and quietly acquired a number of important Church offices around Europe. They were able to make such progress with comparatively little opposition for two reasons: the new importance of the monasteries, where the clan already had many members, and the complacency of the Lasombra, who had been content to regard them as irrelevant cowards with no interest in contesting the real power of the organization.

During the same period, however, mortal reformers undertook a process that would utterly transform the Dark Medieval Church, from an arm of the state dependent on the favors of lords and princes to an empire that claimed the world as its dominion and kings as its subjects. This transformation and renewal swept aside much of the vampires' laboriously acquired gains in the Church, and left even their well-entrenched control over mortal temporal power weakened and fragile.

The Church and Viae

Many vampiric Roads have a basis in Christianity. These Roads are more philosophical systems than religious ones, and adherents don't need to participate in the activities of the Church — either for or against. Nevertheless, vampires who adopt these Roads generally do so as a result of their religious convictions in life. For vampires on the Roads of Heaven and the Devil, therefore, and for many on the Road of Humanity, the doctrines of the Church may continue to be important to their new belief systems.

It is possible that some vampires have developed new quasi-religious Roads, based on new interpretations of Christianity, or the various heresies of the period. The Storyteller should consider this very carefully before introducing such new Roads. A Road is a philosophical system allowing a vampire to manage the Beast Within, not a license to write one's own moral code.

The Other Clans

The Ventrue and Lasombra have struggled for power within the Church, and the Toreador have unexpectedly overtaken both of them in recent times. Most other clans, though, have a less systematic interest in the Church, but few can ignore it.

The Assamites, Gangrel and Ravnos have little to do with the Church. True, the Assamites are involved in the Crusades, new Cistercian monasteries occasionally intrude on Gangrel territory and the Ravnos know that high Church officials are rich enough that they won't miss a pretty bauble or two; but these clans have minimal actual involvement in the Church.

The Brujah have no designs on the Church. If anything, they wish to keep it free from the influence of the other clans. Brujah often believe that, as the guardian of human knowledge and human spirituality (at least in this part of the world), the Church must be a willing party to any new Carthage. Cainites and kine must exist together in prosperity, and with Rome's present ascendancy it seems impossible that this could happen without the Church's blessing. Those of the Brujah who are not busy preparing for some impossible personal crusade respect the Church, and especially the monasteries, for keeping the flame of learning alive in the Dark Medieval world, and for preserving classical knowledge and writings for the renaissance that they know must come.

The Cappadocians share something of the Brujah's interest in the Church's repositories of ancient lore, and their interest in the spirit world reinforces this. The prevalence of the Road of Heaven in the clan means that many Cappadocians practice Christianity. Despite Cappadocius's original vocation as a priest and his secret pursuit of a Christian apotheosis, the Graverobbers have no organized presence in the Church hierarchy — they belong more to graveyards than to great offices — but Church theology and knowledge is valuable to them. Many Cappadocians are priests, monks or nuns, but they pursue personal religious vocations rather than trying to conquer the Church bureaucracy. The majority of clan members have a great deal of respect for the Church, and they dislike the way that the more political clans are trying to turn it into another battleground for the Jyhad.

Many Nosferatu are also Christians. Individuals in the clan are surprisingly devout, seeing the Christian promise of salvation as the hope of redemption from their curse. Most are content to worship and to lead virtuous lives, though their deformities make it difficult for them to participate fully in the Church in any capacity.

Some Malkavians have been mistaken for saints and prophets, and have thus had a dramatic influence on many local churches over the centuries. The clan as a whole appears to have little formal interest in the Church.

The Tremere, though their minds are mostly on other things, share the Brujah's interest in the Church's scholarship. Like the Zealots, many of those who have left their strongholds have taken to making their havens in monasteries. In the long-term, they are well aware of the power — both political and Thaumaturgical — that they could attain through the Church, but at the moment, survival is their main priority.

The Tzimisce are in a similar position. Their ancestral lands are threatened by the Tremere, so they have little time to worry about the Church. A few *voivodes* do, however, see its value as a weapon in their war against the Usurpers, and they attempt to direct its eastern branch toward the "evil" vampire infestation. Subtlety, however, does not come naturally to the Fiends, and the Church is an unnatural vehicle for their pagan thought. The Tzimisce's contempt and disregard for Christianity have dangerously blinded most of them to the increasing Christianization of their territories: The Church is undermining the old gods, and Tzimisce rule with them.

The Followers of Set and the Baali stand fast against everything the Church holds dear. The Setites have been most successful in turning individual irreligious officials from benign freeloaders into venal and grasping simoniacs and parasites. No doubt the Setites would love to take their corruption to the heart of the Church, perverting the entire organization, but they have been unable to do so. The Baali have engaged in a systematic program of corruption and destruction on behalf of their infernal masters, but this has been executed from outside the Church. The wicked bloodline has had absolutely no success in infiltrating the Church and corrupting it from within. (Unless, of course, you subscribe to the heretical Cathar belief that the Church is the instrument not of God but of the Devil...but that way madness lies.)

One other clan — though it is a clan no longer — must be mentioned. The Salubri, childer of Saulot who bared his neck to the usurper Tremere, are creatures of peace and righteousness. Leaderless and alone, poised for extermination by the Tremere, a few Salubri look desperately for safety in the Church. Perhaps some Toreador abbess, more enlightened than her fellows, may see past the physical deformity and the urge for blood, and permit a Salubri refugee to make a nunnery her home; perhaps some Lasombra bishop might perceive the holiness of a childe of Saulot and offer him protection in the bosom of Mother Church. The Nosferatu think they know how likely that is to happen — but unlike the Nosferatu, the Salubri have the goodwill of many Toreador, and through them the Pope....

Story Seeds

There are enmities born in the catacombs of Rome that shape the unlives of Cainites even tonight. Vampires are old, old creatures, and they nurse their hatreds and their debts.

The players' characters, often youthful and weak as vampires go, could become unwitting pawns of their elders. And even those elders may be pawns in the secret wars of the survivors of Rome. It is all too easy for neonates to be caught up in what seems to them to be a vital conflict over present-night Cainite politics, only to find that deeper down it is an act of vengeance for a thousand-year-old slight.

Clan Stories

If all of the players' characters are of the same clan, or of clans with a compatible approach to the Church (say, Ventrue and Toreador, or Brujah and Cappadocian — and perhaps even Tremere), then stories can be built around the clans' attitudes toward Rome and its dominions.

For example, perhaps a province of the Church is believed to have been amicably carved up between the Ventrue and the Toreador, but the Ventrue secular lords have recently found that some officials have turned against them. In addition to their own retainers, the Ventrue might call on their Toreador allies to help investigate the problem. Or, perhaps a group of Cappadocians and Tremere might band together to steal the magical secrets of the monastery that the players' characters have made their home.

Characters who are involved with the Church, but in a way of which their clans might not approve, offer further story hooks. Does the clan ignore this rebellious behavior? If not, what action do they take? What if others in the clan follow the character's lead? When the character encounters other Cainites in the process of her dealings with the Church, do they judge her on her own deeds or on her clan's reputation? For example, imagine a fanatical Brujah whose sire, having lived through the destruction of Carthage, filled him with a passionate hatred for Rome. While a large number of Brujah wish to preserve the Roman legacy of scholarship, this character might seize every opportunity to destroy centers of Roman learning like monasteries and cathedral schools.

Other Supernaturals

The only supernatural creatures other than vampires who are prevalent in the 12th-century Church are clerical mages — the tradition that evolves into the Celestial Chorus. Cainites pursuing an interest in the Church may encounter these mages occasionally, at every level, from humble monk or rector to archbishop or cardinal. The scope for Church-related stories involving other supernatural creatures is limited.

If you want to bring werewolves into a Church-related chronicle, the best way to do it may be as antagonists to the Church. As Christianity spreads eastward, it is easy to

imagine a sept of Shadow Lords fighting tooth and claw to prevent humans from defiling a caern with their "chapel." (Remember that Christian churches are often built on pagan sites of worship, with the intention of both suppressing and assimilating the old faith.) If the players' characters are Tzimisce, they may even share the Shadow Lords' aims. (Just as long as they don't try to share their personal space....) The Red Talons, inimical to humans even at the best of times, might concentrate their attacks on those humans who worship the human God instead of the spirits of Gaia.

Wraiths offer perhaps the most interesting complement to vampires, for both are repositories of history and memory. The memory of a wraith filters through her Passions, and that of a vampire through her hunger. The Church, too, is a repository of history, for the Church has the longest legacy of any human institution in Europe. A very old wraith's Fetters may, for example, be treasured relics or classical manuscripts, forgotten in a monastery somewhere or locked away in the cellars of the papal palace.

The See of Rome

The Dark Medieval world is a venue of profound reform for the Roman Church. The papacy has become the supreme spiritual and even temporal authority of Western Europe by the end of the 12th century. Rome has forced local rulers to relinquish prized privileges to the Church, and she soon claims even the right to appoint and remove kings. It is during this period that the papacy takes the shape it retains right up to the 20th century.

The role of the vampires in this transformation is ambiguous. During the course of the reform, the papacy inevitably becomes another piece in the Cainites' eternal power games, though one which the vampires find much harder to control than the petty lords and princes who are their usual pawns. Some Cainites try to stem the reform, believing that a Church revitalized by true Christian faith is the greatest enemy they could face. Others encourage it, pointing out that the atmosphere of superstitious religious purity keeps the kine fearful and cowed — easy prey. To most, however, it is another dramatic setback to their plans for control. Unintentionally, the reform of the Church purges many vampires from its corrupt ranks.

At present, the Church knows little about the activities of the Cainites. Those few officials who become aware of the vampiric curse are quickly removed, Dominated or discredited in accordance with the Sixth Tradition, the Silence of Blood. Vampires who eke out unlives within the clergy are well aware of the risks they take, and they behave with due caution. The Church's ignorance is the only thing that keeps it controllable; in later years, as Pope Innocent III and his successors begin to detect and root out Cainite influence, the Church will be on its guard.

Papal Reform

In order to understand the position of the papacy in 1197, it is necessary to know a little history.

At the turn of the second millennium A.D., the papacy was little more than a local bishopric invested with a spurious authority by a series of emperors who wished to demonstrate their Christian credentials by supporting the inheritor of Peter. Worse still, the emperors only supported Popes of their own choosing. During the early 11th century, any number of local Italian factions feuded with each other and with the emperor to control the papacy. Between 1000 and 1048, there were seven Popes and one antipope, of whom only three lasted longer than two years.

The papacy had become an object of distant reverence. The image of Rome still retained the authority of Peter, and pilgrims continued to travel there, but the reality was rather disappointing. The vaunted papal authority was the plaything of local warlords, and to those who knew Rome, the Pope was just another bought clergyman, who was granted his position by his king and just as easily removed. The Pope was not the vicar of Christ on Earth, but rather the clerk of whichever lord was on top that year.

The problem reached a farcical head in 1045. Benedict IX, Pope since 1032 (and thus, the longest incumbent of the seat that century), wished to retire and take a wife, so he *sold* the papacy to Gregory VI. Meanwhile, a rival faction — the Italian Crescentii, the dominant family in Rome — had elected Sylvester III Pope. (The Crescentii didn't learn. Fifty years previously they had set up another antipope, for which John Crescentius had been hanged and the antipope mutilated.) The situation worsened when Benedict went back on his agreement with Gregory. Now, three Popes pontificated simultaneously.

It fell to Emperor Henry III to resolve this preposterous situation, and the results were even more incredible. Although Gregory was the only respectable Pope of the three, he had bought his office and was therefore guilty of simony. He was deposed; Sylvester was brushed aside; and Benedict was removed. Henry imposed two of his German cronies in rapid succession — Clement II and Damasus II — but both died within a year of their election, victims of the Mediterranean heat and malarial swamps. In 1048, Henry nominated his cousin, the Bishop of Toul (in Lorraine), and Leo IX was crowned in February of 1049. In his short reign, Leo brought the faraway basilicas and cathedrals of Rome to the notice of all Europe, and he made a government that spanned the continent of the papal court. The papal reform, one of the most dramatic reversals of the Dark Medieval world, had begun.

Ironically, the reformers' main objective was actually to enforce existing clerical law. They had three main targets: the eradication of simony, the abolition of clerical marriage and the enforcement of the primacy of the Holy See.

THREE PILLARS

The Crusade Against Simony

Simony refers to the purchase of positions within the Church. (It is so named after Simon Magus, assumed on the basis of a mistranslation of the Acts of the Apostles to have been the first to attempt to buy a place in the Church.) The problem with simony is not, as modern churchgoers might expect, that the purchase of positions is considered corrupt — Dark Medieval society sees nothing wrong with using money to buy authority. The problem is that with a position in the Church comes the right to perform holy offices — and during the performance of these offices a priest is believed to be infused with the Holy Ghost. Simony therefore equates to the sale of the Holy Ghost. It is a sin against God rather than against any temporal mores.

The eradication of simony has returned a great deal of control over its own hierarchy to the Church. Freed from its self-imposed greed, the Church has become the master of its own appointments. Furthermore, simoniac bishops and priests frequently serve themselves or their local lords only (and sometimes through them, Cainite masters), rather than the Church. Priests honestly appointed by the Pope or another Church official, however, owe their loyalty to those above them.

Symbolically, the reformers' crusade against simony has given the Church a renewed spiritual authority. No longer is it something to be bought and sold, just another chattel in the marketplace of power. It is a self-governing body, above worldly cares, and bearer of the purity of God. A dramatic example of how faith drives out simony is the ordeal of Saint Peter Igneus. In 1068, the bishopric of Florence was bought for a substantial sum, and the citizens rioted in anger at this blatant simony. To quell the rioting, a local abbot arranged an ordeal by fire –in which one of his monks walked through a 10-foot corridor of flame, and he came out unsinged. The simoniac bishop was deposed and the monk later canonized.

The Lasombra faction within the Church exploited this aspect of the papal reform to flush out their enemies in the hierarchy, especially the Ventrue. With their influence in the higher positions of the Church, and even in Rome itself, they were well placed to direct accusations of simony against Ventrue agents. Since those agents were generally guilty, their purge was devastatingly effective. (Admittedly, the Lasombra agents were just as guilty as the people they removed. The Ventrue, however, lacked the influence to have their counter-accusations heard.)

It was not until later that the victorious Lasombra discovered to their chagrin that the removal of the simoniacs was helping to foster an atmosphere of faith and holiness that threatened their own power. It was the error of Rome all over again.

Despite the reformers' efforts, simony is still practiced, especially far from Rome — the simoniacs are merely subtler about their behavior. In areas of heavy Cainite influence, of course, money and land are not the only currencies of simony: Vampires can use feeding rights, ghouls or boons to buy positions for their favored candidates.

The Law of Celibacy

The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife.

— I Corinthians 7:14

Canon law insists that priests be celibate — that is, that they should not marry. In most of Dark Medieval Europe, however, this law is ignored. Married priests are common at low levels of the Church, and even monks often have mistresses. As part of their drive to reinstate the law of the Church, reformers seek to eradicate clerical marriage and other sexual activity.

Marriage is particularly common among the secular clergy, especially those who serve in parishes. Parish priests are often ignorant men, without the high moral standards of those more committed to the Church. Poorly educated in canon law, remote from their masters in the Church and having little commitment to the religious life, they frequently marry, either because they do not know that it is forbidden or because they do not much care.

As with a great deal of the papal reform, the eradication of clerical marriage is not without its symbolic element. Reformers fear the assimilation of the clergy and the laity, thinking that as churchmen become drawn into the world they learn to accept the world's abominable moral and spiritual standards. A lay woman in a churchman's house, with him constantly, can hardly help but draw his thoughts away from God and down to the mud and flesh of the world.

In addition, many reformers fear and loathe women, regarding them as voices of corruption and temptation. The reformers' view, summed up by Peter Damian in his attack on humanity, *The Book of Gomorra*, is that the grip of the world on a man is especially symbolized by the influence of money and by the other sex.

This aspect of the reform has not been entirely successful. Despite the reformers' enforcement of celibacy, many lay clergymen, even in the late 12th century, keep concubines or regularly seek the companionship of women. This can be an easy way for an unscrupulous female Cainite to gain access to a clergyman at almost *any* level in the Church. The stricture of celibacy means that clergymen associating with women are eager to keep their liaisons secret. Consequently, it is hard for the clergyman's colleagues, or for the Cainite's rivals, to detect the vampire's influence. The Blood Oath can be easily administered and reinforced. Perhaps best of all, there will be no embarrassing questions about why the man's mistress is seen only during the day....

The Primacy of Rome

Prior to the papal reform, local patrons regarded churches and abbeys as extensions of their own properties. The priest was a vassal like any other, and the lord could do what he liked with priest, position and altar. Many positions even became hereditary, passing from father to son like any vassal holding.

Reformers have unified the Church under the control of Rome. Kings, princes and local lords have lost the right to appoint Church officials in their own lands. Rome has been remolded from a local bishopric into a government that can rule the world.

The Pope has also taken back many powers once regarded as the province of local officials. Only the Pope now has the right of canonization (that is, the right to acknowledge someone as a saint), and before long he will also be the only person permitted to authenticate relics.

Prelates awaiting election are obliged to visit Rome in order to be approved by the Pope. The Pope has the right to scrutinize and overrule elections, imposing his own candidates over the wishes of the local clergy — and any lay authorities who might attempt to sway them. For Cainites who are used to being able to perpetuate a regional clergy under their own control, each generation electing its successors according to the vampire's instructions, this is a disaster. Cainites living amongst the palaces and manors of bishops may at any time find themselves confronted with new, unknown and potentially dangerous incumbents.

This reform does not have universal support. Many bishops have spoken out against increasing central control, and especially against the seemingly endless greed of Rome. Peter Cantor attacks papal greed as making "my house, the house of prayer, into a den of thieves and a house of commerce," and John of Salisbury describes Rome not as the mother of the Church, but as its plundering stepmother. The Bishop of Chartres has demanded that the Pope impose no new laws on the rest of the Church. But because the Church's excesses are compensated for by its thriving success, their pleas go unheard for the time being. To date, Cainites have taken little advantage of this current of dissatisfaction — who would tie their fortunes to a losing argument? — though a vampire may occasionally find it useful to foster local dissent. There is a delightful irony in letting a man's own voice talk him into disgrace.

After Reform

The papal reform has turned the traditional power structures of the Church upside down. Where local bishops and archbishops had previously been the supreme powers within their own regions, and their appointment had been in the hands of the king, they are now answerable to the Pope. Where the Holy Roman Emperor's "protection" of the papacy had previously been a gentlemanly euphemism for setting a favored candidate on the Throne of Peter and keeping him there, it now means that the Pope regards the emperor as a bodyguard, valuable for his muscle, but at root, as just another subject.

Everyday folk are largely unaware of the vast historical changes that have occurred around them, but they see the effects of the reform even at the lowest level. On the positive side, the clergy are less overtly corrupt, and on the whole adhere more strictly to their vows — at least in public. On the negative side, priests are more aloof, more concerned with spiritual things than with the issues of the world. This is a deliberate aim of the reformers, who want to keep the clergy apart from the debasing influence of the laity as far as possible; but it leaves people feeling cut off from the Church and thus, opens the door to heretical preachers in many areas. Wrapped up in its own success, the Church has not realized how distanced its flock has become.

Cainites and the New Papacy

When Leo IX ascended the papal throne, Cainites had clawed their way to a tenuous grip on most of the many national Church hierarchies. In Northern Europe, Ventrue and Toreador nominees predominated; elsewhere, and in the highest Church offices, the Lasombra had been more successful. The monasteries were havens to Brujah, Cappadocians and Toreador, though they appeared to take little interest in the power politics of the Church.

The papal reform and other events of the late 11th century upset this picture and set the tone for the changed landscape of the 12th century. Cainites, slow-moving creatures to whom a century may pass in a blink, have been disoriented by the speed of the reform, and they adjust poorly to the inversion of the power structure they have worked so hard to penetrate.

First, the reform has concentrated Church power in the papacy instead of at the national level. Prior to this period, vampire factions had not made control of Rome a great priority — it was not worth the effort required to influence a truly faithful Pope. As a result, the papacy had been allowed to remain largely free of Cainite influence. The papacy was a much greater prize after the reform, and the clans scrambled to take it. Initially, the Ventrue seemed to have the greatest influence, since Leo IX was an appointee of the Holy Roman Emperor; but in truth, they had little control over him, and they had badly underestimated the change Leo would work on the Church. After the death of Stephen IX in A.D. 1058, the Lasombra seized their chance. Working through the Roman nobility, they set up Benedict IX as Pope, who was immediately deposed by Nicholas II, the reformers' candidate. In the year of Nicholas' ascension (1059), the right to select the Pope passed to what would become the college of cardinals, forever denying vampires the ability to choose the Pope. They could hope to influence the result, or to bend a weak-willed or faithless Pope to their desires, but the struggle for power had once again been lost to the mortals. In the few short years that had made the papacy worth controlling, the Cainites had managed to surrender it.

This picture persists in 1197. Some Popes have been puppets of one clan or another, but these tended to be short-lived, contested or forgettable. Perhaps this is due to rivals attempting to thwart any clan that gains the upper hand in the contest for ultimate power. The current Pope, Celestine III, is a pawn of the Toreador, having been prepared by them long before he ascended the Throne of Peter, and being surrounded by advisers and sycophants under the clan's domination. Celestine's successor, Innocent III, however, will be a very different matter: Strong and independent, he will throw off all Toreador attempts to rein him in. Celestine, always the minion, achieves little of record; Innocent will become the greatest monarch Europe has ever seen.

Secondly, by reminding the Church that it was the instrument of God rather than just another arm of the temporal authority, the reform has increased the level of faith in the

Church. To vampires attempting to make their havens within Church walls, this is a particularly uncomfortable change. As the Lasombra discovered in the days of Rome, even a little faith, if sincere enough, can drive a vampire from the place or community she has made her home. In some places, vampires who have dared to take Church positions for their own rather than working through ghouls or Dominated servants have been forced to give them up by the renewed faith of those around them.

By 1197, Rome is a veritable hotbed of faith — not only from Church officials, who are scarcely less corrupt here than anywhere else, but also from the many pilgrims who visit the Holy City. This makes it dangerous and very difficult for Cainites to even approach the City of Peter. Some, especially Lasombra and Toreador, take the risk. The former because of what they hope to gain and the latter because they must risk it in order to preserve the control of the Pope.

Thirdly, reform has subtly shifted the Church's realm of interest. Although the Church continues to take a great deal of interest in temporal politics, and it has increasingly asserted its control over lay authorities, the Church is now closer to its spiritual ideals than it ever was during the dark years when mere survival was everything. The Church has rediscovered the exaltation of God—and for Cainites, the expression of that exaltation has been the sudden and unexpected ascendance of the Toreador.

The rise of the Toreador began with the rise of the monasteries. Many members of the clan had taken refuge in monasteries in earlier centuries and had helped shape the spiritual attitude of the monks around them. Consequently, as the monasteries gained in importance, the ideas of the Toreador became increasingly prevalent in the Church at large. The hand of the clan can be indirectly seen in much of the greatest art and architecture of the era. This created the environment in which clerics favored by the Toreador could flourish.

The success of the Toreador in influencing the English Church during the last two centuries, although closely tied to the Ventrue invasion of England, has inspired the Toreador to test their strength in other regions. In some places, they may have been helped by the Ventrue, who see them as friendlier—or more easily influenced—than their Lasombra rivals. In any event, the See of Rome fell to the Toreador with surprising ease. Many papal candidates are predisposed to Toreador ideals and can be influenced even without the vampires' supernatural abilities.

In 1197, then, the Toreador are supreme in Rome and throughout many of the higher echelon of the Church. The present Pope, Celestine III, is their pawn. The Lasombra bitterly contest the Toreador influence, however, with their centuries of entrenched power; and although Toreador philosophies are in favor this year, the Lasombra are less vulnerable to the whims of episcopal fashion and are more numerous in the Church as a whole.

All of this changes in the next year, as Innocent III ascends the Throne of Peter and, all unknowing, embarks on a reign that defies the Cainite puppet masters inside and outside the Church, from Castile to Constantinople.

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Officials of the Church

The Church is, in effect, not only the largest but also the best organized state in Western Europe. It has a vast bureaucracy, centered on Rome and stretching from Castile in the West to Scandinavia in the north and Hungary in the East. Although the only territories technically controlled by the Pope himself are the papal lands in central Italy, individual churches — and especially monasteries — hold a great deal of land around Europe, and the papal reform has in any event given the Church a great deal of authority over lay rulers.

Most importantly, though, the Church is an effective system of government that runs parallel to the secular authorities. The Church hierarchy divides up the whole of the West, and its structure utterly disregards trifles such as whether it holds land or the attitude of the local ruler. Through their religious convictions, the Church governs the people as directly as any king. It is organized with almost military precision, with a rigid hierarchy and command structure.

Organization

At the top of the Church hierarchy is, of course, the Pope, resident in Rome and surrounded by his court. If Christendom is a kingdom (it is in all but name), then the Pope is high king.

The most influential priests after the Pope are the cardinals. The college of cardinals formed in 1059 as the body that elected the Pope, though it has only recently (1181) been officially incorporated. At first, the cardinals were the bishops, deacons and priests of the churches and cathedrals of Rome, though now other priests of all levels can be made cardinals. The cardinals have not yet been raised above the rest of the clergy, or acquired their distinctive red hats. (They have to wait until 1245 for this.) Although cardinals are not directly part of the Church's hierarchical tree of rulership, their position of proximity to the Pope gives them considerable power.

Outside Rome, the Church divides its territories into archiepiscopal provinces (or archdioceses) and episcopal dioceses. A province is headed by an archbishop, and a diocese by a bishop.

The size and number of provinces in a region varies widely. England, for instance, has only two archbishops, at York and Canterbury, while Ireland has three; France, so similar to England in size and influence, has five. The division of a province into dioceses is carried out in different ways around Europe: In Italy, dioceses are kept small and administered by a tiny number of officials; in England and Germany, dioceses are much larger, with quite elaborate bureaucracies. The province of York, covering the whole of northern England, contains only three dioceses.

Dioceses divide further into archdeaconates. When archdeacons were originally imposed between the bishops and their clergy, there had been only one archdeacon per diocese, but by the 12th century, there were usually several. (There are exceptions: The See of Canterbury still has only one archdeacon.) By the end of the 12th century, the powers of the original, singular archdeacon are being usurped by an episcopal judge known

rather sinisterly as the Official. The Official answers to the bishop and is not attached to a specific archdeaconate; eventually, the Official becomes the second most important person in the diocese after the bishop himself.

Archdeaconates vary in size and wealth. In England, the archdeaconate of Stow contains only four rural deaneries, while nearby Lincoln contains 23. Similarly, the archdeaconate of Winchester has five times the revenue of Rochester. The power of the archdeacon varies correspondingly, though this also depends on the country. In England, archdeacons generally have limited rights (as always, there are exceptions: Within his see, for example, the Archdeacon of Richmond has all the jurisdictional powers usually reserved to the bishop). On mainland Europe, however, the archdeacon is a figure of great influence — a serious rival to the bishop within his area. And although the archdeaconate is in the bishop's gift, it is a "benefice," meaning that the bishop cannot remove an incumbent archdeacon except with the latter's consent (rarely obtained save through bribes or threats).

Archdeaconates are, in turn, divided up into rural deaneries, areas placed under a senior priest. Beneath the rural deans are the local clergy, classified as rectors and vicars. (Rectors and vicars both have pastoral duties in their parish; a parish priest is a vicar if his church is the property of a monastic house, and a rector if it is not.) Each parish consists of maybe 1,000 individuals.

The clergy of a rural deanery meet in chapter once a month, presided over by the archdeacon. But in other ways, the archdeacon's role in mediating between the bishop and the clergy is often bypassed. For example, the rural dean receives episcopal mandates directly from the bishop.

The local clergy are the only face of the Church that most people in Dark Medieval Europe ever see. To many Cainites, however, it is the upper echelon of the Church bureaucracy that are of the greatest interest.

The Pope and Curia

The present Pope is Celestine III, a pawn of the Toreador clan. Celestine is a weak man, shored up mainly by his Cainite masters, and close to the end of his reign. His papacy is undistinguished, and he has been forced to concentrate primarily on the resolution of minor political disputes.

The Pope lives in Rome, ruling Europe from the Lateran and the basilica of St. Peter. His lifestyle is that of the greatest of kings, and he is surrounded by an extensive court called the curia. He travels frequently, either because he must address councils or reconcile quarreling kings, or in order to fortify his own position by making a personal intervention on the side of a senior cleric or some friendly king.

The Pope must concentrate as much on political affairs as on those of the Church. It is not uncommon for the Pope to have to arbitrate disputes between kings, and this gives him a great deal of influence. The Toreador monitor Celestine's use of this power, however, because they know they could risk alienating one Ventrue faction or another, which could ruin their cozy relationship with the Patricians (especially in England and France). Celestine is therefore often allowed to make such decisions by himself. When the Toreador do favor one side, of course — for example, if a Lasombra challenger has arisen to an allied Ventrue — Celestine is put back on his leash.

In addition, the Pope exercises political control over his own lands, the *Patrimonium Petri* (Patrimony of Peter, or just the Papal Lands). Across Europe he rules through kings, but here he rules directly. The *Patrimonium Petri* currently covers most of central Italy, and Rome is eyeing the neighboring duchy of Spoleto. The land is mostly safe for Cainites, since outside Rome, its inhabitants are the same as peasants and nobles everywhere else in Europe; nevertheless, most vampires avoid the place, fearing to walk into the shadow of the Church.

Even the least faithful Pope is dangerous to Cainites because he embodies the faith of millions. Like a false relic that gains power from belief, the Pope can wield the power of God even if he is entirely corrupt. This faith also makes the direct subversion of Popes using powers like Dominate or Presence difficult, even for vampires willing to risk the papal presence. The Toreador work through ghoul bishops and advisers, avoiding contact with Celestine himself.

Antipopes

In the days when the papacy was essentially in the gift of lay powers, it was common for different factions to nominate different candidates — and for each to claim that theirs was the true Pope. The false Popes were known as antipopes.

The election of the Pope was placed in the hands of the college of cardinals in 1059. Unfortunately, the votes of the different ranks of cardinals (cardinal bishops, cardinal deacons and cardinal priests) had different weights, but these were not clearly defined. The results of elections were often ambiguous and disputed by lay factions opposed to the winning candidate. Sometimes even the Church was confused over who had been elected. The 12th century, long after the election decree, nevertheless saw 10 antipopes.

Since the election decree of 1179, which gives all cardinals an equal vote and requires a two-thirds majority to elect a candidate, the flood of antipopes has stopped. There is no rival to the present Pope.

Bishops and Archbishops

A bishop is the chief cleric of a diocese, and an archbishop of a province. They are the highest officers of a national church, and it is on their offices that Cainites tend to concentrate their efforts. They are affluent, often as rich and powerful as princes, with great palaces and cathedrals paid for by the Church and by the incomes from their extensive land holdings. A bishop's income is derived principally from the manors granted to him as part of his office; these are largely run by stewards, and thus, the manors have no need for attention from the bishop himself.

The bishop controls the admission of all clergy within his diocese, though this is now subject to increasing papal interference. Even admission to hermitages requires the bishop's approval. The bishop does not, however, propose candidates. These are put forward by private patrons, usually local landowners, and the archdeacon decides whether they are acceptable are not. If the bishop is satisfied with the outcome of the archdeacon's investigations, he approves the candidate.

Bishops and archbishops legislate Church matters in their area through the diocesan or provincial synod. The synod, an assembly of the clergy of the region including its priors and abbots, meets for three days once or twice a year, and it considers matters of diocesan or provincial business in addition to legislation, such as the payment of pensions to clergy. The consent of the synod is not required or requested, and no vote is taken: The synod is simply a venue for the bishop to "read and publish" his canons. The bishop can also issue edicts directly, without waiting for the synod to convene.

A bishop has final liturgical authority within his diocese. In theory, he can decide exactly what forms of worship apply to any given occasion. Bishops usually exercise this authority only by ordering processions during which litanies are to be sung — for example, at harvest time or when the nation goes to war.

Bishops and archbishops, almost without exception, come from noble families. They are closely involved in affairs of state, spending as much time on secular as on spiritual matters. Archbishops are powerful figures in national governments, with seats on royal councils.

They are usually well-educated, though they are not always pious — to many, the office is simply a luxurious sinecure, and their observance of Christian forms is a hollow sham. Some are quite depraved: The Bishop of Durham once tried to seduce and then to rape the postulant Christina of Markyate, who was forced to dress as a man and flee to a hermitage to escape his attentions. Men like these are easy targets for Cainite manipulators, and the Followers of Set, in particular, flock to them in order to lure them further down the path of corruption.

A bishop has numerous ritual duties, the most important being the dedication of churches and the consecration of altars. These must be done by the bishop himself, rather than by one of his subordinates. If a church or altar is "polluted" (by bloodshed, for example) it must be re-consecrated — usually at considerable expense to parishioners.

Another bishop responsibility is visitation, which theoretically takes place once every three years, but in practice is much less frequent because of his other duties. During a visitation, a bishop tours the diocese to make sure that his clergymen are doing their jobs. In addition to formalities such as checking priests' letters of order and institution and inspecting the paraphernalia and property of the individual churches, the bishop calls in laymen in each parish and questions them as to whether their priest has been fulfilling his obligations and leading a good life. Unless a priest is truly incompetent or dissipated, or has failed to look after Church property, visitation is rarely a cause for concern, though it may result in continuing intervention in the priest's affairs. From a storytelling point of view, visitation provides a means for encountering a high Church dignitary almost anywhere instead of ensconced in his palace. Cunning Cainites could also time mischief to coincide with a visitation, in order to rid themselves of a priest with dangerous amounts of knowledge, faith, or both. Vampires posing as priests may wish to be wary in case their bishop has True Faith.

Church and State

The Dark Medieval mind does not recognize the division of Church and state with which we are familiar in the 20th century. All authority, temporal or spiritual, descends from God. The kings of Europe claim a divine right to rule. The 20th-century nation-state does not exist; instead, every man has his feudal master, with *his* master over *him*; and so on up to the king, and then to God. As an example, the right to appoint clergy often belongs to the king, not the Church.

This is beginning to change in the Dark Medieval world. Rivalries between the Church and lay authorities result in the Church becoming more self-contained, while at the same time claiming a wider dominion than ever before. This separation and superiority leads to the collapse of the Church's political power in later, secular ages; but in the era of **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, the Church becomes and remains the supreme power.

One theologian of the period, Hostiensis, goes so far as to put a figure on the Church's pre-eminence. Borrowing Ptolemy's calculations of the relative brightness of the sun and the moon, he claims that the sacerdotal (priestly) dignity is precisely 7,644 times greater than the royal.

The Church is not afraid to proclaim its own superiority or demand the fealty of kings. The Pope, the Church asserts, is the true emperor, and the emperor is his vicar. This rhetoric has been toned down over recent years, as the Toreador who control Celestine III do not wish to provoke the Ventrue, but the conflict between spiritual and temporal authority returns with a vengeance when Innocent III becomes Pope in 1198.

The Age of Innocent

We do not deny that the emperor is superior in temporal matters to those who receive temporal things from him, but the Pope is superior in spiritual matters, which, as the soul is superior to the body, are more worthy than temporal ones.

— Innocent III

In years to come, Innocent III (1198-1216) adopts the stance that the Pope is the representative of Christ on Earth (*vicarius christi*: the Vicar of Christ). Since the Earth is God's kingdom, worldly kings must be God's feudal subjects, and their kingdoms fiefs granted by Him; and since the Pope represents God, the domains of worldly rulers must be in the Pope's gift. Effectively, Innocent claims that the Church — and specifically the Pope — has the right to appoint and remove kings.

Innocent uses his power on a grand scale. He excommunicates the entire nation of England for eight years (1206-14), forbidding the clergy from carrying out baptisms and marriage or burial ceremonies, and eventually forcing the king to surrender his sovereignty to Rome.

This is the apex of Church power. Sicily, England and Aragon become feudal dependencies of Rome, their rulers effectively consenting to Innocent's claim of dominion, and the Church also intervenes in Germany, France and Norway.

Many influential Cainites suspect that Innocent's doctrine will rob them of their roles as kingmakers. The Ventrue, whose power base is most threatened, go further. They see the hand of the Lasombra behind Innocent's claim and worry about the power the Magisters now possess if they have finally been able to bend a strong Pope to their will. Their concerns are ill-founded: Innocent is free not only of the Lasombra, but also of any vampiric manipulation. His stance is directed at his fellow mortals, not at Cainites, and it is based on theology (or greed) rather than on any supernatural influence. Nevertheless, it is a threat that drives and distracts the Ventrue during the early 13th century — to the point where their frantic and clumsy attempts to identify and intercept Lasombra within the papal staff actually end up increasing the Church's awareness of vampiric infiltration. It is no accident that the Inquisition has its roots in the papacy of Innocent — or that bungled Ventrue attempts to control the Inquisition only inflame it further....

Story Seeds

The Church presents Cainites with almost their only systematic opposition, apart from other Cainites. It is a foolish vampire who does not fear the power of faith, and nowhere in Europe is that faith stronger than in Rome. Stories that drive the characters toward Rome play upon the theme of dilemma, especially if they are built up over the course of a chronicle. For example, in one story the coterie might need to travel to Rome and it finds the journey more and more difficult as it approaches the Holy City — and it is relieved to achieve the objective of its quest before it is reached. In a subsequent story, the coteries might cross the *Patrimonium Petri* and feel the baleful presence of the city always on the horizon. Only in a third and final story would the coterie need to enter Rome itself, and that could be a true nightmare.

Sensible vampires prefer to work at the national level, attempting to position their candidates as bishops and archbishops. Political intrigue is a familiar theme in **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, so try to make this something more than just another factional dispute. Have your chronicle's standard feuding factions team up to ward off the threat of a candidate with True Faith. Have a group of Setites secretly corrupt one faction's candidate. Tie the election in to one of your chronicle's religious themes or to a heresy in which the characters have previously shown an interest (for or against).

THOSE WHO PRAY

The Church in Nightly Unlife

The Parish Priest

Like most inhabitants of the Dark Medieval world, the parish priest has a hard life. Instead of the finery and palaces of the bishops, he receives only an ordinary house and garden, a small stipend, and a little land on which to grow food. Instead of being invited to participate in royal councils and grand processions, he must look to his own welfare and tend to his parishioners.

The hardship, social duties and heavy ritual of parish priesthood make it an unattractive vocation for Cainites. How can one conduct masses, blessings and burial ceremonies when one cannot rise during the day? Only by retaining a ghoul to front the operation, or by finding some way to take over an entire village, can a vampire hope to get away with it. Even then, the bishop's visitation may eventually find him out.

The Priest

Most parish priests are poor, uneducated men — some do not even understand the Latin that they read — picked out of the ranks of the laity to serve their villages. Priests are appointed by the archdeacon or rural dean in most areas, though in parts of Italy and Germany, they are elected by the parishioners. Although it is not necessary for a priest to be educated, he must be at least 25, with no mental deficiencies or physical deformities. He may not be a soldier, a bastard, a prosecutor or an executioner. Women and the unbaptized cannot, of course, be priests. The priest must live a circumspect and honest life and may not hunt, war, gamble, or conduct surgery or commerce.

The majority of a priest's small income comes from fees charged for baptisms, marriages and burial services. A church also has a small amount of land in its village, called the glebe. Most priests farm the glebe themselves, though it is permitted to rent it out to others.

The Priest's Duties

Whereas the work of higher Church officials is mainly administrative, that of the parish priest is more spiritual and social. The priest combines the roles of spiritual guide, social counselor, charity organizer and moral authority.

The priest does have some administrative duties. He must see to the collection of tithes, and he can excommunicate anyone who fails to pay. He is responsible for keeping the church in good repair, and he must see that no profane activities — specific prohibitions include fairs and morris dancing — go on in the churchyard.

In theory, the parish priest has the duty to give alms to the poor and to strangers from his own income, but most priests' stipends are so small that they cannot afford to do so. Instead, he regularly exhorts parishioners to care for the

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poor, and encourages the dying to leave alms for this purpose. (The dying are particularly eager to seize any chance of improving their spiritual chances, for they have no doubt that after death they will be judged for their worthiness to enter the Kingdom of Heaven — and that if they fail they will be cast down to Hell.) Manuals for priests emphasize the "seven works of mercy bodily" — feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting prisoners, visiting the sick and burying the dead. Charity is a regular topic for sermons, and those who practice it are praised and respected.

Other important social roles include the reconciliation of parishioners who have quarreled, acting as chaplain to the parish "gild" (a sort of burial club-cum-friendly society with a strongly devotional slant) and helping with the staging of miracle and mystery plays (often organized by the gild, and the only drama many Christians ever see).

The priest also has many ritual duties. At Rogation-tide (the three days before Ascension) he blesses the crops and leads his parishioners in a procession through the fields. When required, he also carries out rites for blessing sick children, animals, houses or anything else that seems to require divine protection. At the same time, he is also responsible for warning his flock against the use of spells or incantations!

Priestly blessings can prove a great inconvenience to Cainites. A house which has been blessed severely discomforts a vampire, and he may have difficulty feeding from a person who has recently been blessed by a priest with True Faith. See page 238 of **Vampire: The Dark Ages** for systems.

Revenue and Taxes

As mentioned above, the main income of a local clergyman comes from his ritual duties, and he also supports himself from the glebe of the church. The tithe, a 10th of a villager's income (usually paid in kind in the low-cash peasant economy), is also collected by the local priest, and he has the right to excommunicate anyone who fails to pay. Finally, some churches derive income from other property, called *temporalia*, such as land or mills.

When the church is part of the property of a religious house or community such as a large abbey, the priest does not receive his incomes directly. They instead pass to the house, which grants him a stipend in return for performing pastoral duties for the parish.

Clerics are, in principle, exempt from lay taxes. In practice, however, senior clerics often hold baronies and counties; they, therefore, owe service and taxes to their local (secular) lord anyway.

If a see is left vacant, its revenues go to the local prince. These revenues are known as *regalia*. Curiously enough, when princes are given the opportunity to delay the process of appointing a new bishop or archbishop, they almost invariably do so. The income from a rich see is a tempting inducement to procrastinate.

Justice

Clerics enjoy a measure of special protection under law. For example, anyone who strikes a cleric is excommunicated — a daunting fate that spells an eternity of damnation. Clerics cannot be deprived of their home or money by a creditor, and they are excused from performing any lay duty that interferes with their vows.

They also have special rights when accused of crimes. Clerics have the right to be judged by their peers in a canonical court instead of by secular courts, and they may, in theory, carry their appeals as far as the papal curia — though few except the highest in the Church can hope to reach this ultimate court. Clerical courts are supposedly independent, though they sometimes bow to popular opinion, even finding ways to impose a verdict that they are technically not permitted to pronounce.

For example, in Padua in 1301, a clerk was found guilty of theft, murder and rape. Because of his clerical status, he was exempt from execution. The canon court instead sentenced him to be put in a cage hung from the top of the Red Tower, and it denied him food and water. It took him two weeks to die.

From 1215, clerics are prohibited from serving as lawyers, judges and public notaries. This is another aspect of the Church's general policy of putting itself and its officials above the things of the world.

Education

Every word you write is a blow that smites the Devil.
— Bernard of Clairvaux

Almost all education — such as it is — rests with the Church. Religious houses teach their own oblates, and some also teach brighter aristocratic children from outside the house. The university movement is just beginning, with a college in Paris since 1180, and the Church runs religious, medical and law schools around Europe.

Church schools may be attached to monasteries or cathedrals, or sometimes to major parish churches. This practice is disappearing from the monasteries, with separate schools, staffed with secular masters, being founded under the supervision of the religious house. Schools are supposedly founded for the education of the poor, but most students come from affluent families. The chaplain usually educates the children of noble families.

Church Holidays

The Dark Medieval world is a harsh place, and the common folk have it hardest of all. The year is an almost unbroken round of work — from dawn until dusk, six days a week, every week of the year. The only relief that the peasantry receive from their labors is provided by the Church.

Most days of the year commemorate at least one saint, but only a few are holidays (holy days). Those few are therefore causes for great festivities. People — commoners and nobility

alike — crowd the churches and cathedrals to hear special masses and spend the rest of the day celebrating. Great trade fairs are often held on saints' feast days or to coincide with local religious celebrations. A fair takes place in Paris every June to occur simultaneously with the arrival of thousands of pilgrims to visit a piece of the True Cross held at the cathedral of Notre Dame. These fairs are also occasions for fun, with merchants coming from every part of Europe and with musicians and acrobats to entertain the crowds.

Holidays vary from region to region. The two most common are Christmas and Easter, as these are celebrated everywhere. Christmas even sees the Church surrendering its dignity during the Feast of Fools, in which a "bishop," dressed up in fake vestments, leads the people into a church and recites a service in gibberish while others play dice on the altar and sing rude songs. May Day, Midsummer's Eve and Harvest Home are festivals inherited by the Church from older pagan religions, and they are respected in most parts of Dark Medieval Europe.

Pilgrimages

The closest that people in the Dark Medieval world come to a "vacation" in the 20th-century sense is a pilgrimage — a journey to a distant holy place. Most people hope to go on a pilgrimage at some point in their lives, to prove their devotion to God; some have other reasons — as penance for their sins, for example, or to be cured of an illness.

Any holy shrine is often the object of a pilgrimage. Favorite destinations are the holy cities of Jerusalem and Rome, Canterbury Cathedral and the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Pilgrims often travel to visit relics such as the bones of saints or the pieces of the True Cross. Each place of pilgrimage has an emblem — scallop shells are popular — which are worn by pilgrims to show that they have visited it. Frequenting pilgrims may sport many such badges — vampires are recommended to avoid such people, as they are very likely to have some small measure of True Faith (alternatively, of course, they are sinners of so vile a hue that repeated journeys of penance are their only hope). Wearing an emblem on one's hat shows that one is on a holy journey and has the right to protection.

Pilgrims travel in groups, rich and poor together, for companionship and for protection against bandits. They travel on foot to demonstrate their piety. Pilgrims' passages are eased on popular routes by special roads and bridges built by local rulers to encourage visitors — pilgrims, like 20th-century tourists, bring a good deal of money into the local economy. With less mercenary motives, monastic orders set up hostels a day's travel apart along these routes to shelter pious travelers. Cainites sometimes insinuate themselves into such hostels over a summer, ensuring a regular supply of fresh blood (the supply, of course, dries up as winter comes and travel becomes more difficult). Because pilgrims travel in groups, such vampires must take care not to kill.

Vampires making a pilgrimage face special difficulties: Sleeping during the day, they cannot take advantage of the hospitality usually available to pilgrims and they can travel with only ghouls, retainers and other vampires; they must pass through the lands of many princes; and once at their objective, they may be repelled by its holiness or by the faith of other pilgrims. Nevertheless, a devout vampire may need to become a pilgrim for the same reasons as a mortal does. Even a Cainite who is not a Christian may be ordered to make a pilgrimage in order to expiate some sin by a more religiously inclined prince. A whole chronicle could be built around a long pilgrimage, with many diverse stories along the way.

The Monastic Movements

We must form a school in the Lord's service.

— Benedict of Nursia

After the papal reform, perhaps the most significant change in the Dark Medieval Church is the rise of the monasteries. By 1197, the monastic revival is widespread and well-established — the number of monks in England alone has risen from under 1000 to over 5000 in 100 years — and it exerts an important influence over Church thinking.

The history of Cainite involvement with the monasteries parallels that of their involvement with the rest of the Church, though if anything, the dilemma is even more extreme. To a vampire, a monastery — isolated and self-contained — is a natural haven, safe from most enemies and well-stocked with vessels. But the monastic lifestyle attracts and inspires faith far greater than that encountered in the Church at large. They are still rare, but even one truly faithful monk or nun can make a vampire's monastic retreat intolerable.

In general, therefore, monasteries have been inhabited only by those Cainites with some additional reason to go there: The Toreador and Brujah, to whom monasteries are islands of civilization in the barbarism of the Dark Medieval world, and the more pious of the Nosferatu, who welcome the solitude and often share the inhabitants' faith. As with so much of the Church, this situation is changing. The rise of the monasteries has attracted the traditional power-mongers of the dark Church, the Lasombra and the Ventrue. And, over the last 50 years or so, the monasteries of the West have been the victims of a new wave of predators — predators as interested in the monasteries' ancient and carefully guarded knowledge as in the blood of their inhabitants: the sorcerous Tremere.

The Monastic Urge

For centuries, humanity has expressed its religious urge by forming communities dedicated specifically to worship. The monastic movement in Christendom was shaped largely by Benedict of Nursia, who established the objectives and obligations of monastic life in the Benedictine Rule. The rule dictated almost every aspect of a monk's life, even down to what to eat and what to wear.

Most monastic communities claim to model themselves on Benedict's Rule, and it has become known by heart by thousands of monks and nuns over the centuries. Although Benedict prescribed that a monastery should look primarily inward, toward the salvation of its own members, they became, in practice, centers of Christian influence, culture, teaching and learning.

The duties of a monastic house, according to Benedict and his successors, are to care for the sick; to help the poor by giving bread in hard times; the education of children; to keep roads and bridges in good repair; to provide beds, food and shelter for travelers; to keep learning and order alive; and, most importantly, the praise and exaltation of God.

Benedict also insisted that a monastic house should be primarily cenobitic — that is, dedicated to the spiritual welfare of its inhabitants as a whole — though he conceded that the group might also provide a framework for the individual spiritual growth of the more advanced members. Anchorites and hermits can certainly exist within a Benedictine community — it is not true that they spend all of their time in remote solitude — but they are not its primary focus.

At the time of **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, the domination of the Benedictine vision of religious houses as inward-looking islands of devotion in a barbarous world, so appropriate to the sixth century, draws to a close. Europe has emerged from the chaos that followed the fall of Rome, and such self-contained protectors of faith and knowledge are no longer needed. A renewed interest in the monk's relationship with the outside world already exists, which waits for a focus that will allow it to crystallize into a new kind of monastic movement. In Italy, a young man named Francis has been born in Assisi, and he will present his own rule to Pope Innocent III in 1210. Following the Franciscan lead, the next generation of monastic revival concentrates on looking outward, to the good that monks can achieve in the world.

The Cluniac Revival

Benedict lived in the sixth century, and although his ideas had some success, the conditions were not yet right for monasticism. It required a more settled European landscape and a more mature tradition of royal patronage for the monasteries to truly prosper.

The revival of the monasteries began early in the 10th century, with the founding of the abbey of Cluny in Burgundy by Duke William of Aquitaine. This was the signal for a wave of similar endowments creating new monasteries or reviving existing ones. The great monasteries of the late 12th century — Cluny, Gorze (in the Franco-German border region of Lorraine) and Glastonbury — all have their roots in this sudden impulse. The popularity of the fashion for endowing monasteries grew for some 250 years, and, although past its watermark, is still strong in 1197.

Fortunately for those desperate to improve their chances of salvation by pouring money into monasteries, the number of recruits also grows continually over the period. (Previous

attempts to revive monasticism had foundered through a lack of monks.) Most importantly for the continued success of the monastic tradition, the new foundations attract monks with the fervor and charisma to lead and inspire. These are the men whose legacy continues to dominate monasticism: Abbot Odilo of Cluny, Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Dunstan of Glastonbury. (Although some nunneries are also founded or revived by the new patronage, it is not until later that women have a significant influence on the monastic tradition. At this time, nunneries are usually mere appendages to monasteries for males, though this will change.)

The most important of all these houses, because of its reforming zeal and its independence from lay authority, was Cluny. When Cluny was founded, monasteries were largely under the control of the noble who founded them and owned their land (or, of course, his heirs), either directly or through the local bishop — who was an appointee of the landowner. (This was long before the papal reform.) Cluny demanded and got independence from its founder and from local church officials, placing itself directly under the protection of the Pope. Worse still, many monasteries had abandoned the ascetic ideals of Benedict, with poverty and chastity being observed only in name, not in deed. Cluny sought to return to Benedictine simplicity, though with a new emphasis on liturgy.

Cluny increased the time allotted to the *Opus Dei* (the Work of God; essentially liturgical worship). In the original Benedictine monasteries, liturgy was balanced by manual labor, but as monks had become decadent, this tradition atrophied. In order to maximize the time available for worship, Cluny did not revive manual labor, relying instead on the labor of laymen and women. The monks taught their own oblates, but unlike some monasteries they did not educate other children. A few anchorites, living in nearby caves, were supported, but for the most part Cluny emphasized communal worship, considered to be the highest form of devotion; little time was available for private study or prayer. The community was inward-looking, more concerned with worship and liturgical development than with contributing to the outside world.

Over the centuries, the Cluniac movement grew, and Cluny itself began to reform and ultimately it took over other monasteries. Cluniac houses were initially independent: The Abbot of Cluny was asked to take over the reform, revival or foundation of a monastic house, and maybe to lend it some monks, and Cluny imported its customs and established bonds of friendship in this way. Over the last century or so, however, Cluny has acquired daughter houses, which are formally subject to the abbot's central authority. The Cluniac monasteries are not a true monastic order like the Cistercians, but a group of houses under a single head.

With Cluny's success have come the seeds of decadence. The abbey that was founded on the Benedictine ideal is now one of the richest in Europe. Its new basilica is the largest church in Christendom, greater even than the cathedrals of Rome. Exaltation of God in His splendor has driven out

simplicity and poverty. The unity of the daughter houses under the Abbot of Cluny puts a tempting amount of power into the hands of that one man. The monks continue their ceaseless round of worship, but it is tinged with complacency and even arrogance. They read Benedict's Rule daily in the chapter house, but they no longer keep it.

Gorze

Cluny has its rivals, of course, of which the main one is Gorze. Gorze shares many of Cluny's reforming aims, but places a greater emphasis on literacy and learning than on pure liturgy. Gorze and its daughter houses often teach people from outside the monastery, and they have become centers of learning. Gorze's influence is felt mostly in Germany, while Cluniac ideals are prevalent in France and Burgundy.

Citeaux and the New Orders

I make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

—St. Paul

Cluny's slide toward decadence has not gone unnoticed, and other orders are springing up which, once again, seek to return to Benedict's original asceticism. The most important of these orders is the Cistercian Order, or White Monks, founded in 1098 in Cîteaux and formed into a true monastic order by the charismatic and inspirational Bernard of Clairvaux, who joined the house at Cîteaux in 1113. The Cistercian Rule has also inspired other monastic orders, such as the recently founded Order of St. Julian de Pereiro (or Alcantara), a Spanish military order, and the Calatrava, whose purpose is to defend Calatrava from the Almohads.

The Cistercians believe in the simplicity and poverty that Cluny and Gorze have lost. They wear habits of undyed wool, and they build their houses out of unfinished stone instead of finely carved marble. They do not have images or gold and silver crosses in their churches, but only the plainest vestments. They live in the remotest places and spend the time that Benedict allotted to work in severe agricultural labor.

Cistercian abbeys spring up on the very edges of civilization, where the monks or nuns can be free from the distractions of the world. (This makes them very popular with noble patrons, as they actually prefer less valuable land.) In Britain, great Cistercian abbeys exist in north Yorkshire (Rievaulx and Fountains) and in south Wales (Tintern). Cistercians would seem to be at risk from Lupines who resent their taming of the wildernesses, but for the most part, they are left alone. Perhaps the werewolves fear the monks' faith — or perhaps they fear retribution.

Cîteaux remains the heart of the order: All Cistercian houses are subject to its abbot, and representatives of the houses must meet in Cîteaux once a year. There is a persistent rumor that the White Monks have been systematically infiltrated by a conspiratorial sect of vampires or mages who use the isolated abbeys for their own purposes (what these purposes might be depends on the imagination of the Cainite passing on the rumor: blood-magical experiments, the forging of new bloodlines, Infernalism, you name it), and also, that the regular meetings are a method of sharing results — and blood, for the rumor also insists that sect members have all sworn the Blood Oath to each other.

Even more extreme than the Cistercians are the Carthusians, founded in 1048 at the monastery of Grande Chartreuse near Grenoble. The Carthusians live like hermits, in separate cells, assembling only for communal worship. Each monk has his own garden, prepares his own food and says his own daily offices. The order is highly ascetic, and the monks live a lonely, austere and almost silent life. Its severity has prevented the order from becoming as popular as the Cistercian. The Carthusian Order is, however, quite popular among Cainites who prefer unlives of quiet, uninterrupted contemplation.

The Monastic Life

The life of a monk or nun depends on the order to which he or she belongs. Different orders emphasize different activities, from missionary work and helping others to work for the monastic community and the worship of God. What all of the orders have in common is dedication. Living in a monastery is not a soft option. When a monk is not working in the vegetable garden or the laundry, the community's many daily observances keep him awake and busy at all hours of the day and night.

A monastery typically has a substantial estate associated with it. It is usually a gift from the landowner who founded the monastery. The estate enables the monastery to survive from day to day, and its management is an important responsibility of the monks.

Monasteries also receive donations from the wealthy — and the guilt-ridden. Monks have become skilled at exploiting tax exemptions and trading privileges, and some monasteries have become highly profitable commercial concerns. The great abbeys along the major rivers of Western Europe — the Rhône, the Loire, the Rhine — even run their own trading fleets. Many monks and nuns have therefore become businessmen and women despite their supposed spiritual concerns. Inevitably, this has bred arrogance, corruption and an abandonment of spiritual pursuits.

Silence

For most of the day, monks live under a rule of silence. Daily tasks must be carried out without speaking. Of course, there are readings from holy books and spoken and sung prayers, but everyday-chat is discouraged. While working, monks may recite the canon and the Psalter to themselves, and the rule of silence may be broken in the cloister during the morning.

The Carthusians are more extreme: Their order emphasizes solitude and contemplation, and a Carthusian house is almost totally silent except for services. Augustinian priories are generally more moderate, though the Augustinian Rule does not lay down any specific requirements.

Appearance and Clothing

Benedict's Rule states that a monk's clothes should be plain but comfortable. Monks who follow the rule wear black hooded habits, which emulate Roman clothing. The Benedictines are therefore sometimes known as the Black Monks. They are permitted to wear leather belts and shoes and are allowed warm cloaks and linen coifs in cold weather. (Apart from the infirmary, monasteries are not heated. The stone corridors and bare cells are very cold and drafty in winter.)

Cistercians wear habits of undyed wool, leading them to be known as the White Monks, and they scorn the softness of the Benedictine ways. Most go barefoot, and some even wear hair shirts against their skin to prove their devotion to God.

The most striking aspect of a monk's personal appearance is the tonsure. When a novice becomes a monk, the crown of his head is shaved, though a fringe of hair remains all around. The crown is never allowed to grow back. Nuns also cut off their hair as a sign of devotion at the end of their novitiate.

A Day in the Life

The monks of Benedict's day led practical lives, spending much of their time on material tasks, working in the fields or gardens. While this is still true in Cistercian houses, life in a present day Benedictine monastery is very different, emphasizing sedentary, liturgical duties far more than practical ones. ("Sedentary" may not be the appropriate word here. In at least one house, monks sing 55 psalms one after the other, all without sitting down.) More than half of a monk's time is spent on religious duties, with vocal prayer being the main element, and no more than three hours a day occupied with work.

Timetables differ from season to season — as the length of daylight varies — and from monastery to monastery, but the following pattern is typical of the greater Benedictine monasteries.

The monks rise at 2:30 a.m. to prepare for Nocturns, the night office later known as Matins. The preparation involves the singing of psalms, and Nocturns includes prayers for the royal family and for the dead. This takes some two-and-a-half hours, after which, an hour is set aside for reading.

At 6 a.m. — daybreak — the bell rings for Lauds, with more psalms and prayers, particularly for the royal house. Immediately afterward at 6:45 comes Prime, when the monks read seven penitential psalms and chant the litany of the saints. Breakfast, if it takes place at all (and in many monasteries it does not), consists of bread and wine or ale.

From 7:30 until 8 a.m., more time is given for reading, and then comes Terce, another two hours or so of religious services, including the first mass of the day, the Morrow Mass. During this time the monks also meet in the chapter house, where house business is discussed, confession takes place and the abbot hands out duties and punishments. The chapter meeting is often lively, with monks making the most of their temporary release from the rule of silence.

The monks then work until midday, or Sext, when they offer up prayers for relatives and celebrate the High Mass. At 1:30 p.m. comes Nones, followed by dinner, which consists of bread, cheese, vegetables, beans and cereal, with fish or eggs on special occasions. Meat is permitted in some houses and is often eaten at the abbot's table where guests are entertained. During dinner, monks listen to readings from the Bible or another holy book. Conversation is, of course, forbidden.

After dinner, the monks may read or work until the bell rings again for Vespers (prayers before supper) at 4:30. Vespers takes an hour, after which the monks have another opportunity to read privately. They also change into their night shoes before Compline at 6:15. This is the briefest office of the day, consisting of just six psalms and taking only quarter of an hour. At 6:30, well after dark in an English winter, the monks retire to bed.

The summer schedule is similar, but the monks wake at 1:30 a.m. and do not go to bed until 8 p.m. More time is devoted to reading and work, but also to the liturgy. A brief period of rest is permitted around the middle of the day, and a second meal is taken after Vespers.

This is a far cry from the life laid down by Benedict and still pursued in Cistercian houses. Earlier monasteries observed only some of the many offices mentioned above, and celebrated Mass only once per day. Religious rituals were also a great deal shorter, usually taking about 10 minutes, whereas in the new liturgical monasteries, they often take well over an hour. Early Benedictine monks spent much of their time at work, while the new monasticism devotes at least eight hours a day to vocal prayer, ritual and chanting. With little opportunity for relaxation or physical exercise, it is a wearing life.

Nevertheless, the ceaseless round of devotion inspires some. Manuscripts, illuminations and original literary works demonstrate the artistic and scholarly achievements of the liturgical monasteries — though some attribute these works to the influence of the monasteries' Toreador and Brujah inhabitants or patrons, creating around themselves a little world that suits their desires. Many monks advance to bishoprics and even higher posts, showing that the liturgical round does not crush the pastoral ability or urge — though once again there are those Cainites to whom this is merely evidence that monasteries are nothing but a breeding ground for the pawns of their enemies.

The Monastic Haven

As mentioned, many monasteries harbor vampires, who take advantage of the community's isolation and inward orientation to prey upon its inhabitants in safety. The schedule described above shows how risky a proposition this is. Because the monastery is an insular community, and monks are expected to be active all day, every day, it is practically impossible for a vampire to pass himself off as a monk.

Vampires must instead insinuate themselves into the dark recesses of the monastery, appearing only to those over whom they have absolute control. Such vampires are known as *monachi* or *monachae* (singular *monachus* and *monacha*), from the Latin for "monk" and "nun."

A wise Cainite therefore makes sure that at least one or two officials, who can keep her haven secure, are under her control before she begins to feed extensively on the other inhabitants. The hospitaller, responsible for the greeting of strangers, is usually an early victim. The cellarer follows quickly: The wine cellar, because it is below ground, is a favorite first stop for many Cainites entering monasteries. (The cellarer's function is to ensure that monks have food and drink. It is a cruel irony that the cellarer quickly *becomes* the vampire's food and drink.)

Once the vampire is established, she sets about forming a herd. This does not usually include the whole monastery, just enough people to protect her while she sleeps. She can then rise while the mortal inhabitants are asleep and take her pick of her captive flock.

A monastic haven is, on the surface, indistinguishable from a normal monastery or nunnery. It would be a foolish Cainite who destroyed her own herd, and since monastic vampires rarely need to spend vitae on healing, physical prowess or Disciplines, they require relatively little blood anyway. Often, the only way to determine whether a house has been turned into a feeding ground is to see whether the work of its inhabitants seems significantly influenced in a particular direction. If scholarly learning seems overemphasized, the house may be in the hands of a Brujah or Tremere; if it produces works of great artistry or philosophical novelty, it may harbor a Toreador *monachus*; if its inhabitants tend toward pastoral ambition and frequently enter the Church bureaucracy, it may have been turned to the purposes of a Lasombra or Ventrue. Of course, the same symptoms may equally well denote an abbot of a particular inclination...

It is rare for a house to be a haven for more than one vampire. This can happen only if the house is large and the two vampires are close allies. A small monastery contains barely enough blood for one vampire, let alone two; even in a large abbey, the supply is tight enough that multiple vampires would have to cooperate in their feeding habits. Add to this the different directions in which they are likely to want to take the monastery, the limited amount of safe resting space and the violently territorial nature of the average Cainite, and it is clear why two *monachi* in a house will usually end up fighting to the death.

It is not unknown for a *monachus* to take holy orders and become a monk. Of course, it is not possible for vampires to work in the fields or take part in daytime offices, and to avoid awkward questions, vampire monks usually remain as well concealed as their more sinister counterparts. Nevertheless, their piety can be as genuine as any mortal's.

Positions

The small community of a monastic house has its own simple hierarchy, with leaders, followers and servants. Some monks also receive special duties. Depending on a particular Cainite's reasons for coming to a monastery, he may wish to seek out particular individuals or members of particular groups for his attentions. A Tremere might make a point of forcing the librarian to take the Blood Oath, while a Lasombra would likely be more interested in the abbot or prior — or, if he proves too difficult to control directly, those who have his ear.

The Abbot

The abbot or abbess is the ruler and leader of an abbey. (Houses smaller than abbeys do not have abbots.) He is the supreme spiritual authority of the monastery — and consequently, acquires all the functions of a lay ruler in a normal community. The abbot is elected by a committee of senior monks, usually for life, though an abbot may retire if he is too weak and infirm to continue his duties. Such elections often attract royal attention because of the economic and political power of the position (though this is not a problem in the poorer Cistercian houses).

The abbot is responsible for appointing and overseeing the other officials and for the discipline of monks. He presides at the daily chapter house meetings, writes sermons and leads the liturgy. In theory, he also ensures that the monastery is properly provisioned, though he usually delegates this duty to his officials. When guests are to be entertained, the abbot receives them; the abbot of a great house therefore mixes frequently with the influential and powerful. *Monachi* of a political bent, such as the Lasombra, encourage their abbots to hold such receptions after dark, for even these fleeting contacts are useful.

The abbot also has a number of external duties, which frequently take him away from the monastery for long periods of time. He corresponds with his bishop and monarch and attends them when required. He is likely to be involved in government and may even act as a royal emissary. The abbot oversees dependent priories and outlying areas of land, and he visits them regularly. When the monastery becomes involved in a dispute — as monasteries, with their extensive land interests, often do — the abbot must fight the legal battle. Because of the importance of monasteries to the Church, abbots also participate in synods.

The abbot's lodgings are far more luxurious than those of the other monks. The Abbot of la Trinité, for example, has a suite of six rooms, with his own courtyard, garden, dovecote and stables.

The Prior

The prior or prioress runs the day-to-day affairs of the monastery and takes the abbot's place in his absence.

Monachi usually make a point of bringing an abbey's prior quickly under their influence. Because of his very general duties, the prior can help keep the vampire away from the attention of the monks. By contrast, if the prior is left alone

and comes to suspect an alien influence, he can make unlife very difficult for the vampire. Even the abbot, because he is frequently away, is less important to a vampire's safe existence.

The sub-prior is an assistant to the prior. Larger houses have more than one sub-prior. In such houses, the prior may concentrate on external affairs and the economics of the monastery, delegating internal matters and discipline to his appointed deans.

In monastic houses smaller than an abbey, there is no abbot, and the prior is the head of the house.

Other Officials

Ten other officials assist he abbot and prior, making up the apostolic number of 12. Officials sometimes benefit by being given specific lodgings, though this depends on the monastery. (The Abbey of la Trinité, for example, reserves lodgings for the sacrist and almoner, but not for the other officials.) These lodgings consist only of a few small rooms — a long way from the abbot's luxurious dwellings.

The sacrist attends to the care of the church and the altars. In the greatest abbeys, these can rival the finest of cathedrals. The Basilica of Cluny, for example, is the largest church in the world — and will remain so well into the 16th century. The sacrist works closely with the precentor, who oversees the organization of ceremonies.

The hospitaller or hosteler looks after visitors. A monastery has a small amount of guest accommodations, the size and quality befitting the guests it must receive. A Cistercian priory can offer visitors only cells much like the monks,' whereas a grand abbey like Cluny has well-appointed guest houses suitable for a bishop or lord. In addition to accommodating guests, the hospitaller performs the monastery's duty of providing food and shelter to travelers.

The infirmarian cares for the sick, both within the monastery and outside it. A monastery room is set aside as the infirmary, and the monks maintain a small infirmary garden. The infirmary is the one room in the monastery that is heated. Wealthy abbeys may have two — one for the rich and one for the poor — the latter possibly doubling as travelers' accommodations. In monasteries with good libraries, monks may have access to considerable medical knowledge.

The almoner bears the responsibility for the monastery's duty of helping the poor. The extent of the almoner's duties varies greatly from monastery to monastery. Cistercian houses, run-down and remote, have little use for an almoner, while larger abbeys can disburse substantial amounts of food, and even money. Charity is often woven into the liturgy, with lengthy ceremonies culminating in a Mass in which selected impoverished people participate. Maundy Thursday and All Saints' Day are common dates for such ceremonies. In some monasteries, on the first Sunday of Lent, monks go without a portion of food, donating it instead to the poor via the almoner. The almoner also visits the poor and the sick in their homes.

The librarian is, of course, in charge of the library. The rule requires monks to read, and they therefore amass collections of books through donations and the copying of books lent by other houses. Most books are sacred — liturgical texts or lives of the saints — but some are classical or vernacular. The monasteries of Wales, for example, preserve the ancient poetry of that country. Collections can be huge — some large houses have over 100 books, and Durham has over 500. Cistercian houses do not emphasize reading as much as Benedictine ones, so they tend to have smaller collections. Tremere and Brujah *monachi*, to whom scholarship is the most important element of the monastery, frequently cultivate librarians as ghouls or allies.

The cellarer or cellaress is in charge of the house's supplies of food and drink, and the bursar in charge of the house's money. These two positions, although vital, are often handed over to suitably trained servants, for they lack the spiritual element of the other offices. They are sometimes combined into a single position that oversees all rents, revenues and expenditures. Because vampires often gravitate to the deepest, darkest parts of a house that they intend to make their home, the cellaress is usually an early victim of any infestation.

Finally, the chamberlain provides clothing, shoes and bedding, and he cleans the dormitories, and the doorkeeper is responsible for the security of the abbey gate.

Choir Monks

Choir monks comprise the heart of a monastery. These are the men or women who have waited out their novitiate and have taken full monastic vows; they have chosen to put aside the world and dedicate their lives to the worship of God. The burden of the abbey's liturgical duties falls on them. They also work the monastery's land, though much of this manual labor falls to lay brothers or sisters in some houses.

Monks are mostly upper or upper-middle class, and may have been educated in the monastery from a very young age. (The Cistercians admit only adults, and other orders now follow suit.) They will usually spend their entire lives in religious houses, though they may be "lent" to other houses at the discretion of the abbot.

To the less devout, monks seem fanatical in their devotion. Their daily schedule is punishing and obsessive, and the prevalence of self-flagellation as a means of penitence makes their lot even worse. Only the genuinely religious — or those with long-term ambitions in the Church — take vows voluntarily, though noble families frequently consign unwanted sons or daughters to the monastic life.

One special class of monks, although it has little formal status, is that of monks *ad succurrendum*. These are old or ill laymen who expect to die soon and want to end their days as professed monks, thus ensuring the salvation of their souls. Because these monks do not actually wish to lead a monastic life, they typically wait until the very last moment to be

professed — one man was professed one day and died the next. Relatives often resist the dying person's request to be professed, because they stand to lose a great deal of property, given to the monastery either in the postulant's will or as an entry gift. For the same reason, monasteries are often eager to persuade rich but sick individuals to be professed before they die, promising salvation at the unspoken cost of one's heirs' lands.

Monks *ad succurrendum* are not a large class in monasteries, for obvious reasons. This is probably just as well, since they lack the strength to contribute anything to the community, and yet must be fed and cared for like any other monk.

Of course, there are occasions when young people, falling gravely ill, hurriedly take vows, but then recover. Such people typically remain in the monastery, either from piety or because the outside world may not welcome them back. Some *monachi* are not above dosing such young people with their vitae to help them recover, out of a cruel sense of humor or because the sufferer would make a welcome addition to their herd. The Tremere sorcerer Adriensis, who pursues his Thaumaturgical studies in the library of the Abbey of la Trinité, regularly uses this tactic, sometimes assisted by a judicious magical affliction or a series of nocturnal visits, to build up the abbey's lands and "recruit" like-minded companions at the same time.

Large abbeys, such as Rievaulx and Christ Church, have about 150 professed monks at their peak, with half that number being more usual. Even great Cluny peaks at 300 monks. Smaller houses may have closer to 30. The minimum complement of a priory or nunnery is the apostolic 12, plus a prior.

Lay Brothers and *Conversi*

In addition to the choir monks, who have taken holy orders, a religious house contains a large number of lay brothers or sisters. These are men or women who have been accepted into the house, but they have not dedicated themselves to God in the same way as the monks or nuns. In Cistercian monasteries, lay brothers are illiterate manual laborers, who belong to the community but whose position is clearly inferior to that of the choir monks. In monasteries inhabited by *monachi*, the resident Cainite often takes a particular interest in the lay brothers, regarding them as a safer source of sustenance than the choir monks.

In some monasteries, particularly those least touched by the Cistercian ideals, the lay brothers are fully monastic, though they are illiterate and have not taken holy orders. Brothers of this type are called *conversi*. They can become choir monks as they learn to read and become able to participate in the liturgy; indeed, even while they are still *conversi*, they may be permitted to take part in major celebrations, such as those for Christmas Eve or Good Friday.

A *conversus* may hold an important position in the monastery, up to and including that of prior. This is, in fact, eminently practical, since *conversi* from the middle and upper classes often have valuable administrative experience that "career" monks and nuns lack. This is less common than it used to be, because the status of the *conversi* has been eroded by the Cistercian attitude to lay brothers, and it is now beneath the dignity of most great lords.

In some monasteries, *conversi* significantly outnumber monks. For example, at the great abbey of Rievaulx in northern England, there are 500 *conversi* to the 150 monks.

Novices

Before a postulant may take holy orders, she must spend at least a year as a novice. This period is called the novitiate. Novices may be children or adults, though the Cistercians and Carthusians refuse to accept children under the age of 15 — as much because children can be disruptive to contemplation as out of any concern that the child might not take to the religious life — and the Benedictines are beginning to uphold this practice as well. Most novices are literate adults, both clerical and lay; during the course of their novitiate, they continue their education, studying grammar, rhetoric and music.

The number of novices an abbey admits is limited by the abbey's means. A poorly endowed house cannot maintain a large convent, and often only two or three novices may be accepted each year. Demand for places usually exceeds supply. The Benedictine Rule prescribes that an intending novice be kept waiting at the gate for four days to test her purpose before being admitted. Houses often expect "gifts" of land or money from a postulant or her family.

Servants

Houses that emphasize liturgy over work rely on servants to attend to daily necessities. Servants, unlike lay brothers, have no clerical role at all. They include free men and women training at the monastery, thus gaining education, protection and a livelihood without losing their freedom; people who have given land to the monastery in return for a pension of food and clothes; servants working for pay, such as smiths, bakers or carpenters; and, most common, people who have given up their freedom and accepted the status of servants in return for support as members of the monastic community. (They may do this for many reasons: to pay a debt, because of the security offered by the monastery, or even to improve their status.)

Servants range from administrators, who could have considerable responsibilities, to body servants and serfs. Depending on the monastery, servants might administer justice, collect tithes and other revenues and even oversee monastic affairs in outlying parts of the monastery's lands. Servants can remain landholders, and they may become as rich and powerful as any monk.

In fact, servants can become so powerful that they usurp control over whole areas of monastic life. Specifically, while the officials of the monastery are supposed to be monks, these

officials often delegate their duties to their personal servants — to the point where the servants effectively become the officials. This is particularly common in houses that harbor *monachi*, as Cainites usually prefer to concentrate power in the hands of laymen rather than in those with faith.

Women

Monasticism is one of the few areas of Christianity where women may participate, and the profession of nun is almost the only respectable one open to a woman other than marriage. Their opportunities, however, are shrinking: Compared to the number of monks, there are fewer nuns now than there were 100 years ago. (It is estimated that there is one nun for every five monks; roughly 1000 nuns in England.) It is more profitable to marry off an unwanted daughter than to place her in a convent, so few new nunneries are being built.

Female houses may be independent, run by an abbess or prioress, but sometimes a male guardian (the master or *custos*) is imposed to look after the house's finances and other temporal matters, thus keeping the women secluded from the outside world. Such a master is higher in status than the prioress. In the Gilbertine order, which has many houses in England, a nunnery is usually part of a double house, and the master of such a double house is always male.

Story Seeds

Ever since *The Name of the Rose*, monastery murder plots have been wildly popular. A monastery or convent is a classic "locked room," and has a magnificently religious atmosphere that makes such a story exceptional. Eco's masterstroke was to relate both the story and the way in which it was told to the setting — the murders and investigation were tied in with religious debates within the monastery (and the larger Church), the monastery had a bearing on those debates and the hero's arguments were an important part of the story. When you tell your vampire monastery murder story, try to bear this in mind. See the discussion of heresies, and read the original book or see the movie for a few ideas.

Encounters with *monachi* can be ambiguous occasions. In a sense, the *monachus* shows the vampire breed at its most parasitic, thus ensconcing itself at the heart of a community and slowly consuming its host for food. But *monachi* can also give a great deal back to the monastery, encouraging art and scholarship, and even recruiting the finest young monks to inspire the community to even greater works. Such encounters illustrate and explore the delicate balance between dispassionate predation and benevolent guardianship inherent in the vampiric condition.

THOSE WHO PRAY

The Treasure House

The Church is more than just the human beings who make it up. Just as its attitudes, bureaucracy and influence have changed and grown, so have its paraphernalia: its buildings, its art, its rituals, and so on.

The rise of the Toreador within the Church has been a major factor in this. The exaltation of their gods has always inspired mortal artists to do their finest, and the Toreador take great delight in directing the Church's new affluence to similar exaltation. Art and architecture now spread and reinforce the Christian message. They have also proved attractive to rich sponsors eager to make a tangible demonstration of their Christianity.

Architecture

In the 12th century, practical knowledge, growing populations and rampant religious urge combine to give birth to the great cathedrals that are the greatest architectural achievement of the era. The Church seeks to build to the greater glory of God, and new craft techniques make it possible for this to happen. Great cathedrals spring up all over Dark Medieval Europe with extraordinary speed. This is the true heyday of Gothic architecture.

The cathedral is the seat of the bishop, and the greatest of cathedrals — the seats of archbishops — are magnificent buildings unlike anything seen before in Europe. Their vaulting buttresses not only give cathedrals an upward-thrusting look, they also carry enough weight to allow the walls to be much thinner than in previous large buildings. Architects can therefore provide large numbers of windows, making the new cathedrals light, glorious places instead of dark and gloomy as previous designs had been, and great, vaulting roofs that draw the eye heavenward.

The Toreador, of course, enthusiastically espouse this magnificent new style. Even the most philistine of their enemies concede the breathtaking glory of the cathedrals. Toreador communities in many cities compete to build the greatest cathedrals, which explains why so many are built so quickly. Some Toreador have become so obsessed that they have even given their blood to workmen so that they may work harder and finish the building more quickly. In addition, devout Nosferatu sometimes send their ghouls to cathedral sites at night, so that when workmen arrive the next morning they find the day's tasks already begun. Christians tend to accept this as God's miraculous intervention in His work; if the Toreador knew that the Nosferatu were involved, they might consider the project tainted and ruined.

That said, the cathedrals are a honeyed trap for the Toreador. On one horrible occasion, a whole coterie of Toreador, standing in the nave of its new cathedral for the

THREE PILLARS

first time, was so mesmerized by its strange new beauty that the coterie was caught by the first rays of the sun through the stained glass windows. Their ashes made a macabre reflection of the window's pictures, telling the story of Christ's death and resurrection.

Art

I am a poor old woman who knows nothing, who cannot read. But in the Church I see Paradise painted, and Hell where the Damned broil.

— unidentified woman, 15th century

Art is, in a sense, the written language of Dark Medieval Europe. Most people can neither read nor write, but they easily understand stories told in pictures. Popular religious art, such as stained glass windows and altarpieces, exists to reinforce the stories told in churches — stained glass, in particular, is used as a sort of pictorial narrative to tell stories of Christ, stories of good works rewarded and stories of sinners cast down to Hell. To the illiterate masses of Europe, cathedrals are not just places of worship, but picture books.

Fine art, such as painting and sculpture, is inspired by subjects and stories from the Bible and from the lives of the saints, but there is little around, and even that is found only in the palaces of the mighty — the Dark Medieval world is not yet ready to support the type and scale of fine art that will flourish during the Renaissance. Even the Toreador are more interested in popular art and architecture. The sacred art of the Byzantine Church is considerably more refined, but the Toreador of the West barely acknowledge even the existence of their rivals' works.

Some of the finest art in the Church is to be found in the form of reliquaries, containers for sacred relics. These caskets are finely crafted, with decorations picked out in gold. The artwork usually tells the story of the relics held within — for example, a casket containing a splinter of the True Cross might show a scene of the Crucifixion, while the one that holds the bones of Thomas Becket tells the story of his murder.

Relics

Holy relics are believed to have magical powers, for example to heal disease or to bring victory in battle, and reliquaries are often exhibited at shrines as the objects of pilgrimage. Examples of relics include the bones of saints, splinters and nails from the True Cross, thorns from the Crown of Thorns, pieces of stone from the manger in Bethlehem, the tunic worn by the Virgin Mary when she gave birth to Jesus — and so on. The basilica of Santa Croce in Rome has the finest selection of relics in Christendom, with its star exhibit being the very finger that Doubting Thomas put into Jesus's side after the Resurrection.

Technically, an altar is defined as a sepulchre containing the relics of a saint, though most parish altars do not. It is a poor cathedral, though, that does not have at least a few bones to show. Competition for relics is fierce, and clergymen are not above kidnapping them from others. Bishop Hugh of Lincoln, visiting the arm of Mary Magdalene at Fécamp, tried to break off part of it; when he failed, he bit off part of the index finger to the horror of the watching monks. One Benedictine monk lay low in a rival community before managing to steal the head of St. Foy in a sack of vegetables.

Given the difficulty of authentication, con men have plied trade in false relics for centuries. There are far more false relics than true ones, and the number of splinters of the True Cross in circulation is enough to make 10 or 100 crosses. Cainites are often rightly contemptuous of those who threaten them with relics, knowing that they are probably false; once in a while, though, a vampire gets a very nasty surprise. Worse still, even a false relic may gain power if enough people believe in it.

Systems for relics can be found on page 237 of **Vampire: The Dark Ages**.

Rivals to Rome

The Roman Church is the supreme spiritual authority of Western Europe and of Christendom as a whole, but it is not without its rivals. Within the Kingdom of Christ, it has an uneasy relationship with the Eastern Church, centered in Constantinople, from which it was divided when the Roman Empire split in two. It also faces internal dissent in the form of heretical sects great and small.

In the far north and the Eastern lands of the Tzimisce, pagan gods still hold sway. These, however, no longer offer any serious challenge to the Church. Christianity takes hold in these regions, and while the old religions still grip the hearts of many, they do not attract new worshippers. Paganism is not organized, lacking both Christianity's clear doctrinal focus and the Church's missionary zeal, and it relies on tradition to retain its adherents. Christianity has long since learned to assimilate those traditions and thereby to deprive the pagan gods of their last hold on the world. The pagan lands may take a little time to fall, but even while they resist they will certainly never challenge Rome.

The Jews do not preach their religion. In Dark Medieval Europe, they are a despised underclass, the murderers of Jesus Christ, and Christian folk avoid contact with them whenever possible.

The only other religion that poses a threat to Christianity is Islam, which has conquered most of the Near East and north Africa, and it has even forged a European kingdom in southern Iberia. Christian and Muslim soldiers clash in the Holy Land, though Europe itself is peaceful enough.

The Legacy of Byzantium

Like so much Church history, Rome's uneasy relationship with Constantinople stretches back to the days of the Roman Empire. As the empire disintegrated under waves of barbarian attack, it split in two, the Eastern and Western Empires, centered on Byzantium and Rome respectively. Two distinct strains of Christianity evolved in the two cities' spheres of influence, and they never fully reconciled. The Eastern Church, although it has in the past acknowledged the primacy of Rome, has been sundered from its Western counterpart since the liturgical schism of 1054 (initiated by the Eastern pontiff as part of a political conflict with Leo IX, and ending with both patriarchs excommunicating each other).

The Eastern Church has developed its own doctrines and liturgy, far more intricate and ritualistic than those of the West. In converting the East, it has absorbed a great deal of Greek and Slavic mysticism, and its influence is felt in the more mystical currents of Western monasticism. Like Rome, Constantinople has preserved the heritage of antiquity over the centuries; if anything, it is even more steeped in history than the Roman Church.

Although both pontiffs are in the hands of the Toreador, the two branches do not get along well, and there is little hope of the schism being repaired. The Western Toreador, giddy with the power of the papacy in their own lands, demand that Constantinople submit to the primacy of Rome. The Eastern Toreador regard the West as not yet emerged from barbarism, and they refuse to submit to their Roman clanmates and their crude liturgy.

Heresies of the West

The late 12th century is a rich time for heresy, perhaps the richest since the early theological battles from which Christian orthodoxy emerged. The triumph of Christianity means that the era's strong religious urge concentrates on the life, work and thoughts of Jesus; while the Church's growing aloofness means that it leaves intellectuals and other free-thinkers to find their own unsanctioned answers to religious questions.

The best known and most dramatic of the Western heresies is the Albigensian or Cathar heresy, which dominates the Languedoc (southern France), and continues to do so into the early 13th century until it is wiped out in a bloody crusade. The Albigensian Cathars are actually the last stage in a chain of dualist sects stretching across Europe and back to the earliest Christian times. In addition to these sects, Dark Medieval Europe in 1197 plays host to a large number of less widespread — and less easily classified — heresies.

Heresy is a matter for the people as well as the Church. Heresies lead not just to theological condemnations, but to rioting and murder, and to their preachers' lynching or burning at the hands of angry crowds. While the 20th-century mind can understand the Church's need to protect its position as the sole arbiter of revealed truth, it is less easy to imagine why seemingly abstract points of theology should inspire the passions of mobs. The answer is that, to the Dark Medieval mind, the divine is *real*. It is universally accepted that truth is in the possession of the Church, its divinely appointed guardian. Two contradictory religious beliefs cannot both be true, and the untrue belief must be purged. On a more political level, people see Christendom as a single kingdom, the kingdom of God; heresy is therefore an antisocial menace, tantamount to civil disorder.

Except in Provençe, where heresy has taken a deep root in the land, heretics are objects of hatred to mobs across Europe. Ordinary people take great pleasure in seizing and burning heretics even though this punishment is not authorized by the Church.

The Dualist Heresies

"God is perfect; nothing in the world is perfect; therefore, nothing in the world was made by God."

Dualism is an ancient philosophy, dating back long before the time of Christ, and elements of dualism have made their way into Christian theology. At its most basic, dualism attempts to answer the age-old question "Why is there evil in the world?" It concludes that not one, but two, supreme divine powers exist, one good and one evil. This might seem to be an accurate description of the God and Devil of Christianity, but there is a vital difference: In dualism, the good and evil gods are equal and coeval. Down through the centuries, many people have turned to dualism in an effort to understand the existence and apparent prevalence of evil in the world.

The most important dualist philosophy for Christian heresies was Manichaeism, whose founder, Mani, preached that the material world was a creation of the evil god, not the good one, and that salvation could therefore be achieved only by rejecting the physical body.

Although Manichaeism was vigorously suppressed by the Church, its doctrines continued to form an important part of the early mystical Christian tradition in Eastern Europe. They resurfaced in a particularly virulent form in the Bogomil sect of Bulgaria in the mid-10th century, from where they spread to the West. The Cathar heresy was born in the early 11th century, with the Albigensian branch arising some 50 years later.

The Cathars (pure ones) are the most extreme dualists — and among the most extreme members of any Western religion — of the era. They preach a radical dualism, believing that the world is the creation of the *Rex Mundi*, the Devil — and that the Roman Church, worshipping the creator, is therefore a tool of the *Rex Mundi*. To a Cathar, the material world is a distraction for the soul — but God

has given humanity the consciousness of good, enabling men and women to save themselves. Only by renouncing the material and concentrating on heavenly things can the soul pass on to the Kingdom of God.

Because of their abhorrence of the material, some Cathars deny the incarnation of Christ and claim that the humanity of Christ must have been an illusion. As a corollary, they also reject the Resurrection and Ascension. Catharism does, however, accept Christ as an emissary of the good God. (The only prayer the sect recognizes is the Lord's Prayer, because Christ Himself taught it.) Other Cathars identify the tyrannical and unjust God of the Old Testament with Satan. It is scarcely surprising that the Church reacts so strongly to the heresy.

Cathars refuse to perform any secular activities and practice a severe asceticism: For example, they are celibate and vegetarian. Their structure is based on a network of *perfecti* (perfected ones). The *perfecti* are those who have renounced the material world. Lay members, known as *credentes*, are not so tightly bound by the Cathar asceticism. They may marry, eat meat and indulge in luxuries.

Most believers take the *consolamentum*, the Cathar oath, only on their deathbeds; the *perfecti* take it earlier in life, after a period of preparation lasting at least a year, and remain bound by it. *Perfecti*, who can be women or men (another major bone of contention with the Church), are similar to priests, and as with priests some stay with their communities while others become itinerant teachers. However, *perfecti*, unlike Church priests, are not intermediaries between humanity and God; they are merely teachers and holy men and women.

By the last years of the 12th century, the Albigensian heresy is widespread throughout the Languedoc and has taken on the apparatus of an organized church. Cathar bishops reside in Albi, Toulouse, Carcassonne and Agen, and deacons preach regularly under the protection of their aristocratic sponsors. Rich, peaceful, civilized and with strongly independent cultural traditions, including a uniquely prominent role for women in society, the Languedoc has proved fertile ground for the intellectual challenge of Catharism, and the region is undergoing its own renaissance. Commoners and nobles alike support Cathar doctrines and reject the authority of the Church.

The Cathars are sometimes confused by outsiders with the Waldensians, another heretical sect of the Languedoc, who preach the holiness of poverty. While Catharism does reject material luxury, this is merely as the consequence of a larger doctrine, not as a primary guiding principle. The Waldensians also reject many Roman traditions, such as the authority of the Pope, prayers for the dead and the veneration of saints, but they are not dualists.

Other information on Manichaeism, Albigenses and Waldenses may be found in Chapter Five of the **Dark Ages Companion**.

THOSE WHO PRAY

The Nature of Jesus

Many heresies revolve around controversies over the nature of Jesus Christ himself. According to Orthodox Church doctrine, Jesus was the son of God on the Virgin Mary, a man-God in whom the human and the divine were fused: He was, paradoxically, both God and man at the same time. Although dualists have their own idiosyncratic interpretations of this, many do not dispute it in essence. Others, however, do. These heresies are not generally preached in the same way as dualism, but they may be remembered by older Cainites, and perhaps used to upset the Church or to inspire a protégé.

Adoptionism has been condemned by one Church council after another, but it continues to be debated, even by respected Church elders. Adoptionists believe that Christ was a true man, born of man and woman, but one who was, uniquely, without sin, and that He was adopted by God — probably at the time of his baptism — and appointed to serve His purpose on Earth. Their belief that Christ was not of a fully divine nature is contrary to repeatedly established doctrine.

Arianism is named for the fourth-century theologian Arius, who taught that Jesus, although supernatural in origin, was not created from the same substance as God. He was, Arius believed, merely the first and the highest of all finite beings — not infinite like the other two members of the Trinity. Arianism was condemned by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, which established and affirmed the doctrine of the unity of the divine essence and the equality of the Trinity, but it continued to flourish in Eastern Europe.

Nestorianism was another early heresy. It was first reported in A.D. 429 and was condemned not only by the Third Ecumenical Council two years later, but repeatedly over the next 200 years. Nestorians accept the Church's teaching that Christ possessed two natures, the human and the divine, but they believe that these cannot be combined within a single person or personality. Christ must therefore, they say, have two distinct aspects. They also conclude that Mary cannot be the Mother of God because she could have given birth only to the human aspect of Jesus, not the divine aspect.

The beliefs of the Monophysites and Monothelites are quite opposite to those of the Nestorians, but are equally heretical curiously, having been denounced regularly by Church councils from the fifth to the seventh century. The Monophysites believe that Christ had only one nature, any human element being utterly dominated by the divine. The Monothelites' subtly different belief is that only one will — the divine will — guided Christ's actions.

Pelagianism

Pelagianism is an odd and now obscure heresy, which nevertheless retains an attraction for some Cainites. Pelagius came to Rome circa A.D. 400, where he taught that salvation can be achieved through purely human powers, without the intervention of the divine. Needless to say, his doctrine was quickly condemned by the Church.

Pelagianism is of particular interest to religiously inclined vampires because many of them feel abandoned by God. Vampires, according to their reasoning, are the unliving, the Damned; they are soulless, cut off forever from the divine. If they are to achieve salvation, it cannot be through divine mercy, but only through their own actions and abilities.

For these Cainites, traditional Church doctrine offers little or no hope. Those who remember or learn the teachings of Pelagius are often attracted to it, and have helped to keep the heresy alive.

Story Seeds

East and West

Political tensions between the Eastern and Western Churches are an excellent source for stories, opening up opportunities for plenty of exotic scenery, doctrinal disputes, obscure heresies and magical cults, and vast, slow currents of political and religious history that affect both Cainites and mortals.

The characters could be messengers between the Toreador masters of Celestine III and their rival clanmates in the Orthodox Church, or spies sent to stir up trouble between the two branches of Toreador Christianity. They could even begin as ignorant, but sweet-tasting mortals, sent by Rome as goodwill gifts or as poisoned chalices. An advanced chronicle could begin with the division of the Roman Empire and span the centuries of conflict and rapprochement.

For more information about playing in the East, see **Constantinople by Night**.

Heresy

The conflict between Church and heretics is an easy source of good-guy-bad-guy stories. A pious and humanitarian heretic speaks his mind; the oppressive forces of the Church try to suppress him; our heroes must decide whether to stand up for the honest fellow or to join the baddies. This sort of story requires a bit of tweaking to make it original — organized-religion-as-bad-guy is too familiar.

Although simple good-guy-bad-guy stories about pious heretics being oppressed by an evil Church are easy to think up, they need a twist to make them interesting. Perhaps the heretic is not the good guy he seems to be. Perhaps he is an *agent provocateur*, trying to draw out heretics in order to hand them over to the mob. Perhaps he is a werewolf, preaching against the Church's opulence because he fears all civilization. (In this case, some rioters are in for a nasty surprise.) Perhaps he is a Ventrue who cannot feed on churchgoers.

Stress the frenzy of the mob, perhaps goaded on by the bishop or priest, rather than organized Church punishment. Perhaps a priest stands up for the heretic and is burned for his pains; such an action could easily divide the crowd, leading to internecine rioting through the streets of the coterie's previously quiet city. A Cainite with a fondness for the Byzantine might deliberately instigate such strife (by Dominating heretic, priest and mob leaders alike) in order to bring down the city's prince, or simply because she likes to watch things burn.

Heresy stories are most interesting, though, when the heresy itself has some bearing on the plot or characters. Old vampires may adhere to old heresies, thought long dead. An ancient prince in a remote town permits only Pelagianism to be preached among Cainites or kine, and he finds himself in conflict with a resurgent Rome backed by the Toreador. Heretical philosophies may drive Cainites to seek out magickal methods of testing or enforcing those philosophies — imagine a conspiracy of powerful clerical mages who had converted to Catharism and were trying to find some magickal way to transubstantiate mortal flesh into divine spirit, so that people could escape the material prison. What would be the results of their experiments? How would the Cappadocians be involved? What would happen if the Tremere got a hold of their research and put it to their own evil use?

The Cathar Convert

Quote: *Look around you. Look at yourself; look at me. This is no work of God.*

Prelude: You were born the youngest child of a noble, and enjoyed a fine education, though you had many questions your tutor could not answer. Why is there evil in the world? Why does God make so many suffer? As you grew up, you stopped worrying about these problems. You became an admired poet and singer, and concentrated on more immediate problems such as how to maintain two or three secret affairs without your parents or any of your lovers finding out.

Your Embrace was gentle, even loving, like a kiss. You were talking on a balcony with one of your father's guests, who spoke of ages past; of the search for God; of poetry, of the heart, and oh, of so many things. It was a warm, clear night; there was a moment of unutterable pleasure, then a moment of undeniable hunger. Your sire's servant showed his neck to you, and the sweet taste of his vitae moved you like nothing you had experienced before.

Your sire stayed with you until he was content that you had learned enough to survive in the society of the night, but he could not fill the void that he had created in your soul. You would never again see the sun, never again feel the breeze of a bright Autumn afternoon, never again enjoy bathing in a warm summer river.

Now you needed to know the answers to those childhood questions. Why had God done this to you?

You found the answer in the teachings of the Cathars. Only the soul is the work of God; all flesh is the Devil's craft. The extinguishing of your soul could only have been the Devil's work, for now you are flesh and flesh alone, without even the redeeming spark of the divine. But you will not concede the Devil's victory: Soulless though you may be, you will rise above him, and do God's work as best you can. Your clothes may be ragged and your body a hulk of dead flesh, but somehow, almost impossibly, your unlife continues.

Concept: You know the evil of flesh more intimately than any mortal can, and you want desperately to help the living understand their condition. Denied redemption for yourself, you try to achieve it through others. You try to starve the Beast, but it only seems to become more ravenous.

Roleplaying Hints: You are an outsider, a self-imposed exile from normal religion, unable to join fully in your new creed. You try to follow the ascetic strictures of Catharism, but obviously you must drink blood to live. You drink as little as possible, and are kind to your vessels. As far as you can, you live as though you had received the *consolamentum*.

Equipment: Ragged clothing

Vampire™ The Dark Ages

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Penitent*
Demeanor: *Loner*
Clan: *Brujah*

Generation: *12th*
Haven:
Concept: *Cathar Convert*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○○
Stamina ●●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●●○○○
Manipulation ●○○○○○
Appearance ●●○○○○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○○
Intelligence ●●●●○○
Wits ●●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Acting ○○○○○○
Alertness ●●○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○○
Brawl ●●○○○○
Dodge ●●○○○○
Empathy ●●○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○○
Larceny ○○○○○○
Leadership ●○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○○

Skills

Animal Ken ○○○○○○
Archery ○○○○○○
Crafts ●○○○○○
Etiquette ●○○○○○
Herbalism ●○○○○○
Melee ●○○○○○
Music ○○○○○○
Ride ●○○○○○
Stealth ●○○○○○
Survival ●●○○○○

Knowledges

Academics ●●●○○○
Hearth Wisdom ●●○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○○
Law ●○○○○○
Linguistics ●○○○○○
Medicine ●○○○○○
Occult ●●○○○○
Politics ●○○○○○
Science ○○○○○○
Seneschal ●●○○○○

Advantages

Disciplines

Celerity ●○○○○○
Potence ●○○○○○
Presence ●●○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○

Backgrounds

Contacts ●●○○○
Herd ●●●○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Virtues

Conscience ●●●●●
Self-Control ●●●●○
Courage ●○○○○

Other Traits

_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○
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Road

Heaven
●●●●●●●●●○

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool

□□□□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□□□□

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Weakness

Chapter Three:

Those Who Toil

...These men had a stern, savage, and wild aspect.
– Sir Walter Scott, Ivanhoe

Humble Beginnings

In my father's house there are many mansions. The first rests securely upon thick walls of stone. The second rises in high walls of colored glass. But there is also a third great manor — one of thatched roofs and daubed walls that whistle in the wind. A great hall resounding with the commotion of pigs and chickens. A gallery decked in banners of onion and garlic.

Crammed into every corner of this grand estate live the teeming masses of humanity — the peasantry. Over 70 million souls toil and die beneath this roof. More than 98% of the population of Dark Medieval Europe calls these familiar confines home.

Life here is a daily physical struggle. Most people lose this struggle before the age of 40. Hard labor, famine, pestilence, warfare and even darker predators dwell among the inhabitants, preying upon them.

These are the two inescapable truths for those who dwell within — they labor and they die. The peasants carry the burden of toil and impending death with them always. Haunting reminders assail their ears from each song, hymn and story. Unsettling images leap from their paintings, sculpture and even the architecture itself.

It is impossible for the residents of this grim estate to even conceive of a life without daily toil. It is, in fact, as unimaginable to them as the thought of a life without death.

But from beneath this patina of toil and mortality, something larger than life occasionally peeks through, catches the light. An unshakable determination, an irrefutable practicality and even a humble nobility dwells within these walls — strengths capable of defying even diabolical designs.

Getting down to this core of precious metal may take a bit of work but, as any good wife can tell you, *"Rub a penny long enough and it will shine."*

Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Smoke, Pillar of Salt

The Dark Medieval peasant is surrounded by powerful images evoked by the words he hears and the symbols he sees. These symbols from art and scripture provide a spectacular window directly into the peasantry's lives, thoughts and beliefs.

Dark Medieval society can be pictured as a mansion supported by three great pillars — the nobility, the clergy and the peasantry. These three pillars lean noticeably together. Any crisis that weakens one threatens to bring the entire edifice crumbling to the ground.

Those Who War

Resist the temptation to rank these three pillars in order of importance. To the 20th-century reader, immersed in a culture of individual freedoms, it might well seem that the peasant exists merely at the whim of her lord.

Serf farmers are inherited with the land on which they toil. They are one of three significant assets — ranked right alongside land and oxen — that determine the taxes each lord owes the Crown.

THREE PILLARS

The peasant cannot even own the land that he toils upon his entire life. He merely "holds" it for his lord and, in return for this privilege, he owes the noble a great number of services and fines.

It is a mistake, however, to jump to the conclusion that the peasantry exists only to serve the nobility. True, the serfs feed and support their lord, his family, his castle and his army. But the nobles also have important duties that they must perform in return.

Foremost among these responsibilities is protecting the peasants from encroaching wolves, bandits and armies. Nobles also provide leadership, justice, and an important sense of security in a rather uncertain world. In times of want, nobles give generously to keep their serfs alive through the harsh winters. In times of strife, the nobles shelter displaced peasants and refugees within the castle walls.

The nobles can, however, prove to be stern and demanding masters. Few would hesitate to strike an intractable servant or to punish a rebellious one. All too often, the peasants are viewed primarily as tools or assets and only secondarily as human beings.

To the enlightened minority of nobles, however, the peasantry are not chattel, but rather a solemn charge. These lords demonstrate an almost paternal responsibility over the peasants — each one is a Christian soul given over to his keeping. For every one, he must give accounting at the final judgment.

Fulfilling his duties to lead and protect often means going to war, yet always means being ready for war. This single factor is the key to decoding all the mysteries of the noble pillar.

A lord must secure himself a fighting force. The backbone of the Dark Medieval fighting force is the heavy cavalry — the knight. The lord attracts, creates, or retains loyal knights by granting them some of his own lands. They swear fealty to him in return, becoming his vassals. They take responsibility for the land and for the peasants who dwell there and pledge to fight for the lord whenever he should call.

It is expensive to maintain a single knight, much less a significant fighting force. Thus, giving the knight his own land, or fief, is expedient — it grants him the means to support himself.

These newly granted lands are known as a "knight's fee." A fee in Dark Medieval Europe does not refer to a tax or fine, but rather to a parcel of land. The word shares the same linguistic root as "fief." Both come from the Germanic "foefum" (or chattel). Even in fairytales, the words "fee," "fief," and "foefum" conjure up thoughts of the noble blood of an Englishman.

A fief is not measured by its acreage, but rather by the value of the land. A knight's fee provides enough revenue to equip and support one knight — about six Librum per year. The lords are not in the habit of parceling out any more land than necessary until the knight has proved his worth.

When speaking of the noble pillar, it is traditional to categorize its denizens as "those who fight." No other characteristic is as important. The noble's first duty is not to rule, nor to lead, nor even to judge — although each of these is an important function that he fulfills. The country depends on equal parts toil, prayer and force of arms; and the nobles supply the force of arms.

Those Who Pray

Interdependence also exists between the peasantry and the clergy. Although it is true that a man of the cloth outranks any individual serf, it is unwise to assert that the clergy is collectively more important than the peasantry.

Serfs often owe the same obligations to the clergy as they do to more secular authorities. The great cathedrals, abbeys and monasteries control sizable land holdings that must be administered just like any other fief — with peasants tilling the soil and tending to the flocks. Thus, the serf's lord might just as easily be a lord bishop as a lord knight.

Even outside church lands, the peasantry has important responsibilities to maintain the Church. Everyone is expected to tithe — to donate a tenth of his income to the Church. This is as solemn and legal a responsibility as paying taxes to one's lord.

In addition, every Christian is expected to give alms not only to feed the poor, but also to the mendicant monks of the region. Even the poorest serfs readily give what alms they can. They are aware that the line dividing them from the landless poor is not so substantial that it cannot be erased by one unseasonable storm, poor harvest, long winter, drought, injury, famine, death, raid, etc.

All are required to attend Mass on Sunday and on holy days. The peasants do not understand much of the Mass they hear each Sunday. The priest speaks entirely in Latin — the learned language of the day. The peasant, however, cannot even read or write his own language.

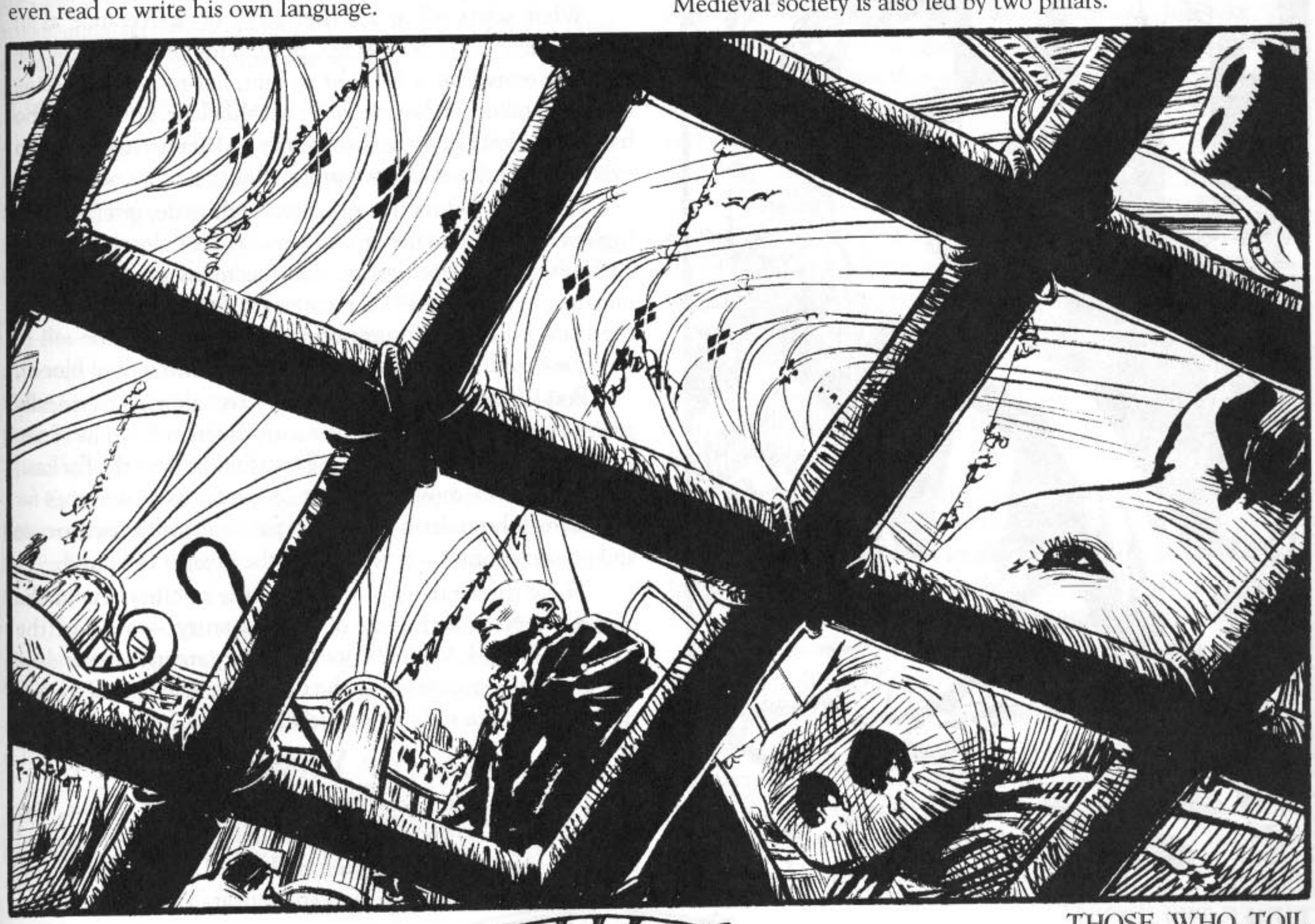
In return for the peasant's devotion, the clergy tends to his immortal soul. The monks and priests renounce all things worldly, denying themselves even the comfort of marriage and family in this single-minded pursuit. The Church becomes their bride; their community, their family. Clergymen dutifully tend to their adopted family. They administer the sacraments: baptism, Communion, confirmation, absolution, ordination, marriage and extreme unction. They preserve learning, the law and the written word.

Although the peasants cannot read, it would be a mistake to think that because of this they are simple. Their ingenuity is evident in their works of enduring artistry and craftsmanship. In the purely abstract, intellectual realm, most peasants have a firm grasp of some very complex theological issues, despite the fact that they will never in their lifetimes have the opportunity to read the Bible.

A significant part of the serf's knowledge of scripture is drawn from the rich iconography — the images and symbols depicting the lives of the saints and other Biblical figures — that surrounds him. The walls and windows of the churches are vibrant with these potent picture stories.

In fact, the easiest way to grasp the concept of the three pillars is from within the mindset of the Dark Medieval serf. To the peasant, any talk of symbolic pillars conjures up the Biblical images with which he is familiar.

In the Book of Exodus, the Jews are led out of Egypt by a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. Dark Medieval society is also led by two pillars.



THOSE WHO TOIL

THREE PILLARS

The noble pillar is a pillar of fire. This pillar presides over the destruction of Pharaoh's army. In Dark Medieval Europe, it is the all-too-familiar aurora in the night sky signifying that a neighboring village has been pillaged and burned. This pillar is characterized not only by wrath and destruction, but also by justice and divine vengeance descending from Heaven.

In *Exodus*, the pillar of smoke guides the people out of captivity and into the desert, the uncharted no-man's land between this world and the next. It is the smoke of incense, the essence of prayer rising to Heaven and the outward sign of divine presence descending upon the faithful. For the denizens of Dark Medieval Europe, the smoke represents the clergy, who offer prayers on behalf of the assembled and dispense divine blessing within the community.

It is significant that the purpose of these two Biblical pillars is to lead and guide the people. The pillar of fire goes ahead to clear the way forward and to protect the people. It leads in all matters temporal, earthly. The pillar of smoke is man's spiritual compass. It is the conduit of divine grace and wisdom that guides the community.

Those Who Toil

To the Dark Medieval peasant, discussion of a third pillar immediately calls to mind another Biblical pillar — the pillar of salt. When the Lord destroys the city of Gomorra, the faithful flee the city without looking back.

What starts off as another story of deliverance as in *Exodus*, here takes on a tragic note. This time it is not the pursuing army that is brought to ruin, but rather the fleeing exile who takes one last look over her shoulder. Lot's wife, who has already lost her home, her history and her heritage, pays an even dearer price and is transformed into a pillar of salt.

Here salt is directly associated with exile, grief and the high price of disobedience — elements that closely link this element with the peasantry. Salt has many other shades of meaning in Dark Medieval society, all of which firmly tie it to the third pillar. It conjures up images of sorrow (the salt of tears) and toil (the salt of sweat) and loss (the salt of blood).

Besides these negative connotations, salt plays a critically positive role in the life of the peasantry. Even in this time of rare and wondrous seasonings flowing into Europe from the Far East, salt remains the most important of spices. Its power goes far beyond merely rendering food more palatable; salt is used to cure and preserve meat — holding back the ravages of hunger.

These three pillars — the fire of the nobility, the smoke of the clergy, and the salt of the peasantry — support the structure of Dark Medieval society. They are interdependent and as equally important as the next. The strength of each is necessary for the stability of the whole.

Three Pillars of Vampiric Society

Just as mortal society is built upon three pillars, the Cainite court also divides those who fight, those who pray and those who toil. When dealing with the Damned, however, there is a grave danger in outward appearances.

Clinging to mortal perceptions can prove to be fatally deceiving. Few vampires will get a second chance after making the mistake of assuming, for instance, that a female vampire will be physically weaker than a male, or that a youthful vampire will be more easily duped than one of more wizened visage. Similarly, assuming that a vampire existing among the peasantry is less capable than, or subservient to, a vampire noble is a recipe for disaster.

Take care not to confuse a vampire's rank during his mortal life with his role after death. Death is a great social equalizer. Here, slaves and emperors meet on level ground.

The dramatic changes of the Embrace and the discovery of his new powers often drive a vampire into a deathstyle very different from his mortal lifestyle.

Many neonates take up the trappings of mortal nobles, setting themselves up as lords over men. For the mortal serf, who has lived his entire life as a semi-free peasant, the Embrace is double-edged — the ultimate grant of freedom and the damnation of God's abandonment. For the cleric, the change often heralds an abandonment of his former vocation in the face of the blasphemous monstrosity he has become.

The change can just as easily herald a fledgling vampire into the arms of the clergy. Fired by a single-minded pursuit of the spiritual, the neophyte grapples with his personal dark angel, trying to grasp the supernatural change that has been wrought in him.

The Embrace also drives many into the peasant lifestyle as they flee the familiar confines of the mortal community for the wilder, untamed regions of Europe. For some it is a matter of exile; for others, penance; for others still, survival.

The Cainite Peasantry

At first glance, the role of the peasant seems to have little to offer the power-craving Cainite. The image of the Dark Medieval serf toiling in the dust and dung, laboring from dawn until dusk, is not a romantic one. There are, however, very compelling reasons to believe that the peasant vampire is the most deadly predator in all of Cainite society.

First of all, it is worth noting that the most powerful vampires in history are drawn directly from the ranks of the peasantry. Caine himself, father and namesake of all vampires, hails from peasant stock: "And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" (Genesis 4:2).

Caine is subsequently cursed for killing his brother — a heinous crime that is both the first murder and the first kinslaying. According to the vampire creation myth, this curse damns Caine to his eternal unlife.

The curse also deprives Caine of the fruit of his labor. "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee." While Adam is cursed to "eat the dust of the earth," Caine is denied even this meager fare. The only nourishment left to him is the blood of his victims.

The very fact that the Earth will not bend to the will of Caine and his childer is significant. Since the time of Caine, no vampire has made a successful living with the plow. However, a large portion — a full third — of Cainite society is made up of the peasantry.

In order to unravel this dilemma, one must first realize that the stereotypical Dark Medieval peasant — the downtrodden serf — represents only a small fraction of the peasantry. Consider for a moment, the vast range of peasant occupations: the hosts of artisans, craftsmen, freeholders, millers, woodcutters, woodsmen, domestic servants, peddlers, merchants, burghers, guildsmen, sergeants, yeomen, hermits, heretics, outcasts, outlaws and many, many others that make up the teeming ranks of the peasantry.

"A fugitive and vagabond shalt thou be." In one sense, all Cainites are lords over men. The vampire preys upon and manipulates mortal pawns at whim. In another very important sense, however, all Cainites belong to the peasantry. They are the outcasts and excommunicants forever shut off from the society of mortals.

There is a very important realization hidden in this apparent dichotomy. When you describe a vampire as a noble or peasant, you are not making a claim about his status in mortal society. Rather, you are asserting his ranking within Cainite society.

A vampire living on the fringe of Cainite society — perhaps dwelling in an isolated locale far from the nerve-center of the prince's court — is a peasant. Cainite society is, in fact, so city-based that all rural vampires can be considered part of the peasantry.

For some Cainite peasants, their remoteness from the court is not geographic, but rather political. Just like the mortal pariah or heretic, these Cainite outsiders belong to the peasantry even when they gird themselves in the trappings of lords or priests. A self-styled robber-baron for instance, whether rural or urban, is still an outlaw and a peasant.

Peasants are also found firmly entrenched within the prince's court. While princes, elders and courtiers are the nobles of Cainite society, the loyal retainers, sycophants, bodyguards, messengers, assassins, physicians, toadies, ambassadors, aides de camp, entertainers, concubines, etc. associated with these lords all belong to the peasantry.

"And Caine said unto the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear." A full 33% of all Cainites are peasants — an astounding figure given that the peasantry accounts for over 98% of mortal society.

Clearly, only the most exceptional peasants are ever selected to shake off their mortal coils. While a noble might be chosen on the basis of his wealth, influence, fighting skill or family connections, a peasant has seemingly little to offer. In fact, the only advantage the mortal peasant might bring to his immortal existence is his personal strength of character or, conversely, the intensity of his depravity.

Peasant vampires are fearful adversaries. They have been tempered, first in the crucible of mortal suffering, and then in the furnace of their neonate vulnerability. While a noble might use his temporal resources to buy off the consequences of an early enmity or misstep, the Cainite peasant has little collateral to secure the loan of the early nights of his unlife.

The main advantage of the peasant neonate is his raw potential. Remember, it is extremely rare for any mortal to be selected for the Embrace. Dark Medieval Europe accommodates roughly one vampire for every 1,000 mortals. This ratio is fairly fixed due to limited food supply. In addition, the longevity of these predators ensures that there are very few new openings during any given century.

The mortal peasant is less likely to be Embraced than a nobleman or clergyman. The peasant neonate invariably possesses frightening reserves of raw strength, character, talent or determination. The drawback here, of course, is that these elite recruits are often earmarked for highly specialized and potentially fatal duties.

A Creature Divided Against Itself

The vampire is a deceptive and perverse creature. In mortal society, a person's lifestyle and his pillar of life are one and the same. One who toils is indubitably found among the peasantry. Those who pray wear the robes of the clergy. Fighting is the domain of the nobility.

The Cainite, however, is a duplicitous being — a creature divided against itself. For the vampire, the guise he wears does not always correspond to his function within Cainite society.

Among those who toil, many still surround themselves with the trappings of mortal serfs. Others, however, require all the resources of the nobility or the Church to carry out their intricate projects.

For many Dark Medieval Cainites, the main purpose of their unlives seldom rise above night-to-night survival. Limitations of food supply and the need for secrecy can drive a vampire far from the familiar confines of the court and out into the wilds of Europe — regions untouched by mortal hands since the dawn of time. These beings seldom interact in any way with the society of the Damned. They are the hermits, drop-outs and outcasts of Cainite society.

Many Cainite peasants, however, still play an important role within that society, supporting it by works. Some, for example, cultivate vast mortal herds. While providing sustenance for their brethren, they develop powerful networks of mortal pawns.

Others are the society's procurers, catering to the varied and insatiable desires of the Damned. A Cainite peasant might specialize in a particular rare commodity. Artwork, coffee, musicians, poppies, youth and above all, secrets invariably bring high prices among Cainite patrons.

Still other Cainite peasants are terrifying in their single-minded pursuit of one specific task, geas or duty. The solemn charge of such a Cainite peasant might be maintaining an ancient cemetery, bearing a fabled weapon or preserving a calamitous secret. He might be the self-appointed guardian angel of a mortal or of an entire line of mortals. These Cainite peasants are closely tied with quests, relics, ancient lore, haunts and curses. They are those who strive beyond death.

The Rural Peasant

When you picture the peasant, the image that the mind conjures up is that of the rural serf — a poor farmer toiling under back-breaking labor. Although the serfs make up the majority of the peasantry, they are certainly not the only members of this pillar.

A wide variety of burghers, artisans, craftsmen, peddlers and traders are found within the burgeoning towns and cities. Even in country villages one finds villeins, freemen, servants and slaves living side-by-side with the serfs.

The Serf

The life of the rural serf is not as grimy and downtrodden as one might imagine. Keep in mind that the serf is not at the absolute bottom rung of the Dark Medieval social ladder. He is still a fair cut above the slave, and as long as he manages to bring in his harvest while paying his tithes and taxes, he can keep his head above the level of the landless poor.

Serfs are considered semi-free. They enjoy some personal rights, prominent among them is the right of access to the courts of justice. Although a serf cannot bring case against any nobleman or clergyman, he does have recourse against his neighbors. Ownership of livestock and the position of boundary stones between neighboring fields are always popular points of contention.

Another important right that sets the serf apart from the slave is inheritance. Although a serf does not own land, he can pass his tenantship agreement on to his heirs. The lord cannot uproot serfs on a whim and shuffle them around between his various estates as he might with slaves. He cannot chase them from his land as he is apt to do with the idle poor.

With these basic rights, the serf acquires some important responsibilities. The foremost of these duties is *corvee* — the obligation of labor. Each lord possesses land that he reserves solely for his private use. These untenanted lands are referred to as the lord's demesne. Each serf must spend three days each week working his lord's demesne.

The work consists of the same type of labor the serf performs for himself the rest of the week — planting, reaping and sowing in season. It sometimes means tending the vineyards and orchards or caring for herds of sheep, swine or cattle. Other times, it means fencing, ditching or even doing odd jobs.

Corvee does not, in itself, fulfill the serf's responsibility to his lord. The serf also pays a variety of taxes either to the Crown or to the local nobility. Most often, these taxes are paid in kind — that is, paid with goods rather than money.

Any emergency — a war, a disaster, a captured lord's ransom — results in the levying of a new tax. Many of these taxes continue to be collected annually, even when the emergency that sparked them has faded into dim memory. In England, for instance, the peasants have long paid the yearly Danegeld (or Dane's tax). Originally, this tax was a means for raising money to fight off the invading Danes. Later it became a tribute to pacify the Danes and, finally, a tax paid to the Danish kings who sat on the throne of England.

The serf is also expected to make use of certain services his lord provides. The peasant must pay to use the lord's mill to grind grain and his ovens to bake bread. The lord also owns the local wine press, the fish streams, the hunting woods, the rabbit warrens, etc. The peasants, of course, must pay to use these facilities. These payments are known as "banalities."

Obviously, some peasants are somewhat irked by this arrangement. It is not surprising that one of the most sinister characters in the folklore of the time is the local miller. The miller, and the others who provide these services, are themselves peasants attached to the lord's manor. It is traditional for them to hold out a share of the grain or wine as payment to the lord. They also retain a share for themselves in return for their services.

The Servant

Many younger siblings, who are not in line to inherit their father's plot of land, go into service at the manor. These landless peasants in the service of a lord are referred to as servants rather than serfs. They are members of the lord's household, exchanging their labor for room and board and usually some small wage.

Scullerers, cooks, slaughterers, bakers, brewers, poulterers and their assistants labor in the kitchens. Pantry maids and butlers look after the provisions and wine cellars. Valets and dressing maids see to the proper attire of the lord and lady, while tailors and laundresses care for the clothes themselves. Grooms and carters maintain the stables. Clerks, messengers, heralds and men-at-arms run errands and do the lord's bidding.

The number of servants a lord maintains is a reflection of his status. Thirty servants might be required to run an average village manor house. A staff of 60 is not unusual for a more influential lord to run a household of similar size. A more ambitious or aggressive lord maintains a sizable household guard in addition to the domestic staff.

The Slave

Even the most menial household servant enjoys many advantages over the slave. A slave is considered the property of his owner. He can be bought or sold at will. Entire families can be uprooted, split apart and redistributed according to their master's judgment. A slave enjoys no rights, personal, legal or otherwise, except at the whim of his owner.

The word "slave" derives from the Slavic people of Eastern Europe who were frequent victims of the slave trade. In the north, Viking raiders played a large part in the spread of slavery, taking many prisoners and selling them at foreign ports of call.

Although by 20th-century sensibilities, the concept of slavery is clearly at odds with basic Christian values, the universal condemnation of slavery is a very late development. The Dark Medieval Church is quite firm that Christians cannot have other Christians as slaves. The Church is less stalwart about the practice of enslaving the infidel who, during most of this period, is in open conflict with the Christian nations.

THREE PILLARS

The Serf Hierarchy

Dark Medieval society is riddled with hierarchies. Even among the very poor, there is a clear pecking order. The very lowest tier of serf is the cottager. The cottager typically has a roof over his head, a yard with a vegetable garden (a "croft") and a tiny strip of land behind his cottage for growing grain (a "toft").

Given a bountiful harvest, the cottager can aspire to subsistence living. During hard times, he depends on the generosity of the parish church and the lord of the manor to feed his family.

The next step in the serf hierarchy is the small holder who works between 10 to 20 acres of land in various parcels about the manor. It is virtually unheard of for a small holder to have one compact plot of land as a serf's fields are frequently divided between his heirs upon his death.

Marriage can add non-adjacent lands to his holding as well. Given that it is impossible to marry outside of the lord's manor without his permission, the holdings soon take on a scattered, patchwork look as individual fields change hands time and time again.

The highest tier of the serf hierarchy is the villein. His holding is typically double the size and value of that of the small holder. However, this is not to imply that the villein was a comfortable gentleman farmer.

The basic unit of land value is the "hide." A hide averages about 120 acres, although it can vary widely, from between 60 to 240 acres. This variance arises from the fact that land is measured not in terms of size, but rather in terms of value. Sixty acres of fertile ground might quite sensibly be considered a match for 240 acres of bog. The hide has become the basic tax unit for England and other feudal societies.

A hide is loosely defined as the amount of land you can cultivate each year with an eight-ox plow. Of course, no individual serf can afford to maintain a full team of eight oxen, but then again, no serf can boast that he cultivates an entire hide.

The hide is subdivided into quarters. Each quarter is called a virgate. A prosperous villein holds about one virgate of land. The tax rolls also mention half-virgates that are about the total of a small holder's fields. Smaller units are so insignificant that they are not even taxed directly.

Death and Taxes

Even in transcending death, the Cainite has yet to escape the other certainty of mortal existence — taxes. The feudal lords bring great ingenuity to bear in devising new taxes and finding better ways to collect them.

When William the Conqueror seized the English throne in 1066, he immediately set about taking stock of his new kingdom. The culmination of this effort came 20 years later with the commission of a project of incredible scope. This project has become known as the *Domesday Book*.

The *Domesday Book* was intended to be a complete record of all the land holdings in England. Its purpose was to determine and record the value of each noble's property with an eye toward taxing him accordingly. The result was something greater still — a picture, frozen in time, of the feudal assets of every lord of the realm.

Teams of clerks blanketed the countryside. In each region, they convened a local court where the inhabitants came forward to give testimony as to land ownership, feudal bonds and tenantship agreements. The clerks assessed land value, the capability of the local lords to harvest that wealth, and even whether the value of the land was rising or falling over a 20-year period. After this detailed investigation, of course, they tallied up the bill.

There is a persistent, if perhaps apocryphal, rumor that following the success of William's *Domesday Book*, a similar project was commissioned among England's undying lords.

Cainite agents of the Crown have a carefully cultivated reputation for pressing pointed and indelicate questions. There is no denying that, of late, they have been abroad in force. The rumored *Roll of the Damned*, however, should it exist even in part, would be a very dangerous little grimoire indeed.

First, there is the obvious danger that the work threatens to shatter the Silence of the Blood concerning vampiric activities. Should even a single manuscript page of this work fall into mortal hands, it might precipitate a concentrated mortal backlash.

Secondly, if the rumors are to be believed, this volume contains a complete list of all feudal obligations between the English Cainites — the clan affiliations, the Oaths of the Blood, the feudal ties, the pacts of coterie, the great pledges and curses that are the sole *raison d'être* of certain exceptional Cainite peasants. Even an outcast vampire with this information at his disposal could penetrate the innermost workings of Cainite society. This work's raw potential for blackmail makes it an even more coveted prize.

Furthermore, such a tome would contain a valued listing of all the assets of each vampire lord — his ghouls, herds, retainers and slaves. An in-depth knowledge of the pawns of any Cainite is a significant lever that might be brought to bear against him.

The most disturbing question to arise out of the maze of speculation surrounding this *Roll of the Damned* hinges on its ultimate purpose. Little can be gleaned save that England's Cainites are coming under exacting scrutiny. It would seem that they are being systematically evaluated with an eye toward some great reckoning.

The Road to Freedom

Taxes fall especially heavy on the peasantry. Excessive debt can drive even a free man back into the fold of the serfs.

The title "villein" originally referred to a free farmer who paid rents to the local lord in return for his holding. By the end of the first millennium, however, the villein had become a serf, bound to the land and its lord.

The courts of the 12th century maintain that a free man who takes up residence in a villeinage — a term for the holding of a villein that gives rise to the word "village" — has thus forfeited his free status.

This is an important point to grasp. In Dark Medieval Europe, a person's status is not simply a function of his birth. Rank depends upon fulfilling certain expectations. Just as a free man can become a serf simply by taking on the lifestyle of a villein, the operation can work in reverse, too.

There are four major ways for a serf to win his freedom. First, he can be granted his liberty by his lord. This formal grant of freedom is known as *manumission*. It is only given in return for some great service done on the lord's behalf. A serf might win his freedom by saving his master's life or the life of his heir; protecting his wife or daughters from being ravaged; saving the manor from burning to the ground or even recovering a favorite mount or family heirloom.

Manumission is totally at the discretion of the lord. A harsh lord might deny a serf his freedom under any circumstances, or even contrive to cheat a free man of his status.

A more generous lord allows a serf to purchase his freedom. This second path to freedom, however, is perhaps even more difficult for the rural serf to attain. Seldom does he raise his head above the level of subsistence living. When he does, it is often a much greater priority to see his children apprenticed to a good trade or favorably married. Although children born of free parents are themselves free, a grant of freedom to the parents does not retroactively free their children.

Marriage to a free man or woman, however, raises a serf to free status. This third path to freedom makes for some convoluted family dynamics. If a serf buys or is granted her freedom, her husband instantly becomes free as well. Her existing children are still serfs, but her future children, born of free parents, would be free, too.

The fourth and final way for a serf to become free is escape to a town or city. There is a popular Dark Medieval saying, "Town air is free air" — a powerful reminder of the fact that who you are in this society depends on what you do. By tradition, if a serf (or even a slave) manages to earn his living in town for a period of a year and a day without his lord coming to claim him, then that peasant becomes a free man.

This miraculous opportunity is only one small part of the fascination that the burgeoning new towns hold for the rural peasantry. The new breed of town popping up all across the Europe during the 12th century woos the rural peasantry with the promises of freedom, culture, wealth and destiny.

The rapid evolution of the town is the single most dynamic element of its era. Its importance eclipses even that of the Crusades and the fiery nobles and clergymen who sustain the holy wars.

In these towns, those who toil are producing something rare and wondrous — crafting *themselves* into new leaders more wealthy than nobles, more influential than clergymen. Soon they will shake the three pillars themselves and threaten to overturn the delicate balance of Dark Medieval society.

The Hearth

The Hamlet

The roots of Dark Medieval society are firmly planted in the hamlet, the smallest of rural settlements. Although lone villas and homesteads are common in the more remote and inaccessible regions, the hamlet dominates the Dark European countryside right up until the turn of the first millennium.

The hamlet consists of as few as six peasant houses clustered around a central social hall. If the settlement falls along a busy road, the central building might be an inn or hostel that caters to passersby as well as to the local populace.

The hamlet is not meant to be a self-sufficient unit. It is strictly dependent on a nearby market town, both for acquiring supplies and for bartering the season's crop.

Furthermore, the hamlet is strictly a peasant community. There are no representatives from either of the other two pillars present. There is no manor of the local lord to protect or lead the community.

The populace is largely left at the mercy of raiding war bands, brigands and even wolf packs. The services associated with the lord's presence — such as the mill and communal baking ovens — are absent altogether. Peasants make do with slow, laborious hand-held grinders and do their own baking on the hearth — an inexact art at best.

The inhabitants also lack a church of their own. The locals do not receive the sacraments on a regular basis. Baptism is administered almost exclusively by midwives. Given the number of infants that perish within their first days on Earth, it is critical that the sacrament not be delayed until the nearest parish priest could arrive. The infant's place in the next life often depends on haste in its first and last moments in this life.

In lieu of a church building, many hamlets have a standing stone cross around which the inhabitants gather in prayer and worship. Many of these markers survive long after the surrounding peasant homes that make up the community have vanished.

The Village

The 10th century witnessed the birth of the rural village. By the 12th century, over 90% of the population of Dark Medieval Europe lives in the village communities. A thriving village consists of as many as 300 people, while the population of the average settlement is about half that size.

While large families are seen as the ideal, the average serf household contains only five members — two parents, two surviving children and a member of the extended family. The harsh reality is that a couple must have at least five or six children to be reasonably sure that even one of their offspring will live to adulthood.

A typical village, then, consists of about 30 homes. With very few exceptions, all of the inhabitants are serfs. These semi-free peasants work the fields, maintain the herds and tend the vineyards and orchards. The serf's typical workday starts about an hour before sunrise, usually with a breakfast of black bread and beer, and it runs until dark. He spends three days a week tending his own lands. He spends an additional three days each week fulfilling *corvee*. Sunday is set aside as a day of rest and worship throughout Christendom. In practice, however, there are always chores, repairs and odd jobs to be addressed on the Sabbath.

Of the small fraction of villagers who are not serfs, most are still peasants. Each village boasts a blacksmith who is a free villager. The miller is also free and in wine country, there will be a vintner, who maintains the lord's wine press.

It is usually unprofitable (and hence, rare) for any other specialized craftsman to reside in any settlement smaller than a town or city. Such artisans reside in villages that are usually free, although a valued artisan might be kept very closely by his lord.

Each village might house a few free men who pay rents to the local lord in exchange for his protection and the use of his land. These rents are seldom in the form of money, but rather they are paid in the produce of the land.

A village also, on rare occasion, houses a freeholder. A freeholder is as close as a peasant can come to owning his own land. He owes no obligations to the local lord, but neither does he necessarily enjoy any protections in return. A freehold often lies between lands claimed by two rival lords and is a point of heated contention. It is not unknown for a noble to try to annex a freehold by guile, treachery or force of arms.

Other free peasants in the village include the reeve or bailiff. The reeve is a village leader, drawn from the ranks of the serfs, who is responsible to the lord for the overall prosperity of the villagers. He supervises the planting and harvest, making the rounds to assure that each serf is performing his *corvee* duties. He can pronounce judgments in cases of common law on the lord's behalf. The reeve has his own lands to tend. He is assisted in his duties by one or more hayward, also drawn from the village serfs.

A bailiff has similar duties to the reeve, but he is a member of the lord's household rather than a serf. His responsibilities center around the lord's demesne, his woods, the mill, and the noble's other business interests in the region. The lord sees to it that a competent reeve or bailiff lives quite comfortably.

The only villagers who are not peasants are the parish priest, the lord and his family — perhaps six people out of a village of a few hundred.

Peasant Homes

The design of the buildings that make up the peasant village has not changed significantly since the turning of the millennium. The walls are constructed of wattle and daub. Wattle is a woven, wooden frame on which the daub is spackled like plaster. The daub is a combination of mud and straw, but local substitutions are common. Cob, for instance, is made of straw mixed with chalk and clay. An even more ready-to-hand substitute is dung.

The foundation of these houses are chalk blocks that are often quarried right behind the house in the croft. These blocks support the timber frame. The roof is usually thatched and the floor made of packed earth and covered with straw or rushes that can be swept out as needed.

A smoke hole in the center of the roof vents a fire pit directly below. Smoke lingers among the rafters, creating dark, smoke-filled interiors. Stone hearths are already commonplace in many areas.

The peasant house usually measures no more than 15 feet wide by 30 feet long. This area can be separated into two rooms by a wattle interior partition. The main room serves as a living, dining and working area, while the secondary room becomes a small bedroom.

This secondary room crouches beneath a lower ceiling than the rest of the house. The loft formed above provides storage space. The rafters fulfill the same duty and they hang heavy with drying meat or strings of garlic and onion. Pots and pans clatter above the cooking area.

The main room often opens directly into the barn, sometimes separated by a low wattle partition or, alternately, a food trough. Pigs and chickens wander ever underfoot.

These dwellings are not well-constructed and each has to be totally rebuilt about once every 35 years. A village can typically build or rebuild only one house each year. Such a project takes on the proportions of a communal effort, and it requires most of the scant resources of the community to be completed.

The Village Layout

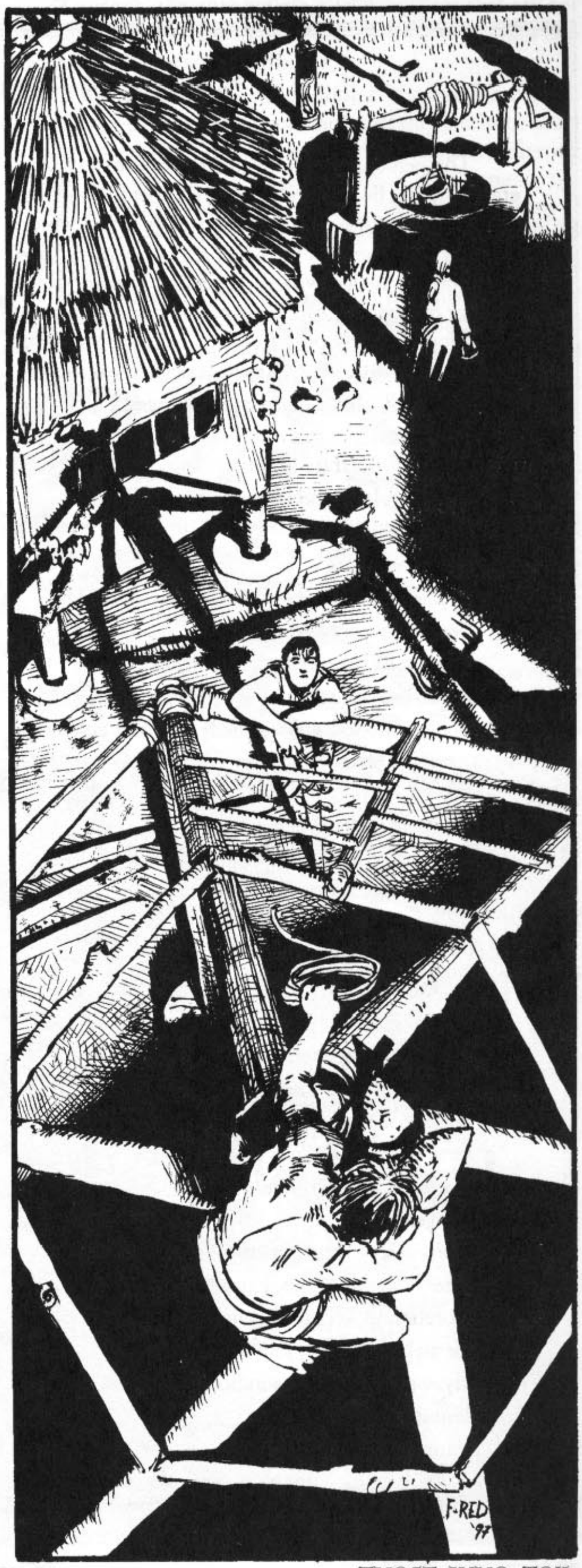
The center of the village, and of village life, is the parish church. This edifice sometimes doubles as a town hall. Although an abbot or bishop might hold extensive lands, rivaling even wealthy lords, the village priest rarely has any land of his own. The priest and the church building are supported by the tithes of the villagers.

In a typical village, the residences form rough lines grouped around a central green. The houses face inward toward the common area, at the center is the village well.

Each house is surrounded by a croft, a rectangular yard that contains the family's vegetable garden. Stretching away behind the house is the family's toft. In this field the cottagers can grow enough grains to eke out a subsistence living. Although the tofts are generally rectangular in shape, their boundaries are dictated by the lay of the land and thus, they vary widely in size.

Beyond the tofts stretches a patchwork of fields worked by the various small holders, villeins and freeholders. Ditches and marker stones divide the various fields. One of the most common complaints heard by the village reeve is that someone has shifted these marker stones in the dead of night — extending his fields at the expense of his neighbor.

If the Church is the heart of the village, the manor house is its head. The manor is the residence of the local lord (usually a knight) and the command center from which he administers his fief. It occupies a position of prominence along one of the rows of houses — preferably some strategic position, overlooking a hill, river, bridge or ford. The manor is also surrounded by toft and croft, although usually of much grander proportions. The majority of the lord's demesne lies beyond the toft. Unlike the scattered peasant holdings, his lands cluster together in one contiguous whole.



THOSE WHO TOIL

Secrets from the Croft

The peasant's garden is a treasure trove of vegetables, herbs, flowers and berries. Each of these plants has its own quasi-mystical properties, many of which can only be coaxed out by the secret lore of the village wise-woman, hedge wizard, herbalist, barber, storyteller or midwife. The following list shows some of the plants found in the peasant crofts of Dark Medieval Europe along with some of their lesser known uses.

Adder's Tongue: cleansing, astringent, ulcerated wounds
Almond: frostbite lotion
Archangel: wound salve
Barley: gruel
Basil: seasoning
Bay: seasoning, remedy for coughs and colds
Beet: tops used as fodder
Betony: healing creams and waxes
Blackthorn: internal disorders
Borage: mulled wine, remedy for chest cold and sore throat
Bryony: poisonous herb
Centaury: wound salve
Cinquefoil: sore throat
Clover: fodder, perfumed oils
Colewort: edible plant
Coltsfoot: cough syrup
Comfrey: lotion for cleansing wounds
Daisy: ointment for cleansing wounds
Dill: seasoning, cordial to soothe stomach
Dock: soothing ointment
Fennel: seasoning, soothes stomach
Flax: fibers made into linen
Garlic: seasoning, wards off evil
Ginger: seasoning
Goose-Grass: knits open wounds
Hemlock: poisonous, painkiller
Horehound: elixir for coughs and colds
Houseleek: aching joints
Hyssop: distemper, jaundice
Jasmine: perfume, tea
Juniper: flavors gin
Lady's Mantle: burns, bed sores
Lavender: perfume, herbal pillows
Lichen: dyes
Lily: perfume
Madder: red dye
Mandrake: soothing ointment
Marjoram: seasoning
Marsh Mallow: soothes wounds
Mint: seasoning, tea, sniffed after fainting
Mistletoe: seizure
Moneywort: cleansing, astringent, ulcerated wounds
Monk's Hood: poison, oil for aching joints, wolfsbane
Mulberry: burns
Mullein: poison, syrup for coughs and colds
Mustard: seasoning, induces vomiting, hot rub, ulcer paste
Orpine: syrup for raging quinsy
Parsley: seasoning
Pea: fodder
Peony: seasoning
Poppy: syrup for pain and insomnia, poppyseed cakes
Ragwort: cleansing, astringent, ulcerated wounds
Rose: perfume
Rosemary: seasoning
Rue: perfume
Saffron: rare seasoning
Sage: seasoning, perfume
Saint John's Wort: wound ointment
Sanicle: lotion for gashes
Savory: seasoning
Saxifrage: rheum
Spikenard: anointed feet of Savior
Sweet Cicely: cough syrup
Thyme: seasoning
Trefoil: aids heart, seizure
Violet: perfume
Wintergreen: healing creams and waxes
Woad: blue dye
Wormwood: perfume

And Miles to Go Before I Sleep

The village poses many dilemmas for the Cainite, not the least of which is the problem of where to find a safe haven to wait out the daylight hours. Most peasant cottages are high-traffic areas with little or no privacy. They have no real attic as even the loft is open to the common room. Nor is there any basement in which to conceal oneself. There is a constant coming and going of people and animals throughout the house.

The rare vampire who makes his home within the peasant village might dwell within a more archaic "pit house." This design was widespread as recently as the turn of the millennium.

The pit house is built over a rectangular pit, about four yards in length, which serves as a rough basement. The house features planked floors, a thatched roof and a clay hearth. A bolted trapdoor in the floor provides a measure of security for the slumbering Cainite.

Of course, there is nothing to prevent a vampire from digging out a basement beneath the more popular timber-framed house. A trapdoor into the packed earth floor would be concealed beneath the ever-present layer of straw or rushes. This camouflage, however, might not bear up under scrutiny. The sound of wood underfoot where the floor should be of packed earth would certainly arouse suspicion.

Typically, the only buildings in the village that are not peasant residences are the church, the manor, the mill and perhaps an inn or social hall.

While the inn is the logical choice for a traveler to spend the night, it presents few opportunities for the Cainite to catch a good day's rest. There are laws against innkeepers sheltering anyone for more than a three-day period. Furthermore, the villagers, a suspicious lot by nature, are especially wary of strangers — particularly the kind who hover around for prolonged periods of time.

In the minds of the local peasants, the only good excuse for remaining in the village is to tend to lands or family you might have there. In this case, however, the visitor would certainly have a place to stay and not be seen loitering about the inn. Although both the inn and social hall tend to be quiet during the day, they are still more frequented areas than the individual peasant homes.

The mill is an interesting haunt for a vampire. The villagers' suspicions might be misdirected at the miller instead of the Cainite he knowingly or unknowingly shelters. Since the miller's person and property are an important part of the lord's business interests, the villagers would be loath to intrude or act against him.

The difficulties of remaining hidden in a village can drive the Cainite out into the wilds. The scarcity of prey within any given village forces many vampires to take up residence in a

more heavily-traveled location. Some of these Cainite peasants are truly homeless, wandering the countryside and simply sinking into the earth each morning.

Others take refuge in long-abandoned roadside hostels or inns. From this vantage point, they prey on passersby, and on the residents of nearby villages. Rumors of nocturnal activity in "haunted houses" help keep the curious at bay.

Similarly, the Cainite peasant can take up residence in a woodcutter's hut, deep within the untamed wilds. Any traveler who ventures so far afield and discovers the "empty" cottage will likely not think twice about the woodcutter being absent during the daylight hours.

Lord and Peasant: The Land Bond

The relationship between a peasant and his lord is just as sacred and just as formalized as the bond between a lord and his noble vassal. An entire vocabulary exists to define the boundaries of this relationship.

One of the major points that elevates a serf above the status of slave is the fact that he can pass on his holding — and thus, his rights, his property, and his agreements with his lord and his very place in feudal society — to his heirs. A serf's first entrance into feudal responsibilities comes at the point of inheritance.

Inheritance is a crucial rite of passage for the serf. Bear in mind that in Dark Medieval society it is almost unheard of for a serf to marry and start a family before he has inherited. Until this point he has no income, no wealth and no means to support a family of his own. Inheritance and marriage go hand in hand.

Younger sons, with no anticipated inheritance, often seek to enter service in the lord's manor. Still others opt to join the military, apprentice to an artisan in a nearby town or enter into lay service at the local abbey or monastery. Marriage and family are even less of a possibility for these younger siblings. Within this social context, it is no mystery that an unmarried priesthood has become a prevalent option.

In order to inherit, the heir enters into a formal relationship with his lord. The significant act is the heir's paying the *heriot*, or death tax, for his deceased relative. He thus demonstrates that he has taken over the obligations of the departed — the most significant of which is the tenantship agreement with the lord.

Heriot is analogous to "relief," the sum paid by a noble heir upon securing possession of a fief. The emphasis, however, is slightly different. *Heriot* is owed by the deceased, and relief is owed by the heir. The essential act, however, of picking up the reigns of feudal obligation by paying a small sum to the lord, is identical.

If a serf does not honor his newly acquired feudal rights and obligations, the lord has the right to effectively cancel the contract. *Escheat* is the term for the lord's right to reclaim his serf's lands should the serf be outlawed or die without heir. *Forfeiture* is his right to retake the serf's lands should the serf fail to serve *corvee*, pay his taxes or fulfill other feudal obligations.

It is important to note the legal overtones in these terms. Once a formal agreement is entered into with a serf, the lord is bound to respect that serf's (and his heirs') claim to the land.

Other instances of invoking the feudal bonds between the serf and his lord are handled in a similar way as inheritance. A serf may sometimes ask his lord to forego some feudal privilege in return for a small monetary consideration.

If a serf wishes for his daughter to marry outside of the village, for example, he first secures his lord's permission and then pays him a small sum called *merchet*.

Even the blatantly antagonistic practice of *Jus Primae Noctis*, the lord's seldom-invoked right to spend the first night with a serf's new bride, is often settled with a small fine.

In each of these cases, it is important to note which way the money flows. Although we associate wealth with the nobility, the real wealth in a feudal society is in the land. It is extracted by the serfs and funneled to the nobility through the extension of protection, rights and privileges to the peasantry. The measure of a man's wealth is the measure of his land.

The Reclamation

The 12th century is the beginning of a time of dynamic change in Europe. Peasants flock to the new towns springing up across the continent. International trade routes carry exotic spices, fabrics and luxury goods into even the humblest of households. An entirely new social class, the burgher, is carving out a place for himself in the shadow of the three pillars.

As with many other periods of sweeping historical change, this one has rather humble beginnings — it sprouts directly from the serf's toft.

It is an old truism that an army marches on its stomach. In Dark Medieval Europe, the entire society depends on rather tentative supply lines. Even in prosperous years, most people barely achieve a subsistence living. Peasants starve every winter. In times of flood, drought or famine, entire villages fall victim to hunger, leaving behind only the abandoned buildings.

Without a surplus of food, both the army and society as a whole are severely restricted in their maneuvers. An army low on supplies cannot exert its control very far afield. Similarly, a society scraping out a subsistence living cannot impose its will on its surroundings.

The spark that ignites the sweeping changes of the 12th century starts rather simply. A gradual climate change throughout most of the preceding century had culminated in a longer growing season across most of Europe. The extended season produced a slight food surplus. The marginal surplus provided a small, but significant, buffer between most of the population and subsistence living. Winters came and went with little or no attrition due to hunger. The population grew slowly but steadily.

With a good meal in its belly, society soon began to march — expanding its sphere of influence. A population boom was soon in full swing. Second sons with no land to inherit and others seeking their fortunes were drawn to the myriad of towns that spread like flames across Europe. The growth of towns led directly to the creation of local markets, which, in turn, led to the establishment of permanent inter-town trade routes. This flurry of new commerce gave rise to the creation of guilds and the rise of merchants. All of these wondrous new developments eventually strain the boundaries of the very model of Dark Medieval society.

The Old School

Europe is firmly entrenched in the "old school" of governmental thought at the end of the 12th century. A nobleman's home is, quite literally, his castle — a towering reminder of the extent of his wealth and power. To take the true measure of a man's influence and wealth, however, you do not look to his house, but rather to his fields.

In Dark Medieval Europe, money does, in fact, grow on trees. Each orchard, field and vineyard yields a crop of silver coin just waiting to be harvested by deploying, and then taxing, the local peasantry.

Nobles do not engage in crafts, business or trade. These pursuits are the exclusive, God-given domain of the peasantry. The noble who actively seeks to usurp this role and profit from trade is met with social censure just as surely as if he had stood up in the middle of Mass to interpret the Scriptures.

In order to become richer in this agrarian society, a man needs to increase his land holdings. There are only a limited number of ways to accomplish this goal. Perhaps the most popular method is wresting territory away from a rival. Nobles spend a great deal of their time, effort and blood in the attempt to conquer new territory through war, marriage or intrigue. For the landless peasant, the only way to get his hands on any of this wealth is to earn a grant of land in return for service to his lord.

In most cases of rewarding exceptional service, the lord grants his vassal some lands from his demesne. Sometimes, however, he extends to the vassal the right to clear and cultivate new lands — such as a strip of forest along the edge of the lord's woods.

Turning woodlands into croplands is known as *assarting*. To *assart* without the permission of the local lord is a grave offense — the Dark Medieval equivalent of printing one's own money.

During the 12th century, *assarting* achieves manic proportions. With the boom in population, it is possible to cultivate much more land than could be worked previously. In fact, providing land for the new population makes extensive *assarting* something of a necessity.

The boom in peasant population spurs the reclamation of land in other ways as well. Landless younger siblings are swelling the ranks of the religious orders. Entire new monastic societies are being chartered. Newcomers like the Cistercians, Premonstratensians and others need to create a source of wealth for themselves. Their abbeys, and the lands to support them, are carved directly out of the most forbidding, inhospitable, and hence, unclaimed regions of the Dark European countryside.

It is no coincidence that the 12th century witnesses the first systematic efforts to reclaim Europe's "haunts" — its previously uninhabitable swamps, moors and woodlands.

Armed with a new iron plowshare, the European peasantry braves the wilderlands. They drain the marshes, plow the heaths, cut back the dark forests and gradually settle vast areas previously abandoned to nature, wolves and outlaws.

As the peasants cut down trees, pull roots, cart away rock, burn undergrowth, dig ditches and level land with little more than spades, they are also taming the regions of their childhood nightmares.

The Staking

This ambitious undertaking is known in Cainite circles as the Staking. The waves of advancing peasants measure their advance by driving wooden stakes to mark the boundaries of the newly claimed fields. As the peasants push back the wilds with axe, plow, and torch, they inevitably come into conflict with powers of an older order.

Desolate "haunts" are liberally scattered throughout Dark Medieval Europe. Most large estates boast a neighboring stretch of primeval forest left largely untouched by human hands. The cultivated lands skirt these darker domains but do not intrude on them.

Bogs, moors and broken terrain fill the empty stretches between each town and village. Wolves range freely across even Italy, France and Germany, the most populous countries. Outlaws and highwaymen lay in wait along each stretch of road that extends like a tenuous guiderope across the vast chasms of uncivilized wilds.

At the time the Staking begins, many vampires living on the fringe of Cainite society make their homes in these haunts, the no-man's land between places. The typical village of 150 peasants cannot support and conceal the feeding of a single vampire. To maintain their secrecy, many Cainite outcasts must take to the wilds where they can choose their prey carefully from among travelers and make nocturnal forays into a number of nearby settlements.

The most lucrative hunting grounds, of course, are the thriving cities founded in antiquity: Paris, London, Rome, Venice, Constantinople, Jerusalem. Even the largest of cities, however, can only support a limited number of Cainites. An area can only maintain or conceal the activities of one vampire for every 1001 mortals — a phenomenon referred to as the Rule of 1001 Nights.

Thus, one would expect only 50 Cainites in all of Paris — by far the largest city in Northern Europe. London might house 25 vampires. The most prosperous cities boast a dozen Cainites — a gathering hardly larger than a single coterie, but with all the fierce political infighting of a prince's court. The Dark Medieval city is certainly no place for the timid.

This deadly competition rises to nearly insurmountable levels in the crowded Italian cities. In the average Italian population center, twice the human population is packed into an area roughly half the size of its sister-cities elsewhere in Europe. The Cainite unfamiliar with the dangers unique to these overcrowded conditions often comes to a swift and unpleasant demise. The Cainite in an Italian city can find himself in a position similar to dying of thirst in the middle of the ocean.

One important corollary of the Rule of 1001 Nights is the Law of Displacement. The cities, preferred stalking ground of the Cainites since the dawn of time, will support only a finite number of vampires. All but the most ruthless or cunning specimens will be displaced and forced to make their lairs elsewhere. The Displaced gravitate to the fringes of civilization. They are the outcasts, outlaws, and heretics of the society of the Damned.

The most obvious place to search out the Displaced (was one foolish enough to undertake such a quest) would be in the towns. Towns offer many of the familiar "comforts of home" on a smaller scale. The average town, however, can only safely support a lone Cainite master.

Towns are really just beginning to come into their own. Soon they will flood the Dark European countryside carrying the Displaced with them on the crest of the wave. At the dawn of the Staking, however, most Cainite outcasts are still in the remote countryside domains they have haunted since antiquity.

Population of Europe's Major Cities

Venice	100,000
Genoa	75,000
Milan	75,000
Bologna	50,000
Palermo	50,000
Paris	50,000
Ghent	40,000
Florence	25,000
London	25,000
Lille	25,000
Marseilles	25,000
Naples	25,000
Rouen	25,000
Toulouse	25,000
Barcelona	10,000
Cologne	10,000
Montpelier	10,000
Saint-Omer	10,000
Seville	10,000
Strasbourg	10,000
Troyes	10,000
York	10,000
(Italian City)	10,000
(Other City)	3-5,000
(Wealthy Town)	2-3,000
(Average Town)	1,000
(Prosperous Village)	300
(Average Village)	100

Beyond the Hearth

Outcast Cainites are not the only supernatural creatures who call these inhospitable regions home. The deep woods are, first and foremost, Lupine territory. The seething hatred that the Lupines hold for the Cainites is as dependable as it is deadly. Werewolf packs systematically seek out and destroy any vampire who trespasses upon their domain.

Although a Cainite might be the match for any individual werewolf, the coordinated attacks of an entire pack easily bring down all but the most ancient and cunning of vampires. Unfortunately, any area untamed enough to support a pack of Lupines usually has only enough mortals to support a lone Cainite.

The patches of wilderland that have not yet fallen to the plow also conceal the traditional strongholds of the fae. Shying away from the ever-expanding sphere of mortal contact, the fae have withdrawn into the untamed lands — back to the hill forts and toadstool circles deep within the primeval woods.

The fae have no great love for the Cainites. This is not to say that open antagonism exists between the two. Rather it would be more precise to say that the fae show no apparent concern at all for the vampire. On the nights when the faerie host issues forth from its hill-fort, the wise vampire gives it a wide berth.

The faerie host is just as likely to trample, confound or abduct any Cainite they come across as they would any mortal. Vampires, of course, find this lack of regard infuriating. Most Cainites would far rather be hated than ignored. Vampires, like mortals, simply do not intrude into the fae awareness. (For more information on the fae, see the **Dark Ages Companion**.)

The solitary vampire is understandably very apprehensive about any intrusion into his secluded domain. As the peasants push back the edge of the wilds, they uncover ancient ruins, level burial mounds and fell the impenetrable canopy of branches that keeps the deep forest in perpetual twilight.

Many dark things that have remained undisturbed for ages must suddenly take flight. Some of them exact a terrible vengeance upon the intruders before retiring to regions of deeper shadow.

The Staking often spills over into open strife between mortals and the Damned. As the peasants catch glimpses of the creeping evil that presses in upon their settlements from every side, mobs arm themselves with torch and spade. These initial skirmishes foreshadow the great war to come upon the Damned — the Inquisition.

The Staking decimates the ranks of rural Cainites. The number of vampires actually caught and put to the torch by mortals is understandably quite low. Many vampires, however, die the Final Death from exposure as their ancient lairs are unwittingly laid open to the sun. The greatest losses of all were inflicted by the Lupines who dogged the steps of the advancing peasants and fell upon any Cainite who was set to flight by their bush-beating.

THREE PILLARS

The New Order of Things

Throughout the 12th century, continual *assarting* brings more and more of Europe's wilds under the plow. The brunt of this back-breaking work falls directly to the peasants. It is unlikely that the serfs pause long enough in their toil to realize just how much good they are doing themselves and their cause.

The success of the reclamation stuns the local lords. They conquer vast stretches of land without the loss of a single knight, without even the cost of maintaining a fighting force. While some peasants storm nature's strongholds, many more flock to the burgeoning new towns. These two great ebb tides combine to leave many lords with more land than they have the manpower to cultivate. In effect, they have wealth simply laying out in the fields that they cannot collect.

You might expect such a labor shortage to lead to increased wages and benefits for the workers as local lords competed to attract and retain personnel. In fact, this shortage leads to a new valuation of the serfs and the creation of many unique feudal relationships.

The dramatic nature of this change is easiest to see within the noble pillar itself. Previously, the lord-knight relationship was formulaic. In return for his knight's fee (lands), the vassal pledged his fealty — his loyalty and his sword arm. In the wake of the newly *assarted* lands, we suddenly see instances of lords giving out lands without demanding the formal pledge of fealty.

Edward I, for example, went as far as to grant one Henry de la Wade half a hide in Oxfordby on the condition that Henry carry a gyrfalcon whenever Edward went hawking. This is a far cry from the bootstrapped military necessity that drove earlier feudal arrangements.

At the same time, the lords are making a multitude of new and better offers to woo the peasantry. Preeminent among these is the *manumission*, the formal grant of freedom. A free peasant pays rents to his local lord for the use of his land, but he is not required to serve *corvee*, nor is he bound by dozens of other taxes and obligations that the serf owes his lord.

These free peasants share a relationship with their lord similar to many of his newer noble vassals. One way the lords convert their found lands into cash is by "farming" out land to new vassals. The term "farm" does not refer to any agricultural activity, but rather to taxation. These vassals pay rents or taxes to their lord in return for their fiefs, much as a free peasant might do for his holding.

The peasantry makes other incursions into areas traditionally reserved for the nobility as well. For example, the role of the peasantry in the military is expanding. One important newcomer to the battlefield is the sergeant — a peasant whose duties and privileges very nearly mirror those of the knight.

The sergeant rides at his lord's side and is often afforded a place of honor in his retinue. He might be a standard bearer, a weapons master, a bowyer, a siege engineer or any of a

number of other specialized military occupations. A sergeant is bound by the obligations of wardship, marriage and relief — three duties previously imposed upon only the knightly class.

Like the sergeant, the new yeoman farmer is a free peasant who holds his land in return for military service, instead of labor (*corvee*) or rent. The English yeomanry soon becomes a renowned military force. To keep this new-found weapon sharp, the English kings ban the yeoman from participating in any sport except for shooting the longbow.

In other areas, the yeomen have different names. In northern England, they are the *dreng*, and in France, they are functionally (if not overly creatively) referred to as helmets and lances.

For the less military-minded peasant, other beneficial relationships are becoming widespread. One such arrangement is the Lease for Three Lives. In it, the lord agrees to lease the land to a free peasant at a fixed rate for the life of the holder, his son, and his grandson.

Interestingly, the Lease for Three Lives also makes specific arrangements for the rights of women to inherit. The tenant can, for example, pass the lease on to his wife should none of his sons survive him. Previously, these lands would have reverted to the lord under his right of *escheat*.

Finally, a growing number of peasants are earning the title of "lord's man." A lord's man is a free servant. The distinction here is largely one of status and liberty. The lord's man still trades his services for room, board and wages just as the domestic servant does. He is, however, free to seek employment elsewhere and his wage tends to be more than a token concession.

Also, note that a lord's man was often, in fact, a woman. This role is a groundbreaking instance of a formal feudal relation directly between a lord and a female peasant. Even under the progressive Lease for Three Lives, the woman participates in the contract only because of a previous agreement with her husband.

The Town

Just as the knights and peasantry reap the benefits of generous new feudal relations, towns also receive more favorable terms, which most often takes the form of the town charter. A charter is a document that establishes the rights and even the "freedom" of a town. Many chartered towns are in effect freeholds, having little or no accountability to any local lord.

The 12th century is the heyday of the town. We see unprecedented growth in both the number and size of towns all across Europe. Peasants flock in by the droves, lured by the twin promises of freedom and opportunity.

A town, however, does not simply spring up wherever a sizable number of people gather together. A specific grant of freedom — a Charter of Franchise — has to be granted by the local lord. This franchise frees the townsmen from any direct feudal obligations to the lord. The town as a whole, however, is now responsible for certain rents and taxes, as if it had collectively entered into a feudal relationship with the lord.

One might wonder what would drive a feudal lord to make such a concession. A charter is not, in fact, granted lightly. The factor that most often motivates a lord to grant franchise is the pressing need for local markets.

Every village or holding needs a nearby market. As the peasants make their weekly journey to market, they need to be able to get there and back again in a single day. Furthermore, they need to be able to travel at a leisurely pace — leisurely even for an ox-drawn cart. Practically, this means that even the most remote holding needs a market town within roughly a 10-mile radius.

Without the support of a nearby market, all of the lands that the lords have recently reclaimed from the wilds will be unable to support themselves. They would soon revert to wilderness. All of the lord's new-found wealth might evaporate before his eyes.

Thus, as the waves of *assarting* peasants advance, clearing fields before them, towns emerge in their wake.

The basic market town is a simple, no-frills affair. Only a small percentage of the townsmen are specialized artisans or merchants. The vast majority of the new burghers still go out each day to tend their fields.

Cultivated land for crops and herds surrounds the town. For the average townsman, life is a little different than that of the rural villager.

For a significant minority, however, the towns are about to offer up an unprecedented opportunity.

The *Villeneuve*

The 12th century witnesses a veritable building boom. Existing towns grow dramatically in size and new towns spring up to service the "found" lands that the lords have *assarted* from the wilds.

In France, these towns are being born at such a frantic rate that they have outstripped even the efforts to name them all. The legacy of this period of rapid growth can be seen in all of the townships called simply "new town." *Villeneuve sur* and *Villefranche sur* place names dot the map, even after the towns to which they refer have become well-established.

Even at first glance, these New Towns (henceforth, *villeneuve*) are quite different from the existing model. The first difference that strikes the visitor is the lack of town walls. Most Dark Medieval towns boast impressive stone walls of at least 10 feet in height. These intimidating barriers often tower 60 feet into the air.

The *villeneuve*, however, is no border fortress, built to withstand raid or siege. It is carved from interior, found lands. This fact colors every aspect of its development.

Here for the first time, there is some loosening in the Dark Medieval obsession with security. Certainly, solitary predators might emerge from the wilds by night. A wolf might brave the streets and carry off a sheep. No one, however, builds 60-foot stone walls to guard against wolves.

The *villeneuve* is far less dense than the town as well. The houses are not packed so tightly together as if they huddled for protection. Nor is there any sense of the rough, frontier town about it. These are settled, civilized regions, as far from the uncertainty and violence of warfare as possible.

The spirit that permeates the *villeneuve* is one of refinement: arts, learning and civilization. Like the goddess Athena, whom the ancient Greeks honored as the patron of civilization, the *villeneuve* is not born in the conventional manner. Legend relates how Athena sprang full-grown from the head of her father, Zeus. In an analogous way, the civilized *villeneuve* springs fully-developed into existence.

For the first time since the Roman Empire, town planning and design reemerge. Foresight dictates the shape and growth of the population centers, instead of rambling, need-driven expansion. Certain standard designs that can be implemented quickly and efficiently become popular.

A veritable army of skilled craftsmen preside over the birth of a *villeneuve*. Quarrymen, stonecarvers and masons shape and fit stone blocks. Lumberers, sawyers and carpenters erect timber-framed walls. Boatmen and carters bring building supplies over great distances. Smiths mend tools and provide a seemingly never-ending stream of nails, hinges and fittings.

Hordes of journeyman artisans travel from building site to building site, scattering towns in their wake. There is little need to fear shortage of work.

The keystone of the *villeneuve* is the church. As in the village, the church is the literal, and figurative, center of things.

Formerly, churches were low sturdy stone structures. Inside they were cool, dark, serene. The little light that found its way in came from small, high windows.

As with all early Dark Medieval architecture, the design was dictated by a need for security. In times of strife, the church became a shelter for a besieged populace. In an assault on the town, it was often the last line of defense. The design need was the same one that ringed the towns in walls of stone and made fortresses of a lord's private residence.

Gothic Moonrise

These design assumptions are being challenged in the plans for the *villeneuve*. The traditional designs are coming under attack from a spidery new form of architecture that is just beginning to emerge in the great cathedral towns of Laon, Paris and Chartres. This is the dawn, or better still, the moonrise of the Gothic.

Gothic architecture has a distinctly skeletal appearance. It is not surprising that the two innovations that make this new form possible are "skeletal" as well. Each provides a new framework to support the body of the church building.

The first improvement is a new method of vaulting that supports more of the weight of the ceiling through arches and pillars. These new structures rely less on the exterior walls to bear the burden of the stone roof.

The second innovation is the flying buttress, the jointed spanners extending outward from the walls like spider legs or human ribs. They distribute the structure's weight out and down into the ground. Between these two revolutionary changes, startling things become possible.

Dense stone walls are suddenly no longer necessary. Entire sections of dour stone give way to multi-colored glass. Where once the interior of the church offered the security of darkened recesses, it now swims in the brilliance of divine light.

Animals

The *villeneuve* is full of animals. The narrow streets are literally clogged with them. Burghers must wade through the press of horses, mules, and oxen bound for market. Draft animals loaded high with goods or pulling carts block each street leading to the town square.

Villagers keep a wide assortment of animals in their homes. These house pets are usually cherished barnyard animals accorded a place of honor indoors with the family. These animals roam freely through the common living, eating and sleeping areas.

In the *villeneuve*, burghers are reluctant to part with their decidedly rural companions. The courtyards of many townhouses resound with the commotion of pigs and chickens. The bulk of the town's livestock, however, is kept outside the town proper.

The streets teem with livestock on market days as the inhabitants of the surrounding land drive their herds to market. The streets ring with the bleating of goats and sheep and the lowing of cattle.

Cows range freely through the *villeneuve* on any day of the week. Fresh milk is a highly valued commodity to the townsmen. Cheese graces the townsman's table daily, and curds and butter also play a significant role in his diet. He is willing to give the cattle free run of the place in return for this bounty.

Any town also boasts a sizable population of pigs. The Dark Medieval pig is feral-looking beast that has an almost prehistoric cast to its features. It is lean and wiry, standing about as high as a man's knee. Its head is sharp and angular, slanting straight down from the bony forehead ridge to the small, but functional, tusks.

With few exceptions, these animals also roam freely through the streets. The city of Paris is a notable case. In 1131, the king's son met with a fatal accident when his horse lost its footing amidst the press of swine that overran the boulevard. Consequently, the citizens of Paris are forbidden to keep the offending creatures. A special dispensation is made for the Abbey of St. Antoine that maintains exactly 12 pigs within the city. These animals wander freely, but wear bells around their necks to warn of their approach.

Ironically, the abundance of pigs roaming the streets significantly contributes to the cleanliness of the town. At a time when household rubbish is routinely dumped out into the lane, swine eat their way through a good deal of the cast-offs. In other regions, goats serve an identical function. Herds of pigs are driven through the streets at the beginning or close of day.

One of the most impressive sights the townsman might witness is the coming of the crows at dawn. Just after sunrise, great murders of crows descend in black clouds blanketing the streets. If the mere sight of the feasting birds does not deter early morning walks, the racket they create certainly does.

Some towns employ less traditional street cleaning methods, some going as far as to employ peasants to shovel out the lanes each day. It is certainly no more unpleasant a task than mucking out a barnyard — a chore to which most are well-accustomed.

Any sizable town also has an arrangement with one of the nearby lords to have a few of his serfs cart away the "*ordures*," which are then used to fertilize his fields.

Creatures of Urban Nightmare

During the 12th century, the total population of Dark Medieval Europe is 75 million souls. Only 5% of these mortals — around 3,750,000 people — live in the towns and cities.

Among the Cainites, this demographic is reversed — over 95% are city dwellers. Since the dawn of time, the vampire has been an urban predator. The history of the Cainites reads like an atlas of the mythic cities of the past. The rise and fall of Enoch, Babel, Ninevah, Troy, Carthage and Rome are all intimately linked with the trials and tribulations of the Damned.

Keeping in mind the Rule of 1001 Nights, it is possible to make a good estimate of the total number of Cainites that stalk Dark Medieval Europe. The 3.75 million mortal city dwellers can support, at most, 3,750 urban Cainites. This would place the logical upper limit of the vampiric population at just under 4,000.

From the Cainite point of view, the mortal population is not ideally distributed. While a ratio of 1001 mortals to 1 vampire is sufficient to maintain the Cainite populace, the above estimate puts the actual numbers closer to 75 million to 4,000, or just less than 20,000 mortals for each vampire.

Population (in millions) of Western Europe

England/Wales	4
France	22
Germany	12
Greece/Balkans	6
Low Countries	4
Ireland	1
Italy	10
Scotland	0.5
Spain/Portugal	7
Switzerland	0.5
Total	**67**

THOSE WHO TOIL

THREE PILLARS

The Town Home

Townhouses are very similar in design throughout Europe. Generally, they follow one of two basic plans. In the south, the Roman style predominates. Buildings make the most of the local resources — rough stone, soft and porous. Stuccoed walls, coated with a wash of ochre-colored paint, provide insulation against the weather.

In the north, the Teutonic design is more widespread. These "half-timbered" buildings employ wood-beam framing and often woven-reed or wooden walls. The rustic, thatched roof is common, and the exterior also features windows set in pairs with red or black accent paint.

Only the most important houses rise above two stories in height. Most artisans' dwellings incorporate a ground floor shop, or at least a front awning beneath which they can display their wares and conduct business. The work area shares the downstairs while the family room or rooms may be upstairs in a two-story home.

Houses tend to be built around a courtyard that often features a well and perhaps even a fountain. The fountains, built according to the ancient Roman model, are cunningly constructed so that gravity alone circulates the water.

A town home also invariably has one or more gardens. Patches surround the house, much like peasant's crofts, while some gardening is done in the courtyard as well.

Towns are much smaller and less dense than one might imagine. Overcrowding and the full gamut of urban problems, however, already emerge by the early 13th century.

The towns provide communal facilities much as the feudal lords do in the villages. A typical town, for instance, boasts a number of mills for grinding flour. In a village, this service is traditionally the domain of a local lord. The towns' chartered freedom from these local lords, however, means that they are also responsible for providing these services for themselves.

Many towns turn this new responsibility into opportunity. The French city of Troyes, for instance, established 11 mills between the years of 1157 and 1191. These watermills go beyond merely usurping traditional noble roles and profits. They also press wine and oil, which are critical to the region's economy. In addition, they power the foundries and forges.

The towns provide other communal facilities tailored to the specific needs of their urban environment. For example, great stone tubs are set up along the river bank so that the inhabitants can do their laundry. For the most part, however, these needs generate entire new professions to provide the desired services.

The Merchants

The town, at its most basic, is a market. It provides a place for the local farmers to exchange their produce for the supplies they need. Such a marketplace soon attracts various artisans to provide for these needs. Familiar faces include cobblers (shoes) and tanners (leather); drapers and tailors (clothes); coopers (barrels) and carpenters; wheelwrights and wainwrights (wag-

ons); bakers and butchers; brewers and vintners (wines); ropemakers and masons. Each town has its own blacksmith and, depending on its size, might also house an armor- or weaponsmith, or even a gold- or silversmith.

While a single village cannot provide enough business to support these craftsmen, a town is insured a steady stream of customers from nearby communities. Inns and taverns spring up to cater to those coming to market. Further townsmen — grocers, moneylenders, fishmongers, carters, etc. — arrive to support the craftsmen.

While most artisans make their homes in the towns, some travel the countryside with their wares. Such peddlers usually base themselves in a market town and then tour the nearby manors selling their wares. The peddler soon gains a reputation for nomadic wandering second only to that of the Gypsies. He often has to contend with the same distrust that greets the arrival of the Rom.

As towns grow in size and prosperity, an increasing number of merchants seize the opportunity to develop inter-town trade. These travelers are more than just peddlers who operate between towns rather than manors. Instead of bringing a specific ware with them wherever they go, the merchants buy local goods and transport them to markets where those items are in demand. In the merchants, we have, for the first time, a class of free man who is not tied directly to one craft or skill.

During the 12th century, international trade grows increasingly popular and profitable. While bold merchants are just beginning to pioneer trade routes into the heart of Asia, the exchange of goods and ideas with the Near East reaches a level unmatched since the fall of Rome.

In the great market cities of Italy and Iberia, merchants cry out their exotic wares: silks, spices, carpets, blown glass, oranges and ivory. The luxuries of the Islamic world evoke not only an alien opulence, but also a deep sense of mystery and hidden knowledge. The civilizations that confront the crusaders have accumulated a vast body of law, medicine and scholarship far beyond anything that Europe has to offer.

European merchants grasp the unique opportunity presented by these two cultures grinding together quickly. Many of these merchants grow staggeringly rich, more so even than many members of the nobility. The old school of thought that insists you can measure a man's wealth by pacing off the boundaries of his fields is beginning to show signs of wear.

In northern Germany, the first true mercantile powerhouse — the Hanseatic League — extends a tentative finger over the map of Europe. The mysterious and influential Hansa had a rather humble beginning — as an association of merchants and towns selling, of all things, pickled herring. This food becomes a staple of the Dark Medieval diet. Its popularity and availability is due in no small part to the efforts of the Hansa.

The Hansa corner the herring market and soon become the sole provider for the entire Baltic region. Their efforts rapidly expand to other products and regions and they are soon a force to be reckoned with — a mercantile league spanning over 100 trading cities.

Any established town in Northern Europe boasts an office of the Hansa and the Hanse himself, the local agent of the League, is invariably one of the most envied and influential persons in town.

The Guilds

Other craftsmen are more settled. In a large town, where multiple individuals pursue the same trade, artisans are beginning to band together into guilds. The guild may have its roots in simple cooperative agreements between two craftsmen sharing the same trade — promises not to compete with or undersell each other. By the 12th century, however, the guilds have become more formal, more widespread and much more powerful.

Guilds fulfill a three-fold mission: They protect, educate and regulate the practitioners of their trade.

Protection implies mainly a freedom from coercion or extortion. The guildsmen band together for strength. Together, they can meet challenges that they could not surmount alone.

Brigands can easily disrupt a craftsman's trade by interrupting the supply of a crucial component — the supply of wool to the clothiers, for instance. An unscrupulous local lord might demand a crippling toll or tribute to pass through his lands. Thieves ply their own trade upon the individual guildsmen within the town proper.

In response, the guilds raise men-at-arms, bring political pressure to bear or financially lubricate the scales of justice. In a very short period of time, the guilds have come to wield great power.

The guilds have also assumed the duty of educating the town populace. While formal education has always been the domain of the Church, the guilds provide a very practical education in the arts and crafts. At this time, there is no widespread literacy and certainly no public education. What learning is commonly available is in the form of trade knowledge. The guilds administer the dissemination of this knowledge through the apprenticeship system.

Guild education starts at about age seven when a child leaves his home to apprentice himself to a master artisan or craftsman. A successful master might have as many as three or four apprentices whom he instructs in the secrets of his trade. The apprentice is expected to provide unskilled labor in the workshop, as well as around the house, during this time. A typical apprenticeship lasts seven years, although in some cases periods as short as four, or as long as 12, years are observed.

The master has full parental responsibility over the apprentice. The master provides food and lodging, shoes and clothing. He might pay the apprentice a token wage (a few pennies annually). He might also offer other assurances to the prospective apprentice — for example, that only the master, and not his wife, would beat the apprentice.

If at any time the apprentice fails to live up to the master's expectations, he can expect to be returned home to his family in disgrace. Such an expulsion severely limits a youth's future prospects. Apprenticed children are almost invariably younger siblings who cannot expect any inheritance (and thus, source of livelihood) at home. Most who fall into these straits are destined for the short and brutal life of a foot soldier.

The Guilds of Paris and Their Memberships

Shoemakers	366
Furriers	214
Maidservants	199
Tailors	197
Barbers	151
Jewelers	131
Restaurateurs	130
Old-clothes dealers	121
Pastry cooks	106
Masons	104
Carpenters	95
Weavers	86
Chandlers	71
Mercers	70
Coopers	70
Bakers	62
Water carriers	58
Scabbard makers	58
Wine sellers	56
Hatmakers	54
Saddlers	51
Chicken butchers	51
Purse makers	45
Laundresses	43
Oil merchants	43
Porters	42
Meat butchers	42
Fish merchants	41
Beer sellers	37
Buckle makers	36
Plasterers	36
Spice merchants	35
Blacksmiths	34
Painters	33
Doctors	29
Roofers	28
Locksmiths	27
Bathers	26
Ropemakers	26
Innkeepers	24
Tanners	24
Copyists	24
Sculptors	24
Rugmakers	24
Harness makers	24
Bleachers	23
Hay merchants	22
Cutlers	22
Glovemakers	21
Wood sellers	21
Woodcarvers	21

Upon the successful completion of the apprenticeship, the newly trained craftsman becomes a journeyman. This term derives not from the extensive traveling expected of the journeyman, but from the French *journee* meaning "day" — journeymen are skilled daylaborers.

A journeyman does travel a great deal, going from town to town, plying his trade. This lifestyle gives him the opportunity to learn from many different masters. It also provides a mobile, skilled labor pool that can be brought to bear constructing the rash of *villeneuve* and cathedrals that spread across Europe.

There is no set length of time to the journeyman stage, although this period is typically measured in years. There are five requirements that must be met before the journeyman becomes a master.

First, he needs an existing master to certify that the candidate is "prudent and loyal." In effect, what is required is a recommendation from a full guild member.

Second, the journeyman needs to have enough capital to set up shop on his own. Guilds tend to be very pragmatic in these matters. Capital is often measured in tools instead of cash. A master's tools are his major expense and subsequently, his greatest asset. Some tools simply cannot be bought at any price. The master must construct and repair them himself. Those that he cannot produce are often prohibitively expensive to replace. An apprentice who loses or damages one of the master's tools is in for a sound thrashing. A craftsman cannot typically afford to acquire or replace more than one such tool each year.

The third and fourth requirements are by far the easiest to fulfill. The journeyman must take the guild oath, pledging loyalty and service, and then pay a membership fee.

The final and most significant requirement that distinguishes the master is the production of the *chef-d'oeuvre* — literally, the "master piece." Each guild has its own requirements for this masterpiece. A stone carver, for instance, must produce a three-foot tall statuette for the review of the guildsmen. The journeyman's style, expertise and technique are all subject to critique and evaluation. A saddler has to produce both a palfrey saddle and a mule saddle, demonstrating his adeptness with both the decorative and the functional. The cobblers have an even more practical examination that involves drawing three pairs at random from a bin of shoes in need of mending.

The final function of the guilds is to regulate. Obviously, they regulate pricing to eliminate internal competition. Pricing is uniform not only within a given town, but between towns as well.

Hand in hand with this practice is the regulation of standards of quality. Producing inferior goods is not only detrimental to the guild's reputation, it undercuts the established system of fair pricing. Using substandard materials, for instance, might result in lowered costs and, hence, greater-than-regulated profits.

Other improvements brought about by guild regulation include widespread standardization of weights and measures and uniform observances of common working hours and wages.

To insure that guild standards are observed, each craftsman affixes his maker's mark to the completed product. Each master craftsman has his own individual symbol that identifies

him as surely as a coat-of-arms identifies a noble knight. The guilds keep comprehensive records of these marks, much as the heralds systematically register arms.

A craftsman takes great pride in his mark. It is the flourish with which he signs his art. Using a master's mark under false pretenses is a grave offense. Professional reputations have been ruined and forgeries foisted off on the unsuspecting. The guilds also take a special protective interest in their members' marks. They can use these tiny identifying features to trace inferior goods back to their creator and then take appropriate corrective actions.

The guilds impose stiff penalties on those who are suspected of shortchanging their customers. A baker, for instance, who sells underweight loaves is fined heavily and then thrown into the pillory — one of the offending loaves tied around his neck as a sign of his offense.

The guilds are quite zealous in their enforcement. Many bakers, to avoid even accidentally short-weighing their customers' orders, have begun throwing in an extra roll or pastry with every dozen. Thus the term "baker's dozen," which has come to mean any set of 13, is a testimony to at least the caution (if not the generosity) of that trade.

Soon many crafts had developed their own guilds. Organizations rapidly formed for the butchers, bakers, goldsmiths, tanners, carpenters, cloth merchants and many other trades. Much of the new-found wealth of the *villeneuve* passes through the hands and coffers of the guilds.

Individually, guild members earn more money than their unguilded counterparts. In areas where wages for an unguilded worker are 2 Librum per year, a member of the guilded building trades earns about 5 Librum — over twice as much. Members of the leading guilds — spice merchants, apothecaries, drapers and furriers — make around 20 Librum, nearly 10 times as much. Guild leaders are among the wealthiest men in their communities, often earning more than 150 Librum each year.

Collectively, the guilds wield an ever-increasing amount of political, as well as economic, influence over the new *villeneuve*. The various guilds compete for the upper hand within a given city.

Most of this competition remains friendly. Inter-guild clashes have become formalized, even stylized. Each guild has its own associated patron saint and on its saint day holds processions of great pageantry.

One famous example of these guild celebrations is the Pallio in Siena. The week's festivities culminate in a no-holds-barred horse race around the town's main square. Each guild enters a contestant in the race and parades the streets wearing its "regalia" and waving its own distinctive banner. Each of the guilds represents one of the neighborhoods that make up the sprawling township and loyal supporters from each "fief" fill the streets.

The assumption of noble trappings only emphasizes the fact that the guildsmen are the most influential burghers. Even when they do not officially hold the position of town leadership, they are the real power in the *villeneuve*.

Patron Saints

The following list describes but a few of the important patron saints that are associated with the various guilds and other urban groups:

St. Adrian: Patron Saint of soldiers and butchers.

St. Agatha: Patron Saint of nurses and bellfounders.

St. Alexis: Patron Saint of beggars.

St. Andrew the Apostle: Patron Saint of fishermen.

St. Anthony: Patron Saint of basket makers.

St. Anthony of Padua: Patron Saint of the poor. People pray for St. Anthony to help find lost articles.

St. Barbara: Patron Saint of miners and builders.

St. Barbe: Patron Saint of brushmakers.

St. Brendan: Patron Saint of sailors.

St. Brigid: Patron Saint of cowherds.

St. Catherine: Patron Saint of wheelwrights. Catherine is broken on the wheel.

St. Christopher: Patron Saint of pilgrims. Travelers pray for St. Christopher's protections.

St. Clare: Patron Saint of mirrormakers.

St. Cloud: Patron Saint of nailmakers.

Sts. Cosmas and Damian: These twins are the Patron Saints of barbers/leeches.

St. Columcille: Patron Saint of exiles.

St. Crispin: Patron Saint of cobblers and leatherworkers.

St. Dismas: Patron Saint of thieves and condemned criminals. Dismas is the thief crucified with Christ.

St. Dominic: Patron Saint of astronomers. Founder of the Dominican monks.

St. Drogo: Patron Saint of shepherds.

St. Dunstan: Patron Saint of blacksmiths, locksmiths, metalworkers and armorers.

St. Dymphna: Patron Saint of the mentally ill. Dymphna is invoked to exorcise demons.

St. Eligius: Patron Saint of jewelers, silversmiths, goldsmiths.

St. Erasmus (a.k.a. Elmo): Patron Saint of sailors. Elmo is saved by an angel from being burned alive, hence the term "St. Elmo's fire."

St. Eustace (alternately, St. Hubert): Patron Saint of hunters. Eustace sees a vision of the sign of the cross between a stag's horns.

St. Giles: Patron Saint of cripples.

St. Isidore: Patron Saint of farmers.

St. John, the evangelist: Patron saint of seers and mystics. Author of the Fourth Gospel.

St. Joseph: Patron Saint of carpenters and woodworkers. Joseph is the earthly father of Jesus.

St. Julian, Hospitaller: Patron Saint of hotel keepers. Julian is forgiven his sins after offering his bed to a leper.

St. Luke, the evangelist: Patron Saint of physicians and painters. Author of the Third Gospel.

St. Mark, the evangelist: Patron Saint of writers and notaries. Author of the Second Gospel.

St. Matthew, the evangelist: Patron Saint of bankers and bookkeepers. Author of the First Gospel.

St. Maurice: Patron Saint of swordsmiths.

St. Mary Magdalene: Patron Saint of perfumers. Mary Magdalene pours oil on Jesus's feet.

St. Pantaleon: Patron Saint of apothecaries.

St. Peter, the apostle: Patron Saint of fishermen.

St. Reinold: Patron Saint of stonemasons. Reinold is murdered by those jealous of his work.

St. Sebastian: Patron Saint of needlemakers. Sebastian is martyred by arrows.

St. Vitus: Patron Saint of dancers, actors, comics.

St. Zita: Patron Saint of servants.

Crime and Punishment

The regional nobility (henceforward, "counts," although a wide variety of titles are in use across Europe) jealously guard their right to hear cases and pass judgment. The last vestiges of the older system of trial by combat or trial by ordeal have vanished. The count hears witnesses, weighs evidence and pronounces sentence.

Justice is not only a solemn responsibility, it is also an important source of income. Whenever a fine is levied, this money passes into the judge's coffers. When a criminal is executed or banished, all of his goods are forfeited to the count.

This system produces swift and decisive sentencing. Lengthy imprisonments are virtually unheard of. Hanging is the most common sentence for serious crimes — a particularly unpleasant fate as the drop technique is not widely practiced; the condemned suffers the slow death of strangulation.

Traitors, witches and heretics can expect to be burned at the stake for their offenses. Thieves can look forward to some kind of disfigurement — branding, the loss of a hand or eye — in addition to having their ill-gotten gains seized. Young cutpurses or pickpockets, however, might escape their first offense with no more permanent reminder than the shame of being publicly flogged and pilloried.

When imprisonments do occur, there are usually strong political and economic reasons. Enemies, whether knights captured in battle, or important burghers fallen in more subtle conflicts, might be ransomed back to their families. The crypts or cellars beneath the count's castle make a good improvised prison in times of need.

The count cannot, however, be all places at once. The demands of justice are great and it has become necessary for him to farm out some of his responsibility. When delegating this solemn duty, the count reserves the privilege of hearing cases of high justice — murder, robbery, rape. These are, by far, the most lucrative cases.

In the countryside, the count looks to the local lords, knights pledged to his service, to administer justice and to forward him his due. Since the knight is often away from home, serving his lord on campaign or at court, the bailiff is allowed to settle minor infractions in the knight's absence. Most knights find it expedient to allow the bailiff to continue doing so, even when the knight has returned to the manor.

Burghers are especially eager to help lift the burden of justice from the shoulders of the nobility. Many town charters grant the mayor the right to hear cases of low justice. The mayor is authorized to judge cases of petty theft, fraud, minor assault and routine matters of commerce and property. In return for this privilege, the town pays a set amount to the count each year. The count agrees to this arrangement because it not only frees his hands, it also gives him a reliable income in return for the variable fines and confiscations.

The burgher courts have a vested interest in matters of debt and credit. In most cases, a debtor's goods will be immediately seized and handed over to his creditor. If this amount is insufficient, the debtor may be temporarily imprisoned to encourage friends and family to raise the money. Failing that, the debtor will be banished from the city.

In many cities, the count also appoints a provost to preside over cases of high justice in his stead. This individual is invariably a wealthy burgher who is firmly within the count's camp. The provost earns a commission on all fines and forfeitures that he imposes. The wise provost fills the count's coffers. The count will shield an ambitious provost from any repercussions. A less productive assistant is quickly dismissed and thrown back among those he may have wronged.

The counts are not the only major players in the lucrative field of justice. Many crimes can only be tried by the king or his agent. In cases of treason, all of the traitor's lands and goods revert to the Crown. The forests are also traditionally the king's domain and charges of illegal poaching, *assarting* or timbering fall to the king's court. Such cases are tried by specially appointed circuit judges who travel the countryside dispensing the king's justice.

Church bishops also have a hand in judicial matters and profits. Each bishop presides over an ecclesiastical court. These bodies often contend with the secular authorities for the right to try a particular case. The dividing line between Church and civil jurisdiction can be difficult to distinguish.

Some cases that fall clearly within the domain of the ecclesiastic courts are crimes of heresy, crimes that take place on church property, or crimes that involve clergymen (even the lay clergy) as the accused or victim.

The Church courts have something of a reputation for lenience that makes trying a case in the bishop's court much more attractive to the accused than facing the count or provost. This is not simply a matter of the Church protecting its own — this reputation results in more trials being brought to the ecclesiastic courts and, thus, greater revenues.

During the great fairs and tournaments, another type of temporary court comes into existence to deal with the sudden influx of people, commerce and of course, crime. The Court of the Fair can hear cases of crimes of low justice that take place anytime during the month-long festivities. The mayor appoints a number of burghers (usually city councilmen) to act as judges.

One of the most important functions of the Court of the Fair is to protect foreign merchants from the whims of local justice. The court spends most of its time, however, in matters of contract, debt and fraud. These judges are voracious in their pursuit of debtors. If the seizure of goods and imprisonment fail to produce the balance due, the judges will demand payment from the debtor's home city.

Each community is held responsible for the debts of its members. It is something of a "gentleman's agreement" between the burghers. Each mercantile city understands the value and necessity of a sterling business reputation. The town council will almost invariably forward the demanded sum. They will then lean heavily on the debtor's family, or failing that, his guild, to recoup its loss.

Cheating and Fraud

The guild inspectors remain vigilant for a wide variety of common cheats and frauds:

Clipping coins for the silver
Watering down wine, milk or oil
Baking extra yeast into bread for extra volume
Reddening old fish with pig's blood
Soaking cheese in broth to make it look richer
Mixing tallow in the lard
Mixing lard in the candles
Selling cat, dog or horse flesh
Trimming bone knife handles with silver to make them appear as ivory
Pressing and hanging mended clothes as if they were new
Rigging scales, shaving weights
Substituting colored glass for gemstones
Cutting spices with common plants
Making false peppercorns of clay, oil or mustard
Stretching cloth
Leaving flax out overnight to increase its weight
Falsely labeling wine
Making pre-arranged sales to acquire a monopoly
Buying or selling before or after fair hours
Even suspicion of these offenses results in guild inspectors seizing all goods. Proof of fraud can result in heavy fines, public flogging and exclusion from the fair.

The Court of the Fair also handles any cases of fraud that escape the guilds' watchful eye. Cases usually reach resolution by banishing and levying heavy fines on the guilty party and even heavier ones on his guild. A reputation for fraud will precede a dishonest merchant from fair to fair.

The shrewd customer is also wary of purchasing "a pig in a poke" — a pig that is already wrapped in a tied sack. All too often the squirming bundle turns out to be, in fact, not a pig but rather a somewhat indignant stray cat. The unscrupulous merchant must take special care not to "let the cat out of the bag" and thus be revealed as a fraud.

Money

Others besides the merchants and guildsmen grow very rich in this new atmosphere of economic prosperity. The foremost of these groups is the moneylenders. Every market town boasts its own moneylender who converts the wide variety of foreign coins to local currency for a fee. This service is crucial to any market fair. A typical fair in Champagne, France, for instance, attracts merchants from Spain, Flanders, Germany, Italy and even North Africa.

The mainstay of the moneylenders, however, is the distasteful practice of usury — charging interest on loans. Usury is traditionally prohibited to all Christians. Most often this profession falls to the Jews, although some knightly orders such as the Hospitallers and the Templars have been granted special permission to practice usury. This new-found vocation has made both of these orders extremely wealthy. In fact, the Templars have loaned such outrageous sums to the Crown of France that debt-relief is a significant motivating factor in that nation's efforts to eliminate the order....

The Dance of Death

The Dark Medieval world is rich in folklore and superstition. Even routine acts are surrounded by a wealth of folk custom. An entire body of lore deals solely with the omens that might be drawn from the first person or creature you meet when leaving the house in the morning.

Any ill fortune during the day can be attributed to the person encountered in that first meeting. Crossing the path of a cripple, a priest, a monk or a raven is considered ill luck. A toad is thought to bring money during the day and a prostitute is considered the most auspicious meeting of all.

The logical thread behind such a list often evades even the most careful attempts to unravel it. The seemingly random litany of folk belief infiltrates all aspects of Dark Medieval life. It is these incongruous elements, however, that jump out and add vividness to a Storyteller's chronicle.

Even though the reason behind such a belief might remain obscure, it can still have a profound effect on the believer. In fact, it is often these unquestioned beliefs, the ones that are so "obvious" that they require no explanation at all in the mind of the believer, that have the most dramatic effects of all.

The most popular image in Dark Medieval folk art is the Dance of Death. Death, wrapped in cloak and cowl and carrying aloft his scythe, leads the procession. Behind him, all men, peasant and emperor alike, join hands as equals. They spin and jerk as they are drawn along in his wake, like marionettes on invisible strings.

These powerful images are a window into the fear and uncertainty of this age — and a man's fears are a potent weapon to be wielded against him. A Cainite, surprised in the midst of his nocturnal feasting, might hastily draw upon this imagery, using the semblance and trappings of the Reaper to strike terror into the mortal witness.

Each vampire is aware of the powerful truths inherent in the Dance of Death. Even the least of the Cainites has broken free of the shackles of death. The vampire as reaper reigns over king, clergyman and peasant, visiting death upon each in turn. All three dance, cavort and finally perish at his command.

Systems and Suggestions

The Storyteller can use such powerful image-laden beliefs, turning them into memorable antagonists or formidable obstacles. For instance, one superstition — derived from the ancient association between the moon, reflection and deception — holds that it is extreme bad luck to view the moon through glass.

Working from this premise, the Storyteller might ask himself what ill effect moonlight through glass could possibly have on a Cainite. He might conclude that the danger lies in reflection — especially reflection upon things lost. Perhaps when a vampire gazes into a moonlit mirror, what he sees is not his reflection, but a reflection of the mortal that he was — of the future that is forever lost to him. This interpretation takes on added impact in light of the folk belief that Cainites cast no reflection in mirrors.

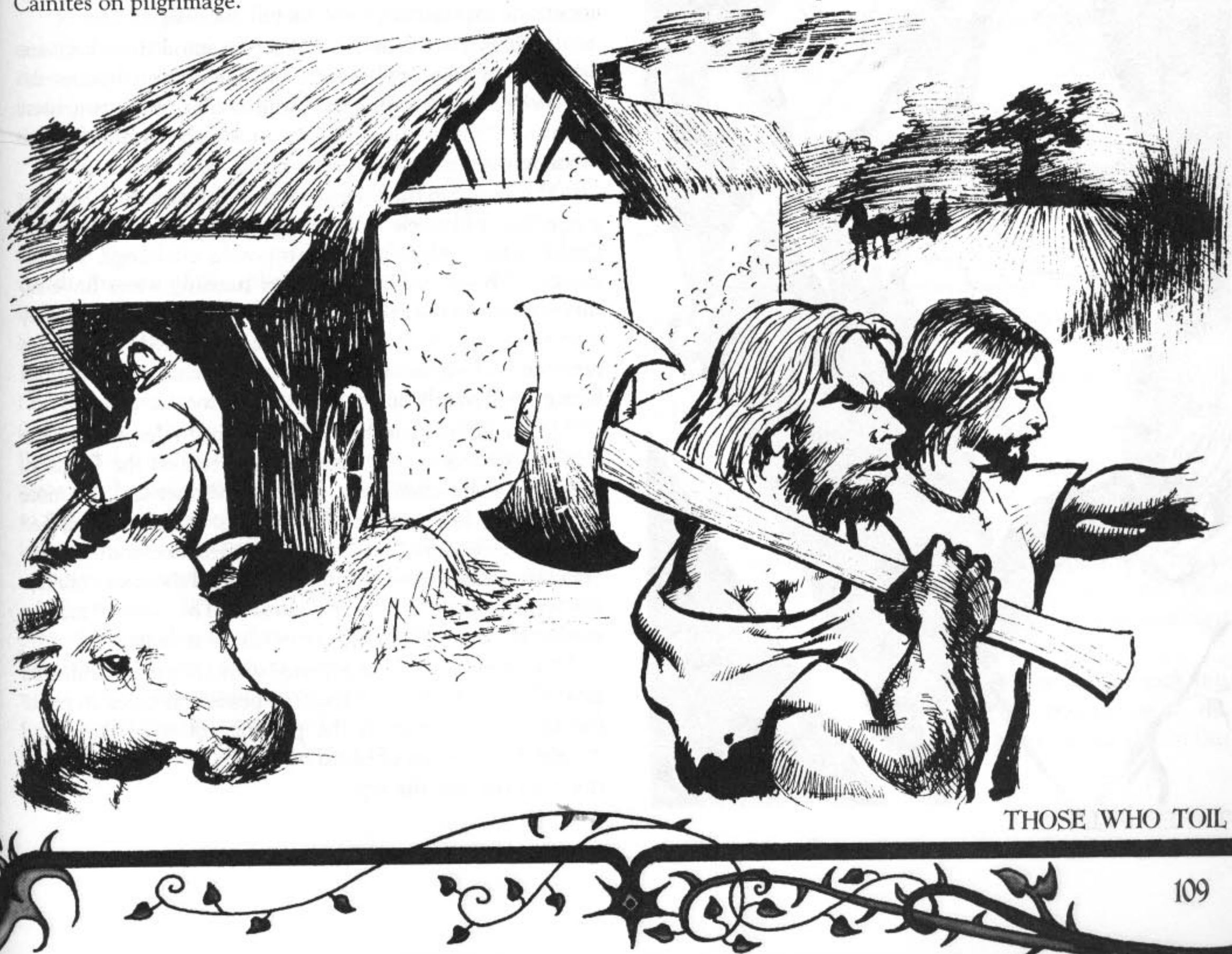
The effects of superstitions do not have to be applied universally. They are often more compelling if their effect is limited to certain conditions or unique instances. For example, perhaps the above reflective property only manifests outdoors, in moonlit pools of still water. Better still, the effect might be unique to one particular dark tarn that could become an important adventure setting, or perhaps even a pilgrimage site for the Damned. An entire chronicle could be built around the rather simple premise of the subtle and deadly intrigues that develop nightly between a party of rival Cainites on pilgrimage.

The same superstitious premise can be taken in a number of entirely different directions. Perhaps the Storyteller has decided that moonlight through glass poses a more overt threat than simple melancholic reflection — that it burns with the intensity of the sun. He might decide to limit this devastating effect to moonlight falling through stained glass. This twist seems especially appropriate as it draws on the taboo against the Damned entering the Lord's house. The Storyteller can add even more impact by limiting the instances of this superstitious effect. Perhaps moonlight burns only in one specific church — an ancient cathedral half-sunken into some desolate moor. Or perhaps only the handiwork of one particularly gifted artisan produces the lethal panes of glass.

Faith and Superstition

For the residents of Dark Medieval Europe, superstition holds great power of conviction. Certain rare individuals, through the single-mindedness of their beliefs, can manifest this power.

Superstition is modeled on the True Faith power. The easiest way to visualize the use of this ability is to assume that within the presence of the Superstitious individual, one particular folk belief becomes literally true. An advancing Cainite might be checked by a garlic-wielding peasant. He might be deafened or driven to panic by the pealing of the churchbells. The crowing of a cock, even in the dead of night, might be used to banish the vampire back to his coffin.



Using Superstition

Superstition is an interesting tool, left deliberately vague so that creative Storytellers may make use of it as they see best. It is not quantified even as cursorily as True Faith, as it is not something that should be encountered with any degree of frequency. Needless to say, none of the players' characters should possess the Superstition Trait. Ever. Nope. Well, if you *really* want to, but then, you get what you deserve.

The exact function of Superstition-based effects are *entirely* up to the Storyteller. This intentional vagueness allows Storytellers to create effects suited specifically to their chronicles and dramatic necessity.

As with the True Faith power, the Storyteller must take pains not to overuse Superstition. Used in moderation, it can provide unique and memorable adversaries. Any individual should only be able to manifest a single folk belief. Even if what is desired is a recurring antagonist of mythic proportions, it is recommended that he only manifest one particular superstition during each appearance — preferably one specifically tailored to the locale or situation at hand.

The Superstition power should be used so rarely that the unsuspecting Cainite should have no idea what he is up against or what is truly occurring. This scene should be an absolutely unnerving experience played for full dramatic effect.

A Storyteller should also keep in mind that there are other interesting applications of Superstition besides directly checking or foiling the Cainite. One interesting twist might be a Superstitious peasant in whose eyes the Cainite takes on even more epic proportions.

Not only can the superstitions of the peasantry provide a significant obstacle to the Cainite, but the beliefs of the Cainites themselves might also pose a challenge. For instance, although garlic, a cross or running water have no inherent power over the undying, a vampire might shy away from these objects due to his own deeply rooted beliefs. This tendency is heightened in a vampire with a strong mortal background in folk customs, witchcraft or the occult.

Many superstitious beliefs have special relevance for the Cainites. Crosses, traditionally used to fend off the Damned, abound. Ornate crosses decorate rustic shrines and the more civilized churches. As personal ornaments, crosses of wood, reed and even precious metals commonly grace necklaces and brooches. Standing stone crosses can be found scattered about the countryside, in hamlets, on hilltops, at crossroads. The Damned must be vigilant lest the shadow of the cross fall upon them.

The cross-piece of an inverted sword is often brandished to ward off evil and, of course, the peasant is quick to make the sign of the cross in the presence of temptation and danger. Even loaves of bread traditionally have the sign of the cross cut into the top.

Drinking from church bells is thought to be a powerful curative for many ills. But then again, so is drinking from a human skull — a remedy that might be more ready-to-hand for the Cainite.

Another common healing practice, which harbors some threat for the Cainite, is that of bringing a fire into the house to protect a sick child. If the open flame cure proved ineffective, the parents might subject the child to a burial cure. To effect this remedy, the child is laid down in an open grave and then covered with rushes or branches. Only when the sun rises is the terrified child raised up again.

There is an entire host of graveyard remedies that often brings mortals into the reach of the waking dead. One common graveside cure is sending a pregnant woman to tread upon the graves to ease her pains or ailments of childbirth.

Just as the burial grounds have a profound effect on the minds of the living, those who lay buried also have a dominant influence. There is a great variety of lore revolving around corpse magic. Besides the wealth of information on how to wake, question or beg favors of the dead, many strange powers are attributed to the physical remains of those who have passed away.

It is a well-known "fact" that a corpse will bleed anew in the presence of his murderer. Similarly, traditions might bind a neonate to give of his own blood or shed the blood of others at the behest of his sire.

House burglars use a peculiar death-magic charm to ensure that the entire household remains asleep while they go about their business. By placing a candle in a dead man's hand, they give uninterrupted slumber for his entire household.

This charm most likely arises from the ghoulish practice of preying upon the families of the recently deceased. In these cases, the body is most often laid out in the main room of the house. This magic might also be effected by murdering one of the inhabitants, or alternately, by paying a visit to one of the household's deceased relations in the churchyard.

Candlelight and candle magic also have a rich tradition that might be of concern to the Cainite. Both light and flame work a powerful, and often lethal, effect upon the Damned. Likewise, the gemstone amber is thought to be a great ward against evil, probably stemming from its power to "draw light," even in a darkened room. The magic of light and flame also call to mind the most menacing of all vampiric adversaries — the infamous torch-wielding mob.

Just as the folk beliefs of light and flame may work their powerful magics against the undying, the folklore of darkness and night can prove to be a formidable ally. On the night of the new moon, when all the world is in darkness, mortal rulers can be petitioned to grant a boon — a special gift or favor. Presumably, a Cainite prince might honor the same tradition.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Mortality runs rampant through Dark Medieval Europe. War, Plague, Famine, Death — the four dark riders — are not mythic characters of some distant prophecy, but rather, permanent residents of the third pillar. They live among the peasantry, preying on them daily.

The peasant firmly believes that the end is at hand, that the Apocalypse is upon him. What is more difficult to understand is that this belief is not seen as unusual, or even fanatical. Unlike 20th-century *Millennialism*, the Dark Medieval belief that all things are unraveling requires no great conviction to maintain.

Given the ravages sweeping Europe, this conclusion appears an obvious one. Man — the body, the physical, the earthly — is wicked and corrupt. The Lord is punishing man unto death.

The Cainite Apocalypse

Cainites have their own legends of the end of the world. While mortals look to the *Revelation* of St. John the Divine, the vampires have managed to rescue a number of other prophetic books from the ravages of time.

Perhaps the most famous of these works is the much-maligned *Book of Nod*. Cainite scholars have attacked the cryptic manuscript fragments on many fronts. The most damning criticism centers on the lack of continuity between this document and any known poetic, mystic or prophetic tradition.

In defense of the *Nod* fragments, it must be pointed out that given the academics' lack of any detailed knowledge about the lost culture of the First City, it is possible that the *Nod* verses are fine examples of some long-forgotten poetic and prophetic forms.

The dispute is further complicated by the fact that there are a number of known forgeries currently in circulation (the Metz Illuminated, the Ninevah tablets, etc.), which can bear little or no resemblance to the original text.

Besides these red herrings, many of the translations thought to be authentic have been purposefully obscured in order to conceal certain secret traditions. Throughout the ages, many sects, cults and secret societies have formed around the *Nod* lore. Each one has jealously guarded its sacred mysteries from the eyes of the uninitiated.

The serious scholar of the Cainite Apocalypse has to sneak up on the *Book of Nod*. The best way to gauge the value and authenticity of any particular fragment is by examining it in light of the other surviving prophetic works.

The fragment below is taken from the *Fall of Enoch*. It is not surprising that Caine, who is the protagonist in the vampire creation myth, has a prominent part to play in this story of the end of time as well.

To date, the main virtue that scholars have found in this selection is its unique glimpse of Gehenna — the final Kinslaying. Perhaps more important in these delicate times, however, are the disturbing images of Caine as the peasant exalted — the sower and reaper of his own kind. Here all things are inverted. The peasant has risen up and assumed the mantle of the vengeful master. It is not only his own childer who will fall beneath his wrath, but the very structure of our three-pillared society:

"This is the Endtime. This is the Fading of the Bluid.

"And in the last days the Master will once again take up his Tools. The Firmament will tremble and the Erth itself will be split asunder. The secret places of the Erth will be cast up into the air and the milky-white creatures of darkness will shriek in the light of day. For it is written that Abel was a keeper of sheep but Caine was a tiller of the ground.

"The First-Born comes in fury. He harrows his children from their graves. His wrath is like unto a hammer, an unhewn cudgel wet with the Bluid of the Kinslaying. He drives the lighting before him.

"His voice is a dark wind scouring the plain. At his word, the sky opens raining Bluid upon the furrows he has prepared. His childer raise expectant faces to the Hevens, but they are choked and drowned in the torrent of spilling life. Such is the price of their hungers.

"Only then shall Caine unyoke his red-eyed ox, whose name is called Gehenna for none may abide its countenance, and loose it to graze upon the Plain of Megiddo."

The Comet Wormwood

Evidence for the pending Apocalypse is ever close at hand. The *Revelation* foretells the loosing of the Comet Wormwood that will appear in the heavens during the final days. The comet is to be a harbinger of great and sweeping calamities — of seven "plagues" that will devastate the Earth. These disasters will eclipse even the seven plagues that Moses visited upon the land of Egypt.

In A.D. 1066, a fiery herald appeared in the night sky. It was Halley's Comet come round for its regular once-every-76th-year visit. As usual, it brought with it a great public outcry. Throughout Dark Medieval Europe, comets are associated with changes of monarchs, plagues, wars, floods and famines.

This visit proved to be no exception. Even the casual student of history recognizes 1066 as the year that witnessed the Norman Conquest of England. This conquest was, in fact, the second major foreign invasion that the island nation suffered that year.

Halley's Comet was not the only fiery omen to appear in the night sky and give birth to widespread rumors that the end was at hand. A great aurora was reported all across Northern Europe in 1192. Regions as far-scattered as Flanders, Gaul, Germany, England and Bohemia reported seeing its manifestations. Some reported a flaming sword or spear standing in the sky. Others saw ethereal armies clashing. Some perceived fiery serpents in the display of lights.

By far, the most common reaction to this phenomenon was the belief that a neighboring village was on fire. This was quite an understandable impression given the number of raiding armies ravaging the countryside. The wood-and-thatch peasant homes also have a tendency to succumb to the open flames that were their only source of heat and light.

The aurora was commonly believed to be the harbinger of the great famine of 1197. War, plague, famine and death are never far apart. For the peasant, mortality is a constant companion. It is not death that he has difficulty accepting. The revelation capable of shaking him to the core is the monstrous, blasphemous discovery of life everlasting — undeath.

The Communion of the Damned

The 12th century is not an easy time to be alive. It is not surprising that it is a particularly challenging time to be among the undying.

At first it may seem that the Cainites of this era have little to fear. They can stand unflinchingly before the advance of the Four Horsemen who lay low all of mortal kind.

The same act that takes a vampire beyond the reach of death, however, severs him from the hope of the life to come.

The Cainite is locked in a perpetual present. The greatest challenge of his continued existence is finding justification for this lingering present.

The fledgling vampire soon discovers that his mortal past is completely beyond his grasp. He can never go back and, as the years pass, even the reminders of those bygone days dwindle away. Old friends and relatives leave this world for the next. The familiar trappings — the tools, the furnishings, the buildings, even the landscape itself — all undergo dramatic transformations.

The stream of time is, ironically, both sluggish and turbulent as it passes before his eyes. The only constant amid the crashing waters is the vampire himself. There is a real danger that as the last vestiges of his human life slip away, his humanity will be lost as well.

With all the events of his past rendered irrelevant by the passing years, each Cainite must grapple with the question of whether or not his current actions will bear up under the scrutiny of time.

The Dark Medieval peasant is ill-equipped to wrestle with these particular inner demons. The angst, doubt and existential dilemmas so characteristic of the 19th and 20th century have little footing here.

These people like order, tradition and hierarchy. Society exists and works because God himself set it up that way for man's benefit. God provided the people with the nobility to look after all of their worldly concerns: to make sure everyone was fed, sheltered and protected. To guide men spiritually and gather them closer to Himself, God provided the Catholic Church. The Church is a pivotal force in the life of every man, woman, and child in Darkest Europe. It is an anchor.

Orders of Night

The solitary Cainite peasant is keenly aware of being cast spiritually adrift. Isolation plays heavily on him. The burden is made even heavier by the fact that during his mortal life he has known little or no privacy.

His entire mortal life has been ordered, and in many ways given meaning by, complex interlocking social hierarchies. It is not surprising then, that the Cainite peasant often tries to ease the pangs of exile by surrounding himself with other outcasts and creating his own power structure.

The highest level of this structure is occupied by the vampire's own brood. The Cainites of this age, however, are acutely aware that the scattered peasant villages of their domains can barely support and conceal the feeding of a single vampire. This constant awareness of the limits of the available blood supply makes the Cainite extremely reluctant to sire progeny.

This problem is compounded by the dynamics of the Cainite family. A wise Cainite never lets his childe wander far from his sight. "Keep your childer and your other enemies well within your reach," is a well-known Cainite proverb. In practical terms, the only areas that can support two or more vampires are the cities and towns.

In effect, creating progeny becomes the almost exclusive privilege of the aristocratic elite — the political infighters of Europe's largest courts. This arrangement is expedient for other reasons. These courtiers have the highest attrition rate of any of the undying.

The Cainite populations of these major cities are closely controlled by their princes. This measure allows the prince not only to maintain the delicately balanced predator/prey ratio, but it lets him preserve the political balance of power in his own court.

The right to create a childe is often a reward for performing some great service to the Crown. This practice ensures that as the prince prospers, his faction multiplies, making the prince more powerful still. A wise prince also uses this privilege to maintain the balance of power within his own camp, ensuring that none of his followers gains enough strength to make an effective bid for the throne.

The second level of the Cainite's power structure is composed of other Cainites who have sworn the prince fealty. The Cainite is often a being of greatly exaggerated self-importance. The power structure he creates around himself is almost exactly the same as that of a mortal king. While the ruling vampire princes of Europe's capital cities easily wield the power of a king or even an emperor, for most Cainites such a structure is rooted in pretense.

The top level of the hierarchy, the brood, is analogous to Europe's royal princes. These royal family members are the highest level of the nobility. The second level of the Cainite's power structure is the other Cainites who have sworn the prince fealty, analogous to the lords of the land.

The feudal oath among Cainites is a looser relationship than that of its mortal counterpart. Rarely do two vampires meet outside the context of a city. The Cainite domains stretch over large geographic areas. Strong centralized control over such far-flung and willful creatures is an implausibility.

THOSE WHO TOIL

Furthermore, each scattered domain is recognized as that Cainite's sovereign territory. There is more than a touch of irony to this admission. The vampires of the countryside are, by definition, living outside mainstream urban Cainite society. They are the outcasts, the outlaws, the pariahs — in short, the vampire peasantry. Even the *Rottebrittie*, the self-styled robber-barons who surround themselves with every luxury of the noble lifestyle are members of the third pillar. They are no more "sovereigns" than the mortal highwaymen are.

Intrusions within these rural domains are rare, and all encounters tend to be governed by the highly formalized system of hostright and guestright.

A host is expected to provide his guest victims for sustenance and a secure place to wait out the daylight hours. More importantly, the host is responsible to see that no insult or harm comes to his guest while the visitor remains in the host's domain.

The guest is expected to abide by the rules of his host's domain, to provide news of the lands beyond, and to join his host in any entertainment he might devise for them. Furthermore, the guest must not overstay his welcome nor offer any insult or harm to the host or any other within his domain.

Although the conventions of hostright and guestright may seem rooted in the genteel and chivalrous, these practices are most staunchly defended in the cottages of the poorest peasants. No one prides himself more on placing a feast before his guest than the serf who struggles to feed his family each winter. There is a certain nobility in giving generously — especially when the gift clearly exceeds the giver's means.

The relationship between host and guest is a solemn bond reminiscent of that between lord and vassal. The guestright is only terminated upon the visitor leaving the lord's domain, or upon the guest violating the hostright.

The visitor initiates the guestright by presenting himself promptly to the host upon entering his domain. The host cannot refuse without loss of honor and status, except in cases of a great wrong done him in the past by the Cainite on his doorstep. Even in these extreme cases, whether or not to honor the request for guestright is something of a moral quandary.

Other serious dilemmas might arise during the visitor's stay. If the guest were a fugitive from a neighboring domain, its lord might show up to demand that the offender be handed over to him. A messenger might arrive from the host's overlord instructing him that this guest should be cast out or detained. Two or more guests might come to blows, with the host responsible for seeing that no harm come to either of them.

These formalized codes of conduct tend to make most conflicts between the Cainite more of a battle of wits, politics and manners rather than a bloodbath.

Rural vampires who are joined in the feudal bonds will traditionally only see each other once each year, on one of the four great festivals. The most significant Cainite holidays are Pentecost and All Saints. It is traditional for the Cainite to celebrate one of these festivals at the court of his liege lord. A lord may alternately require his vassals to attend him for the Christmas or Easter feasts. These gatherings are an occasion for great ceremony, feasting and revelry.

Pentecost is the celebration of the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ's apostles. The Spirit came to them in tongues of flame and empowered them with the spiritual gifts that they would use to spread Christ's teachings to the rest of the world.

Pentecost is a time for embarking on new projects. A lord might set challenges and quests before his knights. Vassals might request boons from their overlord.

Contemplating the fiery gifts of the Spirit, many Cainites keep in mind the Dark Gift that courses like fire through their veins. Some are reminded of just how far from grace they have fallen and throw themselves into calculated evil and debauchery with renewed abandon. Others are reminded that any supernatural gifts carry with them grave responsibilities toward mankind.

The Pentecost feasts of the Cainite are easily distinguishable from their mortal counterparts. Although images of the holy flame are everywhere — tapestries, tablecloths, ornaments and garments display the pattern and colors of fire — woe to anyone who brings an open flame into a vampire's hall. In some regions, custom dictates that the candlesticks on the Cainite's table stay empty and inverted as a symbol of this ban.

The feast of All Saints is a celebration of redemption from darkness. It is significant that the revel of the Dark Medieval Cainite is not All Hallows Eve, a festival marking the closest point of proximity between the realms of the dead and the living.

The cavorting witches, ghosts and goblins of All Hallows Eve are not banished, but rather, transformed in the radiance of All Saints. They are revealed to be mere discontented mortals who seek profit through bringing misery and misfortune to their fellows. The light that reveals their crouched, twisted forms is the juxtaposition to those who have transcended the mere mortal through selfless sacrifice and service— the company of the saints.

All Saints can be a very humbling occasion for the Damned. Some Cainites go out of their way to avoid these festivities altogether. The recrimination is all too clear: Violence toward one's fellow man is the Cainite's only sustenance. The vampire is really nothing more than a corpse without sense enough to lie still.

Many vampires, however, are willing to suffer these unspoken accusations. It is a small penance for the atrocities they commit each night. Many take comfort in the example of the saints, that through grace and good works even the most Damned might be redeemed. Even if the Cainite believes the door of redemption is forever barred to him, he might aspire to become an exemplar, a dark angel leading others toward the light.

This kind of struggle beyond the threshold of hope is the stuff of which saints are made.

An Oath Beyond Death

A feudal bond between two Cainites does not imply the mystic Blood Oath. Although a vassal who is bound by the Oath is valued above all others, save progeny in the Cainite's power structure, most feudal relations are of the more mundane variety.

Among the Cainites, feudal bonds are most often just an acknowledgment of the superior power of a neighboring Cainite. If a vampire bests another in personal combat, the victor may demand that the vanquished immediately swear fealty or lose his life.

The voluntary method of swearing fealty occurs in a formal ceremony, often coinciding with the culmination of one of the great feast days. The new vassal places his hands between those of his lord, literally demonstrating that he has placed himself in the lord's hands. The lord then raises him up and greets him as an equal, demonstrating to those assembled that the vassal is not his servant, but his peer.

The vassal is now considered under the lord's protection and any that harm the servant risk the wrath of the master. The vassal is expected to support his liege, to give him news and council and to come to his defense when summoned.

Fellow Cainites are by far the most dangerous pawns that a vampire works into his power structure. Keeping such powerful and willful creatures in check is a constant struggle. Most of the immortal lords are relieved when their vassals return to their own scattered holdings at the conclusion of the festival.

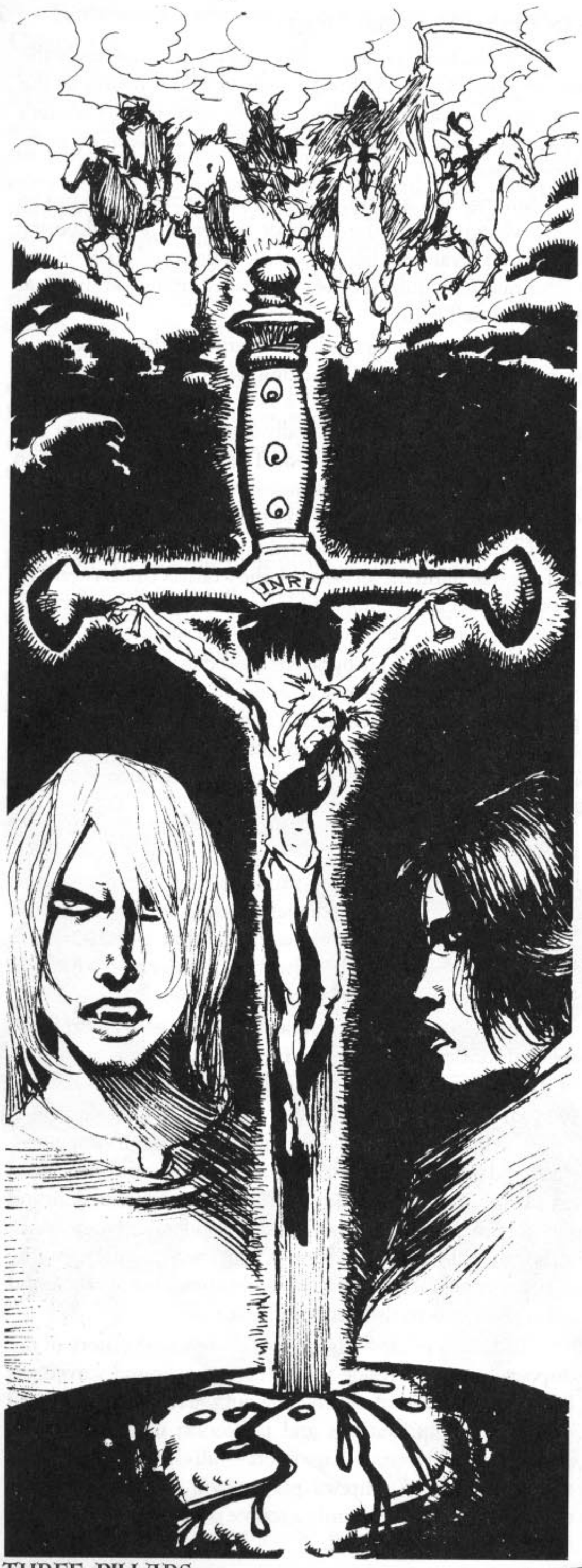
Dame Fortuna

In translation, Dame Fortuna is most often rendered "Lady Luck." In Dark Medieval Europe, we might use the literal "Miss Fortune." Fortuna holds aloft a great wheel. Representatives from each of the three pillars cling to its edge. Each rises and falls in turn as the wheel spins.

The Wheel of Life is populated with a host of colorful and subtly disturbing characters, each grand and tragic. The lifestyle of the rural serf might seem unromantic and somewhat limiting to the power-craving lords of the dead.

The burgeoning new urban areas provide many opportunities and viable character concepts for the Cainite. Journeyman artisans and craftsmen enjoy a greater measure of freedom and mobility than their agrarian cousins. Traders and merchants, although still seen as engaging in "dirty work," are beginning to come into their own with the establishment of overland and sea trade routes to the East and Near East.

The third pillar is also a veritable rogues' gallery of the dispossessed. Here reside the outcasts, freaks and scavengers living on the fringe of society. Uncounted refugees, lepers and pariahs; heretics, outlaws and poltroons; usurers, cripples, hags, beggars, hermits, village idiots — all cling precariously to the Great Wheel. Shrewd players will find among these colorful individuals not only a source of prey, but compelling character concepts as well.



THREE PILLARS

The Plague Cross

As plague and famine cast their shadows across Europe, a new and grisly realism creeps into even the most transcendent spiritual art. The plague cross depicts a skeletal Christ, each bone of his feet and ribs clearly visible. This symbol is a reminder that the harsh necessities of the peasant lifestyle infiltrate every aspect of the Dark Medieval European setting.

One of the most important factors to keep in mind when running a chronicle in Darkest Europe is that the role of the peasantry is far greater than just providing a host of memorable characters. The peasantry is so pervasive that it can be used as a tool to establish the entire tone of a specific locale.

Consider a group of characters entering a remote village for the first time. It is shortly after nightfall, not a soul is abroad. As they approach, a solitary horse gallops past, dragging its unresisting rider behind it. It then vanishes soundlessly into the wood.

This disturbing image will form the characters' first impression of the village. If the symbol is strong enough, it will color all of their subsequent impressions.

Each location within a chronicle should feature a unique and compelling central image. Many common sights that would not have caused a traveler to bat an eye can be used to haunting effect. The draping of a chapel for Lent, for instance, can produce a powerful reaction as each of the sculpted figures is covered in a shroud.

In the churchyard, one might come across a family picnicking among the tombstones. At night, lights in the churchyard might herald a mob gathering to exhume the corpse of one suspected of being a vampire. Witnessing the brutal ritual of decapitation and staking can be quite a disturbing experience for the Cainite.

An abandoned village can also have an eerie effect. Fields that sit untended with wheat rotting on the stalk can be played for great dramatic effect. Nor are the characters likely to forget the black-eyed child staring vacantly up at them from the bottom of the village well.

In areas suffering from famine, human meat might be found for sale in the marketplace. Flocks of dark children descend like crows onto the fields of corn. The shepherd dozing on the serene hillside might on closer inspection turn out to be a rotting corpse.

Even innocuous daylight activities become sinister under the cover of darkness. The farmer carting lye at midnight, two men playing cards in the woods by lantern light, a man burying a sealed jar — all give an air of uneasiness to the proceedings.

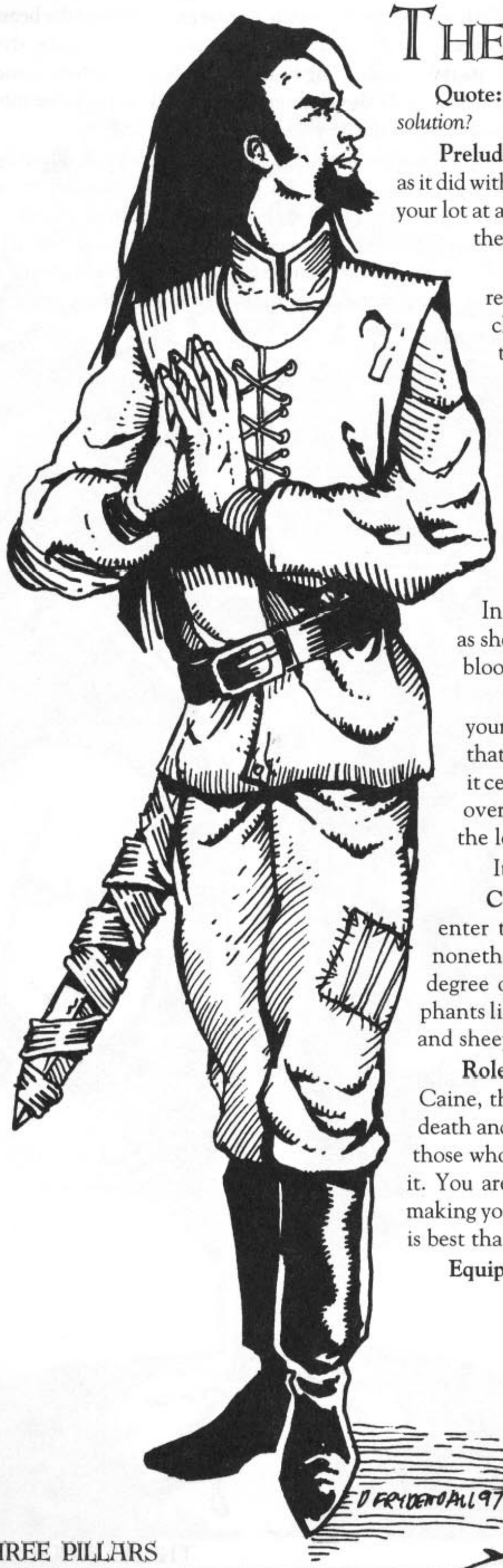
Common folk merely going about their business can take on ominous overtones. A farmer sharpening a plowshare, or a leper ringing a bell to warn of his approach, the servant setting an extra place for Death at the table's foot, can be as alarming as the cross or stake that repeatedly peeks from beneath a certain villager's garment each time he bends or shifts.

Storytellers should not hesitate to occasionally push this imagery into the realm of the surreal or fantastic. A farmer at the edge of the Black Forest might be seen sowing a field with goblin's teeth. An old man might whittle creatures that scurry away as soon as he sets them down. A cat might speak with the stolen voices of children.

Each of these initial haunting glimpses can also provide story hooks, embroiling the characters into the plot or foreshadowing later dramatic developments. The horse that rode through, dragging its rider, need not be merely a device thrown in for atmosphere.

Perhaps the characters can pursue and intercept the beast, immediately involving them in the plot. Furthermore, that horse, its rider, something in its saddlebags, or perhaps something stolen from them, should be central to the adventure that waits ahead in the village.

It is important to remember that in any Dark Medieval setting, the scene is always set by the peasantry. The peasants are so pervasive that they are both backdrop and Greek chorus — simultaneously setting the scene and interpreting it as well. The peasantry is a rich source of material to develop a strong sense of character, setting, plot and even theme that will enrich any chronicle.



The Lord's Man

Quote: *Your wisdom is fair and just, my lord, but might I recommend a more...final solution?*

Prelude: Backbreaking labor — a great deal of it — monopolized your youth, as it did with many of the other children in the castle's village. You grew to despise your lot at a very young age, and while working the fields you looked longingly at the castle and imagined the marvelous life surely therein.

Time did not improve your toil. Rather, it added to the work and responsibility you bore. Like any good man, you married and fathered children of your own, and put them to work in the same fields you tended as a youth, there at the very edge of town.

Fate had not finished with you yet, however; there were other blights in store for you aside from the mundane grind of peasant life. One night, you tarried too late in the field and failed to heed the setting sun's warning to retire indoors. As if forewarned of your nocturnal dalliance, a feral monster lurked just beyond the copse of trees at the end of your fields and in an instant, your menial worries were over...

...or they would have been, were your attacker less careless. In the struggle, you managed to wound the monster who slew you, and as she left you lying in the field and walked away, the tiniest drop of her blood found its way into your gaping mouth.

You arose from the site of your murder as a ravenous beast, and slaked your thirst on pigs and cows. After you regained your senses, you realized that someone would have to account for the animals' slaughter — and it certainly wasn't going to be you. You found a suitable patsy, turned him over to the lord that same night, and became a valued, loyal member of the lord's house for your efforts.

It is a position you keep to this very night.

Concept: Kings are always the first targets, but kingmakers never enter the assassin's list. Though you don't pull the lord's strings, you nonetheless enjoy privileges untasted by others, and you operate with a degree of legal autonomy. Of course, many other peasants loathe sycophants like you, and for very good reason.... You are a vulture among wolves and sheep, and you love it.

Roleplaying Hints: Though you are thoroughly Damned by the curse of Caine, there are others among the wretched flock of peasants who deserve death and torment at your hands. As God has cursed you, so shall you plague those who have escaped His notice — and make the best of your time doing it. You are cunning, clever and insidious, and this reputation follows you, making you unpopular among the other members of the third pillar. Perhaps it is best that you are under the lord's protection.

Equipment: Patched clothing cast-offs, shortsword, leather hauberk

Vampire™ The Dark Ages

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Survivor*
Demeanor: *Rogue*
Clan: *Gangrel*

Generation: *9th*
Haven:
Concept: *Lord's Man*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●○○
Dexterity ●●●●○○
Stamina ●●●●○○

Social

Charisma ●●●○○○
Manipulation ●●●●○○
Appearance ●●○○○○

Mental

Perception ●●○○○○
Intelligence ●○○○○○
Wits ●●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Acting ●○○○○○
Alertness ●●●○○○
Athletics ●○○○○○
Brawl ●●●○○○
Dodge ●●○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○○
Larceny ○○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○○
Subterfuge ●●○○○○

Skills

Animal Ken ●○○○○○
Archery ●○○○○○
Crafts ○○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○○
Herbalism ●○○○○○
Melee ●○○○○○
Music ○○○○○○
Ride ○○○○○○
Stealth ●●●○○○
Survival ●●○○○○

Knowledges

Academics ○○○○○○
Hearth Wisdom ●●○○○○
Investigation ●○○○○○
Law ●○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○○
Medicine ●○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○○
Science ○○○○○○
Seneschal ○○○○○○

Advantages

Disciplines

Fortitude ●●○○○○
Protean ●●○○○○
○○○○○○
○○○○○○
○○○○○○

Backgrounds

Generation ●●●○○
Influence ●○○○○
Resources ●○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Virtues

Conscience ●●○○○
Self-Control ●●●○○
Courage ●●●●●

Other Traits

○○○○○○
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Road

Humanity
●●●●●○○○○○

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

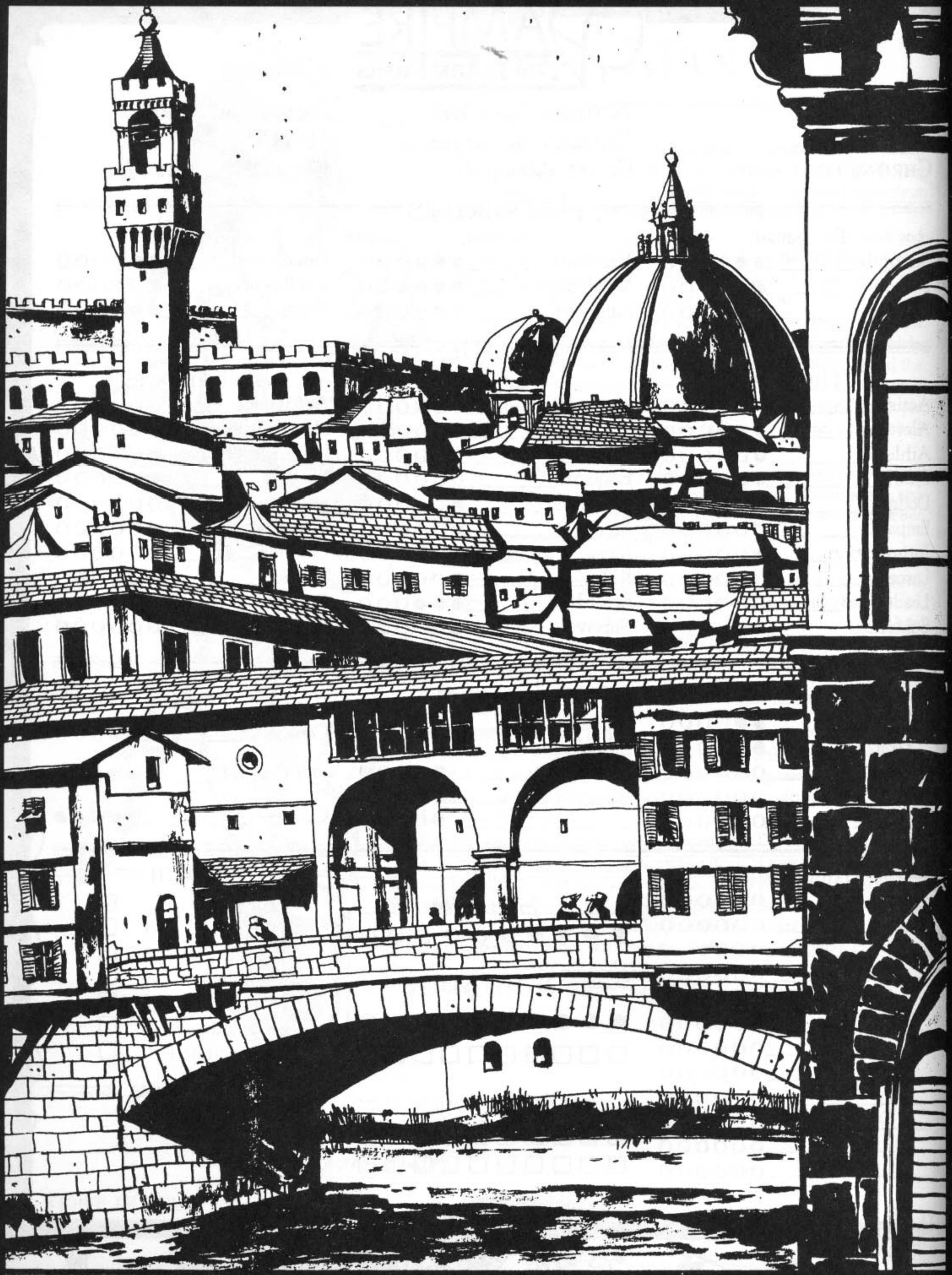
Blood Pool

□□□□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□□□□

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Weakness



Chapter Four: The Italian City-States

Full little he thinketh on my coming.

His mind is on fleshly lusts and his treasure...

–Anonymous, Everyman

Introduction: What Are the Italian City-States?

The Italian city-states are tiny nations. At the dawn of the 13th century, there are literally hundreds of city-states — some only a few miles across, a few respectably large — each a tiny, self-governing and fiercely patriotic republic, with its own sense of culture and history. They have town councils, administrative *podestà* and open-air assemblies. While far from egalitarian, the cities are the closest thing to functioning democracies (or at least oligarchies) in Dark Medieval Europe. The city-states are anomalies in a feudal world. Only the power vacuum between Imperial Germany and the Kingdom of Sicily makes their existence possible. Indeed, they thrive exclusively in the northern and central areas of the Italian peninsula. Many cities have recently been absorbed in name, if not in fact, by the newly ascendant Papal States. Vibrant, violent places, the Italian cities build marvelous cathedrals beside their town squares, elect councils, pass laws, wage wars — and fight to survive.

Powerful and quarrelsome magnates wrack the cities from within. Families fight each other in the streets, using mobs of dependents like armies, retreating to private towers when battles go badly. From without, the cities war with each other and countryside alike. Potent neighbors to the north and south threaten to disband their councils and return them to the shackles of feudal rule.

It is an exciting time and place to be mortal or Cainite. The future unfolds more rapidly here than elsewhere — and is more pliant to the hands of those who would shape it.

The Mortal Life

Cainites rule by night, but by day humans govern themselves. The achievements of the Italian city-states belong far more to mortals than to the children of Caine. Herein we explore the world of the living, the cities they have made for themselves, their manner of life, government and the customs that separate them from one another.

Anatomy of a City-State

Compared to you, Athens and Lacedaemon,
though civil cities, with their ancient laws,
had merely sketched the life of righteousness;
for you devise provisions so ingenious—
whatever threads October sees you spin,
when mid-November comes, will be unspun.

— Dante addressing Florence, *The Inferno VI*, translated by Allen Mandelbaum.

As a political institution, the city-state is a hodgepodge. No one designed the city-state; it grew into its present shape. At its heart is a peculiar institution known as a commune — a word that literally means "an association of people." A commune is a bit like a government and a little like a club. There are both urban and rural communes — but only the ones managing cities are important for our purposes. In the city-states, the term usually indicates not only all the people in the city, but their government as well. In fact, one might say the commune *is* the city-state and vice versa, except for one crucial fact: Not everyone in the city is a member of the commune. Usually only the eligible males of the main city belong to one, and it rules over not just the city itself, but the whole state, including the surrounding countryside and lesser towns.

Over time, communes have experimented with various organs of government. Until the 12th century, cities were represented by their bishops and a handful of the richer citizens. Now there are a plethora of different kinds of secular officials — from the more old-fashioned *consuls* to the newer *podestàs* and the lawyers and notaries who manage it all. Church bishops, meanwhile, have diminished in secular power — although they remain and always will be people of great importance.

The Assembly & the Council

In the earliest days of urban communes, when cities were small, it was still practical to gather all the adult male citizens into some sufficiently large, open space and hold a debate. Naturally, the more powerful citizens would sway much of the opinion — sometimes they even made most of the decisions by themselves. Such general assemblies, however, tended to be loud and fractious — imagine a thousand angry people all shouting at the top of their lungs! — and a more refined form of representation, the council, soon took over the daily business of government. In 1197, general assemblies are only called for the ratification of important decisions and on special occasions.

The makeup of the council varies significantly from city to city. In some cities, the council has only a handful of members; in others, several hundred. In some places, the council is elected, either directly or through an elaborate process. In others, the council selects its own successors. Members or electors are often chosen by lot. In some locales, a particular family or institution always has one or more councilors — or is banned from the council altogether. Variations are practically endless, and most communes change the rules of the game every few years, searching for just the right constitution, or to reflect changes in political influence.

The council, in all its myriad of forms, is the true governmental heart of any 13th-century commune. It decides everything. Most communes busily engage in the creation of their own civil and criminal codes of law, passing statutes as the need or the mood takes them. In cases where their own local law has no precedent, they usually turn to ancient Roman examples or to traditional customs. The council also regulates street plans, dictates the appearance of private buildings, supervises the construction of public works (such as walls, cathedrals and aqueducts), conducts foreign policy, hires the *podestà* and other officials, and decides on matters of war and peace.

The *Consuls*

The earliest executive office that the city-states created for themselves is the *consul*, so named after an ancient Roman office. The consulate is a nebulously defined post and the subject of constant tinkering in most communes. Sometimes there is one *consul*, sometimes several dozen. (Old Republican Rome had two *consuls*, so many communes flirt with that number.) *Consuls* are either commonly elected directly, by the acclimation of the people (this practice involves getting the whole city in a square, to cheer or boo as the spirit moves them) or indirectly, by the city's councilmen. In the latter case, the council selects the *consuls* and then presents them for approval in the assembly. Unless the crowd is markedly hostile, the *consul* will be proclaimed "elected" regardless of the actual cheering. Certain cities elect them by class, with a fixed number from each group. Because there are often multiple *consuls*, drawn from the wealthiest and most fractious classes, disputes between equal *consuls* are common, much to the consternation of the commune itself.

Consuls manage the city's finances, conduct negotiations and act as judges. (By 1197, many cities also have judicial *consuls*.) In times of war, they act as generals. Most city-states, however, place limits on a *consul*'s freedom of action. The assembly or council can often override a *consul*'s decision or remove him from office altogether.

The *Podesta*

Many communes have grown tired of the office of *consul* and its inevitable problems. These communes instead turn to a new office — that of the *podestà* — to solve their woes. A *podestà* is a single person, elected to serve as chief administrator of a commune. He is always hired from outside the commune himself. The *podestà*'s tenure is always short (six months to a few years) and there is usually a review of his performance before he leaves. The same person may never serve two terms in a row. In this way, the *podestà* is supposed to be impartial and incorruptible, even while control of the whole administrative apparatus is invested in his single person. The institution of the *podestà* becomes increasingly common in the latter decades of the 12th century and has almost entirely replaced the consulate by early in the 13th.

Communes usually invite *podestà* from other nearby cities. The *podestà*-elect is frequently a noble and has probably worked as an administrator or *podestà* elsewhere. (In fact, as this office becomes more entrenched, certain nobles start to work as professional administrators-for-hire.) Occasionally, another member of the candidate's family may be acceptable — "I can't work this month; will you take my son instead?" — as arranged between the candidate and the commune. If the official performs the job adequately, he might be hired again (once the waiting period has elapsed), perhaps even several times. On the other hand, incompetent or rebellious *podestà* can be summarily fired.

A *podestà*'s duties and powers are much the same as the *consul*'s, but there is only one *podestà*, and he is unquestionably the council's inferior.

THREE PILLARS

The *Popolo*

Part trade union, part political party, part militia and part revolution, the *popolo* is a state within a state. It is the organization by which the "middle-class" guildsmen defend themselves from the truly wealthy. At the turn of the 13th century, the *popolo* is still relatively weak. In most city-states, a *popolo* comes about when, fearing oppression from the magnates, the poor people in the city and the countryside form a kind of militia. In joining the *popolo*, an individual artisan or farmer agrees to fight (if need be) in the popular infantry. This defensive league has gradually accumulated peace-time functions. As the 13th century waxes, the guilds dominate the politics increasingly within the *popolo*, which meets in legislative bodies and passes regulations for its members. (The truly poor are excluded from *popolo* politics; it is run by the "middle class.") In some cities, the *popolo* has become so successful that it gets seats on the council by default. *Popoli* take an extremely hostile view toward the rich. Their statutes often dictate death (carried out by the *popolo*) against any noble who kills a member. On the council, they often push for greater numbers of *popolo* representatives, or even the total expulsion of all non-*popolo* members from government office. Thus, while the *popolo* protects the middle class (a rare thing in Dark Medieval Europe), it is also a constant source of friction (and violence) in communes where it is strong.

Siena: The Evolution of a Commune

Siena, a Tuscan hill-town, neatly illustrates the evolution of Dark Medieval town government and the nuances that Storytellers should be aware of as they research their chronicle's setting.

Until the 12th century, Siena was ruled by Carolingian or Lombard lords, but these lords, being remote from the city, gradually waned in power. The Sienese bishop, too, owned much of the local land and had a strong say in early town government. But by 1125, the most important local men, with the aid of *consuls*, ruled the city. In 1170, the *consuls* proved powerful enough to temporarily expel the bishop. The final blow for the bishop came in 1186: The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa tried and failed to subdue Siena by force. The siege ended with an official recognition of Siena's independence and a forfeiture of the bishop's land rights. The Sienese also took advantage of the occasion to replace their *consul* with a *podestà*.

The constitution was again rewritten in 1233, this time to accommodate the new power of the *popolo*. Its captain became an official officer of the state, and the council's number set at 24, half of which were members of the *popolo* and the other half *grandi*, or representatives of the rich.

By 1285, the *popolo* supplants the *grandi* altogether, removing them from government and creating a self-appointing council of nine, an arrangement that lasts until nearly the 11th century.

The *Contado*

Most city-states lay claim to the territory that surrounds them: fields, farmlands, castles, villages and even smaller towns. The countryside is indispensable to a commune; it is a tax base, a source of recruits and the producer of food. The city-states are currently engaged in a battle to expand the area they control. Most believe that they have a right to anything within the bounds of their bishop's diocese — regardless of existing feudal claims. This zone of influence is called the *contado*. If a city-state can, it forces existing counts, nobles and villages to voluntarily swear allegiance. Thus, the city itself becomes their feudal lord. Many communes engage in warfare against smaller cities or landed nobles, trying to snatch away property and power. It is common to find smaller communes within the *contado* of a larger city; these smaller cities have agreed to or been forced to give up their independence. They must often pay some tax or levy and accept a *podestà* nominated by their master city. Eventually, however, the major cities will find they have nothing left to subdue — and then they will be at each other's throats.

Inhabitants of the *contado* are at the mercy of the ruling town. Only rarely are they granted citizenship or a voice in commune affairs, and their lives and property are ruthlessly manipulated for the city's benefit. Starving farmers must watch their grain being hauled away for others to eat, while local artisans find themselves forced to trade exclusively with the mother town.

Guelphs or Ghibellines?

Two terms are ubiquitous in histories of Italy — Guelph and Ghibelline. They refer to succession crises of the Holy Roman Empire. "Guelph" is a corruption of *Welf*, a German family, and "Ghibelline" is a corruption of *Waiblingen*. Guelph and Ghibelline are labels, referring to a person's political sentiments. Guelphs are roughly pro-Papal, while Ghibellines are roughly pro-Imperial.

While the words do not come into common use until the mid-13th century, the sentiments they embody are very much alive by 1197. It is easy to see why: The Italian city-states are sandwiched between two strong powers — the papacy and the empire. City factions favoring one power or the other arise quite naturally, then they are perpetuated through family and national rivalry. If a city's ruling family is pro-Imperial, its opposition is likely to be pro-Papal. Likewise, if one city in a province is pro-Papal, its rival city is likely to be pro-Imperial. Things get complex when you consider that every "Ghibelline" city's opposition "Guelph" party probably has contacts or gets aid from other cities where "Guelphs" predominate.

Cruel Storytellers take note! You can embroil your players in rivalries — not just about local politics — but by what they casually say about an empire several hundred miles away.

Society in the City-States

Within a commune, the three orders of Dark Medieval society still exist, but the distinction between nobility and commoner is often blurred. In the communes, there exist nobles so poor that they must be given clothing suitable to their station, commoners who equip themselves as knights and guilds whose express purpose is to humble the mighty. Street corners bristle with fortified towers, and violence is everywhere.

The Nobility

Certain city-dwelling families come from noble lineages. Many hold extensive lands beyond the city walls and may possess their own castles or other traditional fortifications there. Some were once petty (or not so petty!) lords overtaken by the expanding commune's power. Many a lording has found that alliance or submission to a city-state offers advantages — hardly the least of which is continued possession of their property. Others come from the lesser orders of nobility — knightships and the like. They can ply their trades like everyone else in the city, though they are often considerably richer. Noble families of all orders have resided in the city for generations, if not centuries.

In the period circa 1197, nobles make up the majority of most governing councils, and it is from their ranks that important offices such as *consul* and judge are most often filled. Furthermore, nobles are currently the mainstay of a commune's cavalry. Horses and armor are expensive, and communes require the richer nobles to maintain a working set. However, the noble population is on the wane. The number of truly noble families appears to be shrinking; diminished, say the wags, by as much as a third or more.

Italian nobles are unique in that they do not disdain participation in trade. Many act as merchants or bankers, supplementing the income from their land holdings. The stigma for these un-noble activities is far lower in the communes than elsewhere in Europe, and, while many nobles deem trade as theoretically unworthy of their time, few abstain altogether.

The Wealthy

A new class of persons has begun to usurp the traditional prerogatives of the nobility — those who are wealthy but have no formal title. In practice, they are noble in all but name. They own land, engage in large-scale and long-distance trade, act as bankers, cultivate family reputations, and generally lord it over poorer folks. They have gradually acquired seats on the councils and filled offices of state. The wealthy, however, are often newcomers. The city-states have expanded rapidly throughout the 12th century; each new influx includes humble families that make their fortunes. The families are quickly, if grudgingly, absorbed into the ruling elites. Most governments admit all citizens of good reputation and a substantial income into that privileged circle known as "leading men" or "good men of the people." Such folk possess legal privileges above those of ordinary commoners — and special obligations as well.

In such an environment, the wealthy may easily gain noble status. One way is to marry into an older family, but this is not common. Another is for a family to simply invent "noble" origins for themselves — a form of self-aggrandizement. Recently, communes have knighted those commoners who can afford to maintain a horse and harness, the better to bolster the state's military might.

Naturally, the nobility detests wealthy commoners, but they usually cannot hinder the newcomers' rise or prevent their access to the organs of government. Besides, only a few generations need pass before the commoner family is accepted by the older blood of the city, and both can focus their hatred on the latest crop of newcomers.

Families and Their Powers

Now one day, [Michele Scalza] was with some friends of his at Montughi, and they happened to start an argument over which was the most ancient and noble family in Florence. Some maintained it was the Ubert, some of the Lamberti, and various other names were tossed into the discussion, more or less at random.

Scalza listened to them for a while, then he started grinning, and said:

"Get along with you, you ignorant fools, you don't know what you're talking about. The ancient and most noble family, not only in Florence, but in the whole wide world, is the Baronci....As you are aware, the older the family, the more noble it is, and everyone agreed just now that this was so. Since the Baronci are older than anyone else, they are ipso facto more noble...the fact of the matter is that when the Lord God created the Baronci, He was still learning His craft, whereas He created the rest of mankind after He had mastered it. If you don't believe me, picture the Baronci to yourselves and compare them to other people..."

— Boccaccio, *The Decameron* 6:6, translated by G. H. McWilliam

A commune's leading families — whether noble or common; whether there are four or 20, or only one, of them — dominate city life. A single wealthy family can own so much farmland and control so many jobs that supporters rally around them. A patron family is an employer, a guardian and a political party all in one. Bread for the poor, support for the oppressed, offices for the ambitious: These are all tangible rewards of service. And when the carrot does not serve, the stick often suffices. When the commune is weak, the rich can murder the poor with impunity and act without regard to law. When times are troubled or the commune strong, the rich can retreat to their urban towers and call mobs of followers to their defense. The poor have little choice but to accept whatever fate the rich give them.

Around the turn of the 13th century, before the *popolo* reaches full strength, the great families control the councils and other offices of government unchecked. In these small worlds, the network of extended family is a sure way to advancement and a ready source of political allies. Who can one trust, if not one's own father, brother or cousin? Politics within the commune are often marked by diplomacy or war between the leading families. They may make peace among themselves, allocating communal offices among themselves, or they may make war with each other, besieging their urban fortresses and murdering each other in the streets.

The Humble

The bulk of the populace consists of people of more vulgar professions. Much of the population own land or are engaged in agriculture; some, indeed, are little better than peasants, commuting daily to their fields, while others live off the proceeds of the small plots they lease to even poorer families. Others engage in crafts of one sort or another (smithing is very popular) or shopkeeping. It is extremely common for people to mix two or more of these activities. A man could, for example, be both an artisan and a covert moneylender, or a notary and a minor land-holder.

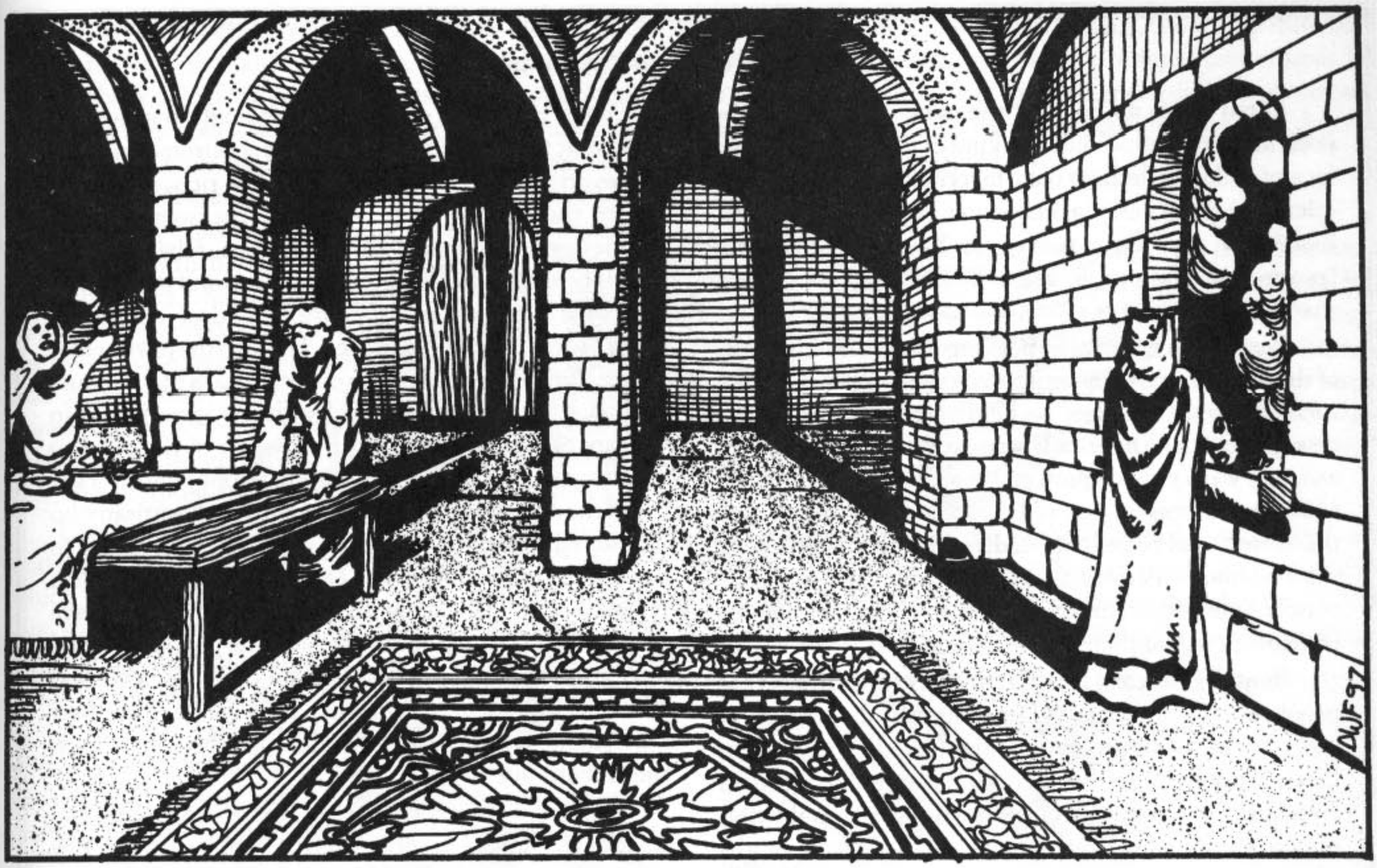
While ordinary citizens do not wield the power of the great, they nonetheless have many chances to participate in the political life of the city. Neighborhoods in the city offer posts as watchmen, supervisors of various public functions ("keeper of the streets!"), small advisory groups and the like. Most of the humble know everyone in the city by sight — including the great — and often have the ears of the patrons or are used as makeshift infantry for street warfare. Furthermore, many cities still possess a general assembly, which all citizens may (or must) attend. The mood of the crowd, the strength of their acclamations or the harshness of their silence often determines the course of public politics.

The Clergy

The clergy of the Italian communes are not much different than clergy elsewhere. In Rome, of course, the presence of Pope and curia means a higher proportion of clergy to laity and an increase in the clergy's political power. In years gone by, bishops played an important role as representatives of their respective communes. Now the *podestà* and *consuls* have mostly usurped the position of city executive. In all cities not under interdict, however, life goes on, and the clergy, the educated, elite, undisputed spiritual guardians, go about their daily work of Mass and saving souls.

Family

Italian family is unabashedly patriarchal and patrilineal — the oldest living male is the head of the family. This *paterfamilias* controls all the money and family property. What is more, he rules over his wife, his children, his grandchildren and sometimes even his younger brothers and sisters. A husband controls his wife's dowry and any property she brings into the family. A father manages his sons' incomes and even decides what professions they may or may not pursue. If they rebel, he can have them thrown into prison. It does not matter how adult any of these people become — grown children and grown grandsons are still subject to their patriarch's authority. The only escape is marry into some other family (if you are woman), or to wait until the old man dies (if you are a man) or to move far away (if you are either).



Bear in mind that not only do moralists consider this restrictive arrangement right and proper, so do most "ordinary" people. Many hope that by behaving justly toward their elders, they may one day be treated well by their children (or at least, go to Heaven). In the meantime, the *paterfamilias* can manage the family's resources to help its members. He can use these resources to help a struggling cousin, pay for a grandson's education or advance the family business. The converse, of course, is that he can arbitrarily punish sons or daughters that he dislikes. Few like to think about the possibilities. (Thus, the likelihood of patricide is probably higher than it would be otherwise.)

Family unity goes beyond the institution of the *paterfamilias*. Married sons often live with their wives in their father's house. Even when the father is dead, young brothers often live together in the same household after marriage, so as to keep family wealth together. Even after they part ways, brothers and cousins often pool their wealth, so as to keep the family strong. Such measures are necessary in a hostile world.

The Blood Feud

Families protect their own. The blood feud is a living tradition in Italy. Harm one member of a family, especially an important one, and you have gained a lasting enmity. Warring families may murder their enemies in the street or take other acts of vengeance. And, of course, each blow is met...which leads to more violence. When the combatants are rich, with many dependents, the results can be particularly devastating — which is why most rich families' houses are fortified like urban castles. Violence is thus endemic to the city-states and murder is common.

Work

Most work in the Dark Medieval city-states is done from the home. Artisans tend to keep their workshops and storerooms in their house or in a series of rooms in the same building. Typical domestic activities such as spinning and weaving can easily slide over into commercial ventures. Bankers, moneylenders and the like keep their books and money in the house — where else would they be safe? The obvious exceptions are farmers, who must commute to their farms (a peculiarity of the Italian city-states), and merchants with substantial, bulky stock to store and transport.

Friends

People of the city-states form other associations. Young folk gather with others of their own sex. Unmarried women go to church together (or partake in other reputable outings). Underaged men have more freedom, often forming cliques or even violent gangs. (Such roving hoodlums are a danger day and night.) Older men and women may have similar (if less formally organized) societies. Entire families may associate with each other, buying a fortified house together or agreeing to support one another in all things. Finally, dice games, illegal but tolerated, are a common way to spend one's few hours of spare time.

The Guilds

Guilds are just starting to come into power and prominence in the communes. Most major crafts have guilds, as do the Judges and Notaries. Italian guilds engage in the same self-regulation and monopolistic practices as do guilds elsewhere in Europe.

Common Professions

Listed below are some of the more common professions in a city-state — just the kind of thing that's handy for a prelude, for fleshing out a favorite ghoul or even just spicing up the occasional encounter on the night streets. Remember, too, that a person can have more than one "profession," and people in communes often have more than a single source of income.

Peasant: In Italy, many peasants live within the walls of the nearest city, commuting daily to their fields. Sometimes the walk can take an hour or more — a tedious arrangement, but the price is often worthwhile. In times of war, city walls provide protection, and, as a citizen of the *commune*, a peasant can often escape feudal duties. For this reason, and because its leaders are often landholders, the communes periodically restrict immigration. Conversely, in uncertain times, communes will forcibly import peasants to secure their own grain supplies.

Rentier: Basically a landlord, a rentier charges other people to use her property. Depending on the amount of property she owns, the rentier might live like a queen or barely eke out a living. People of all classes and genders can be rentiers; a wealthy merchant might own several buildings, a peasant a field and cottage; a noble, whole swaths of countryside; a widow might mind her dead husband's property.

Artisan: The term artisan covers a wide range of crafts — pottery, smithing, tanning, etc. Each craft has an attendant guild that organizes its members and fixes wages and prices.

Merchant: A wealthy class, Italian merchants may be found all over Dark Medieval Europe. Merchants typically travel much, carrying their products with them. Most trade only in a well-defined area around their own town, and deal mostly in commodities (foodstuffs and the like). Others deal with the exotic Muslims, exchanging spices and gold for European cloth. The overseas trade is risky, but extremely lucrative.

Moneylender: Yet another seemingly narrow category that turns out to include a wide spectrum of people. Not everyone who lends money need be rich, or need to rely on the practice for their living. True, some wealthy families establish houses all over Europe, relying on the trust inherent in the familial bond to lend and loan money over wide distances, and often they also deal in letters of credit or other forms of assurance. Through the townhouses of a single family, travelers can deposit gold in Flanders and exchange a certificate for gold with the same family in Tuscany, thereby alleviating themselves of the need to carry money with them. Such banking is one reason for the *rise of the city-states*. Yet, equally typical is the artisan who occasionally lends a few silver coins every so often to peasants or to her neighbors. The Church frowns on such practices, calling them usury, but most moneylenders have found ways of staying out of trouble. One popular method is to figure the total price of the loan (with interest) into a document of debt; no one may then check to see how much money was actually lent, although they can witness the amount due.

Notary: A notary witnesses and records legal and trade agreements. His records might then be called for by officials at some later date. Most Italian cities boast a host of part-time notaries, few of whom are noble. Notaries tend to be inveterate politicians and often sit in as observers and commentators at council meetings.

Judge: This term typically designates not an appointed official, but a lawyer. "Judges" must master not only the many (sometimes an absurd number) laws passed by their own communes, but also old Roman law, which most cities use to supplement local law. Judging is a rich person's job — who else would have the time and education to carry it out? Judges are typically the sons of the nobility but trained as secular clerks, rather than as knights or as clergymen, and this, combined with their work's importance, makes them especially powerful.

The Physical Environment

Every city-state is different. Each has its own artistic traditions, its own landmarks, its own effect on the eye. Nevertheless, city-states have a certain basic anatomy. All cities have places where people congregate: where they worship and where they live. These locations have an enormous influence on the lives of the local folk, shaping the way they think and talk. Just as the mall and the interstate define 20th-century suburbia, so, too, do the *duomo* and *piazza* define life in a commune. What follows is the archetype of a medieval Italian city. Many cities differ from it in the particulars, but as a generalization, it allows one to begin to understand what life in a commune is all about.

The Basics

Medieval Italian cities are, by 20th-century standards, small.

Most have under 20,000 people. Almost anybody of any consequence knows everybody else of consequence. People see their leaders almost daily, passing them in the street and knowing them by sight. Patrons probably know all of their dependents personally. Anonymity is hard to come by. Within one's own class and city quarter, at the very least, people can put a name and family history to every face. It's much like small-town life anywhere. Gossip travels unimpeded, rumors circulate and rivalries flourish for generations.

All activity is crammed into a tiny space. A person can walk across even the largest commune, going from gate to gate, in a half hour or so. City walls are extensive, and nobody really wants to be stuck outside if there is a siege, so the tendency is to make existing buildings taller rather than expanding the city horizontally. (There are exceptions, of course; some cities build spacious walls, expecting a corresponding increase in population. They may then be stuck with idle land they cannot use in upcoming years.) Such congestion leads to disease and filth. Sewers disappeared with the Romans. The place for garbage is the street; urine and feces rain down once the chamber-pot is full. Wild animals, like rats and dogs, make their living off human waste. Lice and fleas spread sickness to the people, and there's often dysentery in the water. The stench is indescribable, though (presumably) the inhabitants are used to it.

Paradoxically, life in a city-state is still closely tied to the outlying countryside. Most cities are surrounded by farmland, which residents work themselves. Only rarely do even the largest cities have to import food from outside their own *contado*. Many of the rich maintain expensive country houses beyond the walls. Regardless of class, the natural world is never far away.

City life has its own special dangers. In times of war, a rich or populous city attracts armies like flies to offal, and even the highest and thickest walls cannot prevent the inevitable starvation that accompanies a siege. A conquered city can expect little mercy; only if the city actually surrendered could the inhabitants expect to escape with their lives or property. In all other cases, an invading army is free to do with the city and its inhabitants as it wishes. Usually, this means three days of raping and looting, the capture of important citizens for ransom and the murder of most other city-folk. In peacetime, danger comes from fires (which can gut an entire city), disease, random violence and robbery.

The *Piazza*

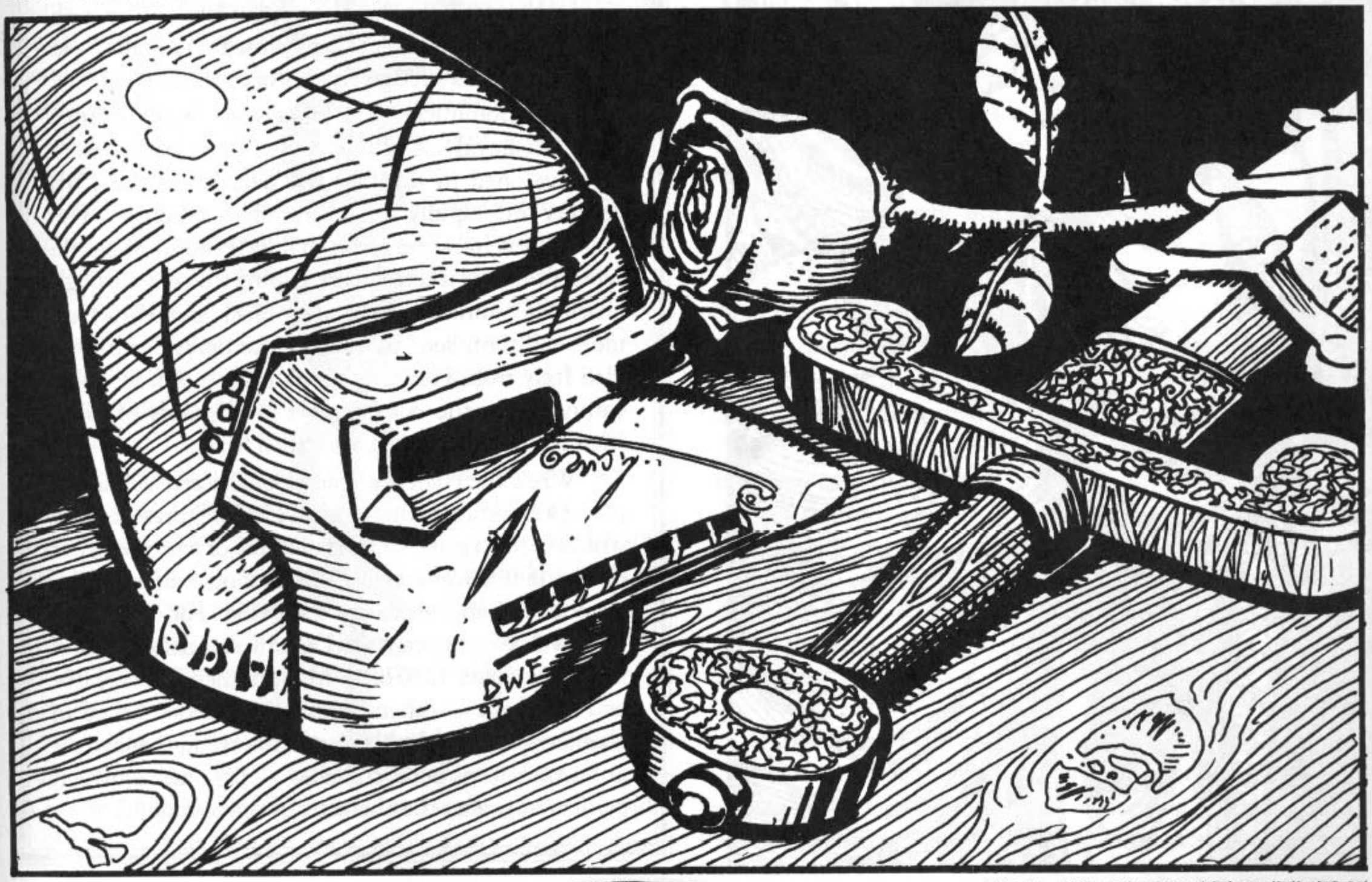
A *piazza* is an open space or square in the city. Most cities have a large *piazza* for the whole community, and maybe a few smaller ones here and there. They are good places to meet people, hold gatherings, sell wares or just escape the omnipresent claustrophobia of the streets for a time. Sometimes *piazze* are the scenes for festivals, assemblies or public tortures and executions. The *piazza* is usually swept free of garbage daily.

The Councilhouse

Communes love to flaunt their wealth. Many of them build huge, highly decorated councilhouses. Inside are rooms often covered in murals for receiving visitors or for deliberating. The outside is generally as fine and embellished as the city can afford.

The Cathedral and Other Churches

Cities pride themselves on their cathedral (or *duomo*), trying to outdo each other in the size and magnificence of their main church. The idea of magnificence, however, varies from place to place. Pisa has an enormous gray and white Romanesque church at its center, while Venice's San Marco is a dazzling Byzantine mass of domes and colored stones. Nevertheless, Italian churches tend to be more colorful than their



THREE PILLARS

French or German counterparts. Horizontal striping and multicolored marble are common in the Romanesque churches; mosaics are popular in the older Byzantine-style churches. Most cities have rebuilt their cathedral earlier in the 12th century, are rebuilding it now, or plan to do so in the near future. Cathedrals are ongoing projects, not finished masterpieces, and the work often halts for months or years on end. It almost never interferes with regular worship.

Still, a *duomo*, for all its grandeur, is rather impersonal. While the *duomo* is the focus of important ceremonies and the seat of the bishop, the average citizen more often worships in a smaller, friendlier, local church. These, too, lie scattered over most of the city, usually one for each neighborhood. Such humble churches may be harder to find: Unlike the great basilicas, their façades are often flush with nearby houses.

The Coming of the Mendicant Orders

The mid-13th century also sees the raising of the first Dominican and Franciscan churches. Each mendicant order builds huge, austere buildings. As befits the mendicant orders, these plain churches have only a modicum of decoration, a simpler interior and vaulting scheme, and they tend to be of brick rather than stone. Because of the rivalry between the Dominicans and Franciscans, their churches tend to be on opposite sides of the city — so that the rival orders will see each other as little as possible — and close to the walls — so as not to infringe on the territory of the bishop's clergy.

The Dominican and Franciscan orders change Dark Medieval city life forever. Both orders were commissioned in the first few decades of the 13th century and rapidly spread throughout Europe. The Franciscans (wearing brown habits) tend to be gentle types, primarily interested in helping the poor through charity. Dominicans (who wear black and white) are more militant, sent to combat the heresies filtering into Italy from France. There's even a pun in Latin calling them the *domini canes* — Hounds of God. Members of both orders are called friars.

While the Franciscans and Dominicans will not be part of a chronicle taking place in 1197, a Storyteller who wishes to run a game set at a later time or who wants her chronicle to cover several decades should alter the descriptions of an Italian city somewhat. For one thing, there will be Franciscans and Dominicans in the streets of most towns after 1230 or so. Many of them actually live and beg there — others, especially later on, attend to chapter houses and the like. Furthermore, the Franciscans and Dominicans build churches — big ones — which permanently alter the character of the commune.

The Baptistery

Closely connected with a commune's cathedral is its baptistery. Usually roundish buildings, baptisteries contain fonts of water that are used to baptize children. Naturally, each Christian need be baptized only once — but so will each of their siblings, cousins, children and neighbor's children. For this reason, and especially because of the importance attached to being a godparent, the baptistery is an important part of everyday life. Godparents have easier entry into the household — they become, as it were, surrogate family. Even families of different status can become joined this way. Cities often lavish money on their baptisteries: Florence's and Pisa's are particularly grand.

Houses and *Palazzi* (or What's in My House?)

The quality and comfort of the housing to be found in the communes varies greatly depending on what a person can afford. The rich live in enormous three-story brick palaces with adjoining towers. The poor live in tiny wooden hovels. Furthermore, in housing of all types, furniture is fairly sparse, and the standard of living is crude — welcome to the Dark Medieval world!

In the countryside, the poor live in tiny cottages (much as peasants do everywhere). Most of these cottages are of cob, though more affluent peasants can afford wood, brick or even stone. If the cottage has one room, then food, animals, beds and firepit are all packed in together. If, however, there are two rooms, the first is inevitably a common room (or *sala*), while the second is almost always a bedroom (or *camera*). Third rooms are less common; sometimes they become storerooms, or second bedrooms, or kitchens. Furniture for the poor usually means a bed, a few cooking or farming tools, plus possibly a chest or a chair and table.

In the city, the poor tend to cluster together in the "bad" part of town. Many dwellings are practically huts: very small and made of wood or even cruder material. These buildings are much like their counterparts in the country — only smaller and more expensive to rent. Also, the tight streets mean less room to dispose of one's garbage; so disease is even more prevalent than in the countryside.

Another form of housing is the apartment building. These tend to be large wooden structures, subdivided into smaller rooms. Usually a family can afford only one or two of these chambers, which may not even be on the same floor. Even more than in the countryside, one finds ridiculous numbers of people crammed into inadequate space — but usually for a span of only a few months. Then the lease expires, and the family moves on to some other building, replaced by someone else equally unfortunate.

A well-to-do guildsman may rent either a well-lighted suite or floor of rooms along the front of a building, or lease an entire small house. Such persons usually maintain multiple bedrooms, a kitchen, a common room, and perhaps a workshop, storeroom or study. Their furniture typically includes tables, chairs and various tools. Chests (rather than closets) are the main means of storage and usually remain close to their owner's bed, both for easy access and to keep anyone from stealing her things during the night.

The houses of the rich are called *palazzi*. These buildings are almost always of brick or stone and are large enough to consume an entire block. They tend to be crenelated, gated or otherwise defensible, and often have attached towers.

It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly what class of people are housed in the building you're looking at or who's living there. Some cities require that buildings meet certain criteria — or even conform to a standard appearance. ("You must build out of brick, have no overhangs greater than three feet in width, and always have rounded-glass windows with two columns!") Even when buildings are left entirely unregulated, the pressures of city life and overcrowding force buildings to take on the same square appearance. Even the richest houses often have shops along the ground floor. Furthermore, the same building can house people of all stations. The front of the building gets the most light; if rented, these choice rooms fetch higher prices. Interior courtyards, however, are often dark (or smoky, if the courtyard doubles as a kitchen) — poorer rooms are located here. Thus, both peasants and guildsmen may share a building and barely notice each other.

Personal Towers

The skyline of any city or village bristles with chunky towers. These square, chimney-like buildings are not public defenses, but privately built fortifications. They tend to be quite tall, several stories higher than the highest house. Certainly, most families try to build towers higher than those of their rivals. Most towers are rectangular-shaped, and made of sturdy brick, capped with battlements or overhangs, and rise over the skyline like artificial mountains. They often have little holes in their sides, left over from construction, when wooden scaffolding was supported in the masonry. Such towers can often only be entered by a second-story doorway. In times of urban war or blood feud, defenders can drop objects or fire arrows on their enemies. Also, if rival towers are side by side, combatants may try to build bridges and cross over. The urban tower is a discomforting reminder of the dominance of the strong over the weak. They are symbols of family wealth and power — the city-states, knowing this, sometimes destroy the towers of renegade families or restrict the height of buildings as a sign of their own authority.

The City by Night

The city-state presents a stark face to the night.

Nocturnal wanderers meet few people abroad in the streets. Most folk rise early in the morning and go to bed as early as the sun sets, so as to take maximum advantage of the

daylight. Even night-owls do not venture out of houses easily, for the communes enforce strict curfews after dark. Thus, guardsmen are the only pedestrians one is likely to encounter, although the diligent searcher may also find an occasional crowd gathered to gamble by the light of a candle. The darkness, too, may present an obstacle, as there are few streetlamps, and moonlight often cannot reach the high narrow streets.

Buildings of all sorts are closed at night. Even church doors are commonly closed and barred. Scrabbling at the sealed, leaden windows will only wake the priest inside or in the outbuildings. Houses most certainly will not be open: Locks are rare, but bars are common. Doors and windows cannot be picked silently — only forced open brutally.

The only saving grace is that people pay so little attention to screams....

The Italian Cainites

The urban centers of Italy hold a special attraction for Cainites. The city-states — strong, populous, autonomous — hearken back to the first cities Cainites ever knew. The First and Second Cities resonate in the mythology of all Cainites, and the cities of the Roman Empire still loom tall in the tales (and even the memories) of vampires. When Cainites, especially those who have known nothing but country living, first see the Italian cities, they often (and quite irrationally) feel that they have come home.

The Italian communes are in truth hardly vampiric paradises. The cities' rapid rise to power has attracted more Cainites than the mundane population can support. Havens and hunting grounds are hard to find. Old quarrels threaten to tear Cainite society asunder, and even the wiliest of elders find themselves lost in the face of rapidly changing mortal society.

Consiglieri

The office of *consigliere* is unique to the Cainite culture of Italy and Sicily. Many cities and *contados* do not have actual vampire princes *per se*. Rather, the governing Cainite is often appointed by the prince of a more powerful city as a reward for faithful service, as a near-feudal endowment or just as a way to get a troublesome vampire out of the way.

Cainites in these positions of "sub-princedom" are known as *consiglieri*, and they often rule their smaller establishments with the same policies as the princes who put them there. After all, that which has been granted may just as easily be taken away....

Territory

Vampiric unlife is spread unevenly throughout the *contado*, engaged in a vicious fight to survive in the face of its own overpopulation.

The city itself is both prime hunting ground, and the seat of political power throughout the *contado*. The commune is the seat of the prince, the source of her power, and she often populates it with childer and ghouls. Yet, it is also the home of other elders, perhaps collectively more potent than the prince, even if their power is often wasted in feuding amongst themselves. They, too, have their flunkies and childer. Finally, there are the wretched hangers-on, the childer of childer, or Cainites who have wandered in from the countryside. A typical Italian city cannot support them all. Therefore, the lion's share of territory and food go to those in power: the prince, the elders and their cronies. Princes (supported by the elders) typically try to keep the number of other Cainites low — through proclamation, purge or exile. Most cities have a population of "floating" Cainites, constantly on the edge of starvation and always in fear of a crackdown by the prince. The exception to this rule is often the Nosferatu. They have their own ways of punishing clan members who create neonates — and they keep the dark alleys clear of interlopers. Princes usually leave them alone (and, indeed, are often incapable of challenging them underground).

Necessity forces most Italian Cainites to reside in other locales. Most *contados* boast smaller towns of varying sizes, each subject to the main commune. Sometimes these towns have their own princes, sometimes not. Regardless, the hegemony of power works in much the same manner as in the main city: Powerful Cainites have free run. Others must hide and make do. The many farming villages and suburbs of the countryside also offer sustenance. The truly desperate can try living in the wilderness and drinking the blood of beasts.

The Ghoul Families

The all-encompassing Italian family extends into unlife. Many powerful Cainites maintain close contact with a mortal family, acting as its patron or even as its *paterfamilias*. Such Cainites often select members of the family to reward with their blood. A gift of vitae at precise moments can cure ailing allies of diseases or wounds, prolong the life of a favored servant or give street soldiers an advantage in combat.

Italian Cainites often Embrace from within the family. This can result in some problems, especially if the neonate was well-known in life, but it also has its own advantages. The new childe usually finds the transition to unlife exceptionally easy, as devotion to sire and clan is an extension to family loyalty, requiring no conflict of interest. The childe has simply moved on to serving his family in a new role. The greatest problems with childer — confusion and divided loyalties — are, thus, already solved. And although these childer tend to have a rather parochial view, they too will come to see subsequent generations of their family as tools rather than associates.

The existence of ghoul families is a misunderstood "open secret" in most cities. Every humble artisan may know, for instance, that the patriarch of the Induco family has lived for far too long, that the weavers on the corner have the evil eye, that Pietro the monk never seems to get sick, or even that although Andreas is supposed to be dead, one sometimes sees his "ghost" walking the streets at night. What mortals cannot do is distinguish the ultimate source of these gifts — or tell fact from rumor. Often, people will think a person has "magic blood" when, in fact, she is simply naturally long-lived, eccentric or perceptive.

Such tight relationships between Cainites, ghouls, and mortal families, common in Dark Medieval Europe, survive in a few scattered lines such as the Giovanni, Grimaldis and Szantovich.

More information on the ghouls, families and ghoul families may be found in **Clanbook: Cappadocian**, **Libellus Sanguinis I: Masters of the State** and **Ghouls: Fatal Addiction**. More information may also be found in the following book, the title of which does not bear a colon: the **Storytellers Handbook to the Sabbat**. We just like colons.

The Urban Haven

It is difficult to find a good haven in the city. Mortal tenements are poor places to hide: Rooms are small, walls are flimsy, people love to gossip and the neighbors are in an excellent position to watch people come and go. The streets are narrow and usually crowded. Even the slightest peculiarity in a pale stranger will likely be noticed immediately. In the countryside, Cainites can usually find caves, abandoned buildings, or isolated cottages, but a city has no wasted space. Still, the concentration of blood makes a city irresistible, and Cainites adopt a number of different strategies for hiding themselves in the cramped urban environment.

Rich Cainites can always take the easy way out by building themselves suitable havens from scratch. The average *palazzo* is luxurious enough to suit any vampire; one of its myriad of rooms can easily be bricked off, forming a completely lightless chamber. Other Cainites prefer to put their bed in the cellar, where it is less likely to be affected by fire or sunlight. For those who cannot afford an entire house, a suite of large contiguous rooms is often the wisest course, although, since there are *always* neighbors, the risk of discovery is greater. Any house of substantial size needs to have a visible resident who carries out normal daytime activities. Therefore, rich vampires often allow a favorite ghoul (or family of ghouls) to assume nominal ownership of the house and to keep their own Cainite presence as secret as possible. Cainites wealthy enough to pursue such lifestyles are likely to be old and paranoid — yet, able to maintain one or more emergency havens.

Poorer Cainites have fewer options. They can rent or own one of the numerous thin-walled shanties that huddle in the poorer areas of town, but since these usually have only two rooms, both of which probably have windows, they may be

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unsuitable. Furthermore, it is easy to count the number of residents going in or out such a dwelling, or to overhear the voices inside. If these do not tally, neighbors may catch on. Suspicions and jealousy may also be aroused if only a single renter moves in, as these buildings typically house entire families. Cainites can also risk living in a tenement building, though this foolhardiness is bordering on suicidal, even with the aid of Dominate, Obfuscate and an entire family of retainers. The truly destitute must live on the streets, hiding themselves in a different place each night: in garbage, in warehouses, under construction materials or in the earth itself.

Sometimes the countryside or an outlying village is a safer choice. The wilder parts of the *contado* offer all the usual hiding places — and they might even be safe from the Lupines. Villages have greater space between buildings and uninhabited sheds and outbuildings. Even the city walls might have their refuse-pits, hollows in the masonry and underground culverts. Affluent Cainites might find rural villas attractive havens. All of these options have the same disadvantage — the hungry vampire must find some way to enter the city each night or accept slim pickings in the country.

Finally, the city may offer Nosferatu and other underdwellers a variety of labyrinths to choose from. Many communes build networks of fountains and aqueducts to supply their city with fresh water. (Siena, in particular, is rumored to be as miraculous underground as above ground.) Unbeknownst to mortals, these systems also often sport dry chambers, raised platforms and other makeshift refuges (thanks largely to the Nosferatu who quickly Dominate masons sent to modify the ducts). Surface fountains, especially large and elaborate ones such as Siena's Fontebrandi, act as gateways into and out of the system, and the aqueducts provide conduits to the remote wilderness. Unexplained deaths and disappearances often take place near the fountains at night at the claws of canny vampires.

Cainites and Politics

Cainite influence permeates all of communal society. Exactly where Cainites ply their Disciplines and influence depends on personality and opportunity as much as anything else. If one has the money and connections, any class has its own merits as a sphere of influence. The Cainite who controls the city's weaver may not have much prestige and live in some pretty awful places, but she could bring the city's lucrative cloth industry to a grinding halt if she so chose.

The appeal of wealthy noble and non-noble magnates is obvious. They control much of a city-state's property and commerce and are the driving force in politics. A Cainite who hides among them receives the best of all worlds, or so it seems: ready control over the mortal world, abundant material possessions, and a luxurious unlife. However, so desirable is this position that weak Cainites often find themselves unable to maintain it. There are only so many noble families to go around — and if both an elder and a neonate wish to control one, the elder surely wins out.

A group of artisans does not have the prestige of noble family, but it offers its own subtle rewards to the Cainite who takes the time to assume control of it. A single industry may make up the mainstay of a commune's trade. Cainites who have leverage over industry production always have a ready supply of money and political capital. The money comes from Dominated or ghoul servants; the political power arises from threatening to use the industry against some other Cainite. Even a small but essential group, potters for instance, can be worth controlling. The prince might never come begging for a favor — but every once in a while, there will be some money skimmed from ceramic sales, and maybe, just maybe, some elder may wish to use certain contacts in a scheme. That's when they bargain.

The clergy of Italy presents the same rewards and dangers as that of everywhere else. In times gone by, the bishop of a city acted as its primary negotiator and power figure. Subordinate towns would swear allegiance to him, and embassies would meet with him. No longer. The Bishop might still have a ceremonial place beside the *consuls* in some towns, but by 1197, all real secular power has transferred to the council and its representatives. The clergy are important only for the property they own and the spiritual authority of their office, not for any special place they might occupy in the Italian scheme of things. Cainites who wish to control the clergy may gain the predictable rewards — influence over excommunication decisions, sensitive information from the confessional, access to the wealth of the Church — but the Cainites must beware the predicable dangers as well — notably True Faith.

Commoner Cainites may seriously consider living among (and manipulating) the lowest class. The masses of urban poor have easily inflamed resentments that are not adequately addressed by even the nascent *popolo*. The poor live at the sufferance of the rich, their wages are miserable and they often have no voice in politics. Since they work for hire rather than as peasants, they cannot even count on the traditional protection of a feudal lord. A supernatural ally can offer them hope and can use his influence to control the political mood of the lowest class. Even noble Cainites fear riots; they treat handsomely the soothsayer who can prevent one — or placate the firebrand who threatens to unleash urban violence.

With communal power concentrated into the *consuls*, *podestà* and councils, Cainites have found many ways to influence these institutions. The main goal of princes, at the moment, is to further expand the borders of their *contados*, giving them wider spheres of influence. Elders participate in this aim to a lesser extent, but they may be more interested in passing legislation that favors their own mortal agents and industries. The extent to which either goal is met depends on the strength of opposition (both Cainite and mortal) and whether the Cainites of the city are working in unison or at cross-purposes.

Princedom and the *Contado*

The rapid growth of their cities has taken the Italian princes by surprise. Where before, a typical prince ruled a small area in and around her own city, she may now control wide sweeps of land, often including other, smaller cities — some with their own princes. While weak and ineffectual princes have found it impossible to extend their own authority into a newly conquered *contado*, most have used their control over the commune's mortal military more ruthlessly.

In effect, the prince of a strong city-state controls unlife throughout the *contado* — either directly or by proxy. Where the smaller towns of the *contado* once possessed local princes of their own, now those princes are politically subservient to a center many miles away, and the fate of local princes and the elders of their town depends entirely on the temperament of the conqueror. If the smaller town had been taken by force, the victorious prince may encourage his contacts in the army to set fire to enemy havens. Most princes, even if they do not burn the town, at least engage in the opportunity for a selective purge. Conquered princes, especially if they were once powerful rivals or hated foes, fear the latter especially.

In any case, night-to-night unlife continues, and most princes have found the lesser towns too remote to rule over directly. Usually they choose a *consigliere* to administrate in their stead. In most cases, the conquering prince finds it expedient to appoint some favored Cainite to the princedom or administration of the conquered town. Princes use this opportunity to promote allies, exile rivals and reward childer. If they feel particularly angry, they can even put a ghoul or mortal in charge of the town's unlife. Sometimes, however, the conquering prince permits the old prince to continue to rule as a lieutenant, and weak princes have been known to surrender their towns to stronger foes — if only they are allowed to survive into the new regime and keep a vestige of their former authority.

Reactions to this new political map vary from Cainite to Cainite. The princes of major cities are usually ecstatic. Some, however, are beginning to turn complacent. Is not the current situation their due as great and mighty Cainites? The elders of the great cities, likewise swept up in their communes' rise, may also be darkly pleased at the new scope of their influence. Cainites of the countryside and of the lesser towns tend to be less thrilled as they scramble to maintain their authority. Others ingratiate themselves with the new powers-that-be. Elders of conquered *contados*, denied the status they feel is their due, resent the upstarts and quislings — to the point of violence when they feel they can get away with it. Finally, the bulk of young Cainites, denied participation in politics, run the gamut from apathy to patriotic outrage to amusement at the foibles of their elders.

The Massacre at Orvieto

When Cainite princes contemplate the possible fates that might befall their cities, the example of Orvieto stands foremost in their thoughts.

Until 1194, the nights of the strategically important hill-town Orvieto were relatively unremarkable. Brujah Prince Marco, under whose patronage heresy flourished within Orvieto's walls, ruled the city by night. But as the Pope began to submit the territories around Rome to his rule, Orvieto naturally came under his eye. Orvieto not only perches nearly impregnable over the Rome-Arezzo Road, but it also controlled the fortress Acquapendente on the road from Rome to Siena at that time. The Pope attempted to secure Acquapendente by placing Orvieto under interdict. Orvieto's heretics retaliated by seizing control of Orvieto and forcing its Catholic bishop to flee. The following year, Orvieto surrendered to Rome and accepted a papal rector.

Herein, the trouble for Orvieto's Cainites began. Since Orvieto was now subject to Rome, Rome's Prince Constantius claimed jurisdiction over Orvieto's unlife. Orvieto's Prince Marco, backed by loyal elders, refused to yield. Constantius responded by sending a secret army of Assamites into Orvieto and instructed them to destroy any childer of Caine they encountered. The slaughter lasted for months, and most of Orvieto's ancillae and neonates perished before fire, stake and sunlight. Prince Marco died on the very steps of the cathedral. The remaining Orvietan elders fled.

Constantius moved quickly to establish a new Cainite order in Orvieto. He installed the surviving Roman ancillae as a new Orvietan council of elders. The few remaining Orvietan ancillae and neonates were forced to surrender their property, havens and ghouls, and were turned out into the streets. In perhaps the final insult, Constantius appointed Gaius Orsini, a little-known Roman Nosferatu, to be *consigliere* of Orvieto.

Not surprisingly, Constantius has had little further trouble obtaining surrenders from towns in Roman territory.

The Conciliatory Movement

There are a few scattered Cainites who look at the prince and elders and see a council and *podestà*. The dissidents, usually Embraced within the last 50 years (although a few are older) believe that the mortal commune is a better form of government than anachronistic princedom. They seek to replace the current informal council of elders with a duly elected council. The most radical among them want to see the prince replaced with a vampiric *podestà* with administrative powers only. Young Cainites, Embraced under representative government, find the idea quite natural. Needless to say, most princes do not favor it — and punish those merely mentioning the idea with exile or Final Death.

The Distribution of Clans

Not all clans are equally represented in Italy. Some, such as the Lasombra or Toreador, are native to the peninsula, while others, like the Tzimisce, are exotic and rarely seen.

Assamites

The Assamites have few permanent residents in Italy. Their spheres of influence and their deadliest enemies lie elsewhere. Assamites often use Italian traders as a way of "shipping" themselves into Europe. The maritime Italian city-states of Venice, Pisa and Genoa find trading preferable to fighting, and they try to maintain friendly contacts with Muslim countries. Although they have participated in the Crusades and acted as staging areas, their zeal is secondary to profitability. From these cities, an Assamite can proceed to her chosen target, or begin opportunistic wanderings. Only the most foolish Assamites attack inside their port of entry — lest the Italians begin checking all oblong containers for hidden occupants.

Brujah

The political chaos and innovation of Italian city-states attracts droves of Brujah — much to the chagrin of the Lasombra, who are used to having Italy to themselves. Brujah political motives vary. Some Brujah support the new communes, seeking to make the new governments stable and prosperous. They tend to work hand-in-glove with the native Cainites. Other Brujah feel that while city-states are a great improvement over the feudal system, that the communes are not yet sufficiently egalitarian; they push constantly for a perfect constitution. Promethians of the most demented stripe, such Brujah can be found behind urban rioting and the emergent *popolo*. One particularly obnoxious Brujah, named Stilicho, wanders the communes in search of the perfect New Carthage — stirring up unrest among the peasantry wherever he travels. Finally, there are those Brujah who feel that the communes sap strength from the Holy Roman Empire, and that the emperor — they insist — is the one ruler who can bring about a better order. This imperialist faction is radically unpopular among the Italian princes. No prince, even one who rules a Ghibelline city, desires to forfeit his city's independence.

Cappadocians

The Graverobbers are not quite so common in Italy as elsewhere. Still, they may be found here, searching for the secrets of Roman antiquity, advising princes or experimenting in the shadows. They are rife in the lower levels of the Church and also maintain a presence in most coastal cities, where they can maintain contact with brethren in Africa and the Levant. There is a substantial population of Cappadocians in Venice, watching over their new experiment, the necromantic Giovanni, and Cappadocius himself is rumored to surface sporadically in Rome.

Gangrel

Italy is a highly deforested land with a large population. Italian Gangrel are fewer here than in wilder lands, and those who exist are more cautious, having to share the remaining untamed tracts with Lupines and fae. In the height of the Alps, however, rumors persist of ancient Gangrel with mysterious powers — the remnants of the undead who accompanied Hannibal's invasion. (A well-traveled Ravnos swears she saw a great, gray "monster" once by moonlight, and she speculates that this might be a Carthaginian Gangrel.)

Lasombra

Italy is part of the Lasombra heartland. The Lasombra control most of the political power on the peninsula. Eight of every 10 Italian princes is a Lasombra, as are 4 out of every 10 elder vampires. Most major mortal industries and factions in a Lasombra-held *contado* have Magisters behind them.

This is not to say that other clans do not matter — they do — only that the Lasombra dominate the leadership and politics of the region. The Lasombra of Italy have for centuries been associated with local mortal families, and family traits can be traced in the faces and lineages of generations of Cainites. Italian Lasombra are thus "native" to Italy to an extent that few other clans can claim.

Malkavians

Malkavians are spread evenly but sparsely throughout the peninsula. Their madness and disunity, however, keeps them from all but isolated positions of power and influence. The madmen, instrumental in Rome's destruction of Carthage, seem to have either lost interest in the region or moved on to more verdant pastures.

Nosferatu

Italy is riddled with catacombs, sewers and ruins undreamed of elsewhere in Europe. Nosferatu have larger broods in Italian cities than they do elsewhere. For the most part, however, they are a nonentity in politics. Unlike other Cainites, the cliquish Nosferatu use social pressures to limit the siring of childer — their population thus remains supportable and hidden. Princes thus leave them alone — until they want information, or until they feel the brood is taking more than its fair share of blood. The Nosferatu of Rome are particularly numerous, which is one reason why the Prince of Rome appointed one *consigliere* of Orvieto.

Ravnos

The Ravnos wander through Italy from time to time. Cities on major trade-routes, particularly east-west roads, are more likely to receive an unwelcome guest than other cities. Princes either grit their teeth and put up with them or subtly redirect them to their least favorite neighboring city.

Setites

The Followers of Set have infiltrated Italian communes, and go about their despicable business, either openly or masquerading as members of other clans. Their goals and methods do not differ greatly from those they employ in the rest of Europe — although Setites have proved themselves to be disturbingly adept at corrupting the democratic process. They are particularly fond of the seaports, where they can come and go easily.

Toreador

Toreador are not particularly common nor uncommon in Italy, which boasts some magnificent buildings — the Cathedral of Pisa, the Baptistery of Florence, the Basilica San Marco in Venice, plus numerous other, less famous buildings — which reflect, in part, the enthusiasm of Toreador "patrons." The Toreador are well-known for their extensive control over the upper echelon of the Church, though they find unlife among Italian Lasombra and Ventrue a bit stifling. Thus, they prefer to exercise their Church ties over a distance.

Tremere

The Tremere are drawn to the ruins of Roman antiquity — birthplace of the Hermetic arts. Here, perhaps, they seek some information to aid them in their war against the Tzimisce — or perhaps they merely seek lands they knew in mortal life. In any case, the Tremere are new arrivals in Italy; hardly any city or *contado* can boast more than one small chantry.

Tzimisce

Tzimisce are currently rare throughout Italy. However, as more and more young Tzimisce flee the conflict in the East, their road of exile leads directly through Italy. Many princes are already bracing for even greater numbers of immigrants.

Ventrue

The Ventrue have a foothold in Italy. Six-hundred years ago Ventrue followed the Lombards into northern Italy, and they have been there ever since. Even the Frankish invasion of the Lombards in the eighth century did not crush them; it just brought in more Ventrue. More recently, the Norman conquest of Sicily has brought in a second Diaspora of Ventrue. Some of these have begun moving north. Over the years, however, the number of Italian Ventrue princes has slowly eroded under the onslaught of "native" Lasombra, but the Ventrue still hold a few Lombard cities, and they still exist in small numbers elsewhere. Of the non-Lombard cities, only Rome boasts a significant Ventrue enclave — Frankish Cainites who arrived with Charlemagne.

Other Supernaturals

Cainites, urban creatures, are the pre-eminent supernatural power in the city-states. Other mystical beings are present, however, in smaller numbers.

The *contadi* of most city-states still sport small tracts of wild land. Here the Lupines can still be found, as can the numerous varieties of true fae. As one of the oldest centers of

human population in Europe, however, Italy has already suffered major deforestation, a process that is still continuing. The wild creatures are thus not the threat to Cainite unlife as they are elsewhere in Europe — except when some heedless vampire wanders into that little wilderness that still survives.

The activities of the magicians are mostly invisible to the Cainites. Italy is a magic — and magickal — land of great antiquity, boasting a variety of hedge and True Mages. Italy, the ancient heartland of the Western Roman Empire, holds special appeal for magi. The outlines of Hermetic magical systems took shape here, and many of the finest Roman magicians lived and died here. The Sons of Cronos linger in Italy, lamenting that the debauchery of the empire has passed away, and they console themselves with the luxury goods that are available in the great trading towns like Venice, Genoa and Pisa. They will resurface as the Cult of Ecstasy one day, but for now, they are a small and obscure tradition. Those who will one day be known as Verbena, descended from pagan Roman cults of Isis or the Magna Mater, linger here, along with static "witches" of the same traditions. The Italian city-states are a natural breeding ground for those mages who will one day form the Technocracy. The Renaissance is only a century and a half in the future; the craftmasons and others are already in Italy, laying its foundations. Who knows what ancient secrets, potent nodes and hidden chantries yet exist among the scattered imperial ruins, or those that are fitfully concealed behind the façades of *palazzi*? Who knows how many of the potion-sellers, spell-workers or witches are, in fact, more than mere charlatans?

Even less visible than magi are the ghosts. Almost all cities have their own necropoli on the far side of the Shroud, bustling with the dead. Some few Cainites, notably the Cappadocians and their Venetian offshoots, have made inroads toward contacting their silent fellow city dwellers. To the majority of Cainites, however, the Restless Dead remain but whispers and rumors.

Story Ideas

· The *Paterfamilias*

A ghoul or other servant of one of the characters faces a dilemma: a command from his *paterfamilias* that he cannot obey and still continue to serve his vampiric master. Perhaps his mortal grandfather wishes him to marry, or there is a business he must manage or a journey he must undertake. No amount of pleading changes the grandfather's mind. Legally, he can be censured or even imprisoned if he refuses. Does his Cainite master try to Dominate the *paterfamilias*? Kill the turbulent grandfather? Or is the ghoul's tie of mortal blood stronger than any Blood Oath?

· The Notary

A notary makes an amazing discovery; while checking some records inherited from his father, he finds a record of a purchase made in 1127 by one Gislebertus Barbatus. Trouble is, the year is now 1197, and Gislebertus is a vigorous man in his thirties. What does the notary do? Who does he tell? What trouble can he make for the Cainite who is Gislebertus Barbatus?

· Taking the Council by Storm?

The characters' city is engulfed in extensive rioting. (Most cities suffer unrest at one time or another.) The noble families are at war, conducting campaigns and forays from their towers. The Cainites of the city cower by night, fearing that the wild mobs will burn the city. Are any Cainites responsible for the riots? Are rioters targeting Cainite homes? Which elders stand to gain or lose from the warfare?

· Aftermath

The rioting is now over, and the losing families have been exiled by the commune. Must any of the character's allies and ghouls depart the city (perhaps forever)? If the change in power has swept new faces into the council, which Cainites have benefited? Are any of the new councilors already pawns of an elder, or are all the Cainites jockeying for control?

· Meet the Neighbors

One of the characters has chosen her haven foolishly; the walls of her dwelling are too thin. The neighbors know that *something* not quite human lives next door among those peasants. What can they do about it, and how does the character react?

· The *Contado*'s Other Residents

Some very old Cainites dwell in the countryside. For centuries, a coterie of Lasombra has dwelt in a petty noble's castle. Now the noble has been humbled into submission by the *contado*. Though the noble has moved into the city, her Lasombra keepers have not. Can the prince of the city subdue them? In their stone fortress on ancestral land, the Lasombra could hold out for years or months. On the other hand, they seem willing to entertain the prince's envoys, though they are loath to accept his authority. The characters must travel into the countryside and negotiate a settlement. But what do the Lasombra want in exchange for their support? Can the characters deliver? And just what is the Lasombras' erstwhile ally, the noblewoman, up to in the city...?

· Refugees from a Massacre

The Damned are filtering into Venice. Rumors speak of ancient Cainite faces glimpsed by moonlight or in the marshes. Elder vampires know these faces — they belong to refugees from Orvieto, recently the target of a takeover by the Cainites of Rome. Now the Roman Cainites have sent an envoy into the city; they want the refugees slain. The city's elders line up for and against executions. How will the characters be drawn into the conflict? Can the renegades be caught? And as the youngest vampires in the city, what unsavory risks must the characters assume in the upcoming Lextalionis?

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Part Three: The Cities

No Italian city is a model commune. They each have their own personalities and culture — in short, their own character. (They're like people that way.) This section is here to help you get to know a few of the more important or interesting cities — what it's like to live in them, what they look like, what their quirks are, what to watch out for, etc. Some brief additional information is also included about the Cainites who live in each city and the most notable features of their unlives. And since this is a section for Storytellers, too, we have included information about the future of the cities and how these events can be dropped into short adventures or built into chronicles.

Travel and Language

Travelers in Italy, even native Italians, may have a hard time making themselves understood.

Each city has its own Italian dialect, which everyone who is born there will generally understand. The farther from home one goes, the harder it is to understand people, even if one stays inside Italy itself. Go far enough away, and dialects may be mutually unintelligible.

In addition, all educated people know Latin, which has remained remarkably homogenous since the downfall of the empire. The educated, however, make up a relatively small elite in Italy, so that it requires the traveler to learn the local vernacular as quickly as possible.

Storytellers may wish to have their players make Intelligence + Linguistics rolls (difficulty 6) for their characters any time the Cainites might come in contact with those who do not share their dialect.

Milan

Milan is the most important city in Lombardy. Once it was the administrative capitol of the Roman Empire, and its most famous bishop, St. Ambrose, humbled even the Western Roman Emperor. Now the Western Empire is dead; Rome has eclipsed the fame of its bishropic, and Milan itself has shrunk. But if it has diminished in glory, it still remains impressive by Dark Medieval reckoning. Milan is said to have 100,000 inhabitants (obviously an exaggeration) employed either in the rich surrounding countryside or in the trade arriving along the roads to Genoa and Venice. Its most important structure is the Church of St. Ambrose, a huge Romanesque building that guards the bones of the old Roman firebrand.

The Cainites of Milan

Most of Milan's elders date from the Lombard period. Old, Germanic and somewhat weary, they find it increasingly difficult to understand the new politics of the city-states. Even as the city becomes increasingly democratic, the prince and her cohorts revert ever more to rigid autocracy. The childer they Embrace do not understand their sires' feudal ways and chafe at the restrictions they impose. As a result, the ancillae population forms a flimsy buffer against incoming Lasombra, as the Magisters have made expansion into Lombardy one of their chief goals. Young Lasombra are encouraged to wander north, and even elders occasionally take to the road. The Ventrue of Lombardy have responded by restricting certain key hunting grounds to their own clan and waging periodic war on interlopers. Regardless, the Lasombra population in Milan and its *contado* has grown substantially over the last few centuries, and few predict that trend will abate.

Venice

As in the arsenal of the Venetians,
all winter long a stew of sticky pitch
boils up to patch their sick and tattered ships
that cannot sail (instead of voyaging,
some build new keels, some tow and tar the ribs
of hulls worn out by too much journeying;
some hammer at the prow, some at the stern,
and some make oars, and some braid ropes and cords;
one mends the jib, another, the mainsail);
so not by fire but by the art of God,
below there boiled a thick and tarry mass
that covered all the banks with clamminess.

—Dante, *The Inferno*, XXI, translated by Allen Mandelbaum

Venice lies just off the coast of northeastern Italy. It was founded in late Roman times as a refuge from invading barbarians; knowing that the barbarians had no ships, the ingenious Roman citizens built their city on the islands of a lagoon. For a city built on a swamp, Venice has since done very well. It is the dominant naval power of the Mediterranean, controlling both the largest fleet and dominating most of the shipping to and from Byzantium and the Saracen lands. Most anywhere in the Crusader States or Byzantium,there are Venetian outposts — and in most Muslim states as well. (Venice is known more for its mercantile leanings than its Christian militancy.) Venice is also the oldest republic by far. Instead of a *podestà* or *consuls*, Venice has possessed a *Doge* for centuries. (The word is Venetian dialect for the Italian *duce* or the Latin *dux*, meaning "leader" or "duke.") Each Doge is elected by the council and serves for life. "Life," however, is usually not very long, since the council tends to select only very old men, the better to stave off a hereditary succession of Doges.

In matters of religion, Venice is possibly the most unusual diocese in Western Christendom. Its patron saint is Mark, one of the four evangelists. This is a bit odd, as Mark himself actually died in Alexandria, Egypt. There he rested until 828,

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when a group of Venetian merchants stole his body and smuggled it back "home," thus fulfilling an old prophecy. Mark had sailed through the Venetian lagoon on his way to Egypt. While his boat was anchored, an angel appeared to him and told him: "Peace to you, Mark, my evangelist. Here your body will rest." Venetians took this as a sign that Mark was destined for their city. They built Mark a basilica beside the ducal palace and quickly wove Mark into their theology, giving themselves a claim to apostolic authority second only to Rome in the West.

Physically, Venice's main feature is its most obvious — it's built on the water. Many of its streets are canals, on which small boats constantly move about. Gondolas exist, but they look nothing like those of the 20th century, having a dozen rowers and rich decoration. Most of the major buildings and private *palazzi* have entrances on both the canal and the street. The canal face is usually the more opulent-looking of the two. Most buildings at this date are constructed of wood, though some more permanent stone and brick buildings exist.

Venice's most important church is not its cathedral, but the ducal Basilica of Saint Mark. The current basilica was not built until the early 11th century. It is in the Byzantine style — comprised of rounded interior vaults and colorful mosaics. For centuries, Constantinople was one of Venice's allies and a source for many cultural traditions. Now the friendship between the two is turning sour, and war lies not far in the future. But the Eastern-style cathedral still broods there, like a jewel-encrusted monster beside the ocean.

Near the basilica is the ducal palace, the seat of Venetian government and the home of the Doge. Its current incarnation is more fortress than palace, using its position beside the sea as a way to guard the city.

The Rialto is the market area for Venice and is usually crammed with booths, stalls and customers.

Also of note, the lagoon's many islands are not all equally settled: Fallow land abounds, with the occasional outbuilding or ruin thrown in for good measure.

A Venetian Curse

In 1172, the Republic razed the house of the man who murdered Doge Vitale Michiel and decreed that no building of brick or stone will ever stand again. (A prohibition that lasts until 1948.) In its place, a series of wooden houses act as a mute testament to the murdered Doge.

But that is not the whole tale. Doge Vitale Michiel was hardly popular at the time of his death; he had just returned from a failed war with Byzantium and he brought back with him a deadly plague. Perhaps his wraith — or that of his murder — lives yet. Or perhaps the house itself still stands as a haunt in the deadlands, filled with the wailing of plague victims....

Cainites in Venice

As one of the largest cities in Christendom, Venice has more than its fair share of Cainites, despite crowded conditions, few havens and negligible countryside. The influence and wealth of the lagoon draw in the undead as an inexorable lure.

Ruling over this glittering chaos are the Lasombra who have held Venice in their grip for centuries. Venice is the oldest city-state and the most traditional. Elders have sired childer from the same mortal bloodlines for so long that the leading families and Cainites are now inextricably linked. Newcomers who wish for power must cultivate a family or business from scratch; all the existing ones have been taken for centuries. Complete control over the Doge, however, has been thwarted by the fact that almost all Doges enter office over the age of 70. No Cainite can thus control the Doge for long — any Doge who lives more than a decade or three would raise mortal suspicions.

Beneath Lasombra rule there are various other Cainites of note.

Cappadocians are unusually numerous in Venice at this time, though Venice has always possessed a large Cappadocian population. This is due in part to the lagoon's proximity to the East, abetted by the strong ties between Venice's St. Mark and Coptic faith of Egypt, which he founded. (In Egypt to this day, Cappadocians frequent Coptic monasteries, concealing themselves there from Egyptian Setites.) The current influx of Graverobbers into Venice, however, is due to the presence of the newly Embraced Giovanni family, which requires supervision in its stumbling efforts — not to mention careful guarding. In addition to the Giovanni, their guards and native Cappadocians, Venice has become something of a pilgrimage site for curious Cappadocian travelers. Most are rebuffed by the Giovanni or their shepherds, but others stay for weeks or months, observing the "experiment." All in all, the Cappadocian presence has tripled since the beginning of the 12th century.

The Nosferatu of Venice have a large problem: Hardly anything in the city can be underground without being underwater, too. While Cainites cannot drown, most of them do not enjoy being submerged in the cold, filthy water of the lagoon for any length of time. Furthermore, rumors persist of malignant *things* that live beneath the canals, surfacing to devour Cainite and mortal alike. So the ugliest of Caine's progeny must instead take up more normal residencies in rented houses, abandoned structures and the like. Venetian Nosferatu usually have, as a consequence, often alleviated a greater mastery of Obfuscate than their inland brethren.

Finally, as a hub of commerce, Venice boasts more than its fair share of "exotic" Cainites. Ravnos, Tremere, Tzimisce, Assamites and other clans that are rare on the peninsula pass through Venice regularly.

A Venetian Chronicle: The Fourth Crusade

The opening of the 13th century is a busy, exhilarating time for Venice. The Fourth Crusade assembles in the city; Venice's own Doge departs on the expedition and, in the end, Constantinople — ostensible ally of the West — falls to Latin swords as the Venetians return laden with spoils. Storytellers who can't use this fact to spawn some great Cainite intrigue just aren't thinking. Do any Cainites head East with the army? Is foreign blood especially palatable? After the conquest, do any young Cainites go East to colonize the new territories? What mystical artifacts and such are brought back to Venice as spoils — and what are their powers? Finally, are any Greek Cainites inclined to take revenge? And if so, how?

A Venetian Chronology

1193: Enrico Dandolo is elected Doge. This feisty old blind man is well over 70 — a typical age for Doges.

1201: Six knights from a burgeoning crusade arrive at Venice. They negotiate on behalf of the crusaders for ships and transportation to the East. The agreement is ratified by shouting Venetian crowds. The leading crusaders plan to attack Egypt. The Venetian leaders, who have a lucrative treaty with Egypt, are secretly displeased. They plan secret actions of their own to deflect the crusaders from their goal.

1202: Word spreads among crusading soldiers that the fleet leaving Venice will go to Egypt. Many head East on their own, aiming for the more holy goal of Jerusalem. The leaders of the Crusade suspect the Venetians of leaking news of their true object, but they are powerless to stop the desertion. The army that eventually arrives at the lagoon in June is far too small to use or pay for all the ships contracted. Doge Dandolo extracts a deal — Venice will allow them the ships, but the crusaders must help Venice retake some outposts that it lost to Hungary. The fleet sets sail in November with the Venetian Doge in tow.

1203: For some years now, Constantinople has been ruled by a "usurper" — but now a son of the deposed emperor escaped. Young Alexis is currently in Germany with his in-law, Philip of Swabia. The crusaders agree to help restore Alexis's father to the throne — for a price. He agrees. In July, the crusaders arrive in Constantinople, but Byzantium has no fleet to put to sea. For years now, *Venice* has been in charge of shipbuilding for the Eastern Empire. The crusaders take Constantinople easily, and Alexis and his father (also Alexis) are crowned — but they have no money. Tensions mount, as both Greeks and Franks get angrier at each other.

1204: The Greeks, disgusted with the crusaders, depose the Alexises. The Latins respond by attacking in force. The city falls, wallowing in blood for three days. Then the crusaders take everything valuable and divvy it up. Venice comes out very well and gets a huge chunk of the Eastern Empire. Wealth, art and relics flow back to Venice.

1205: Dandolo dies and is buried in St. Sophia. The Latin Empire begins in the East.

Genoa & Pisa

Genoa lies in Liguria, a rocky, not particularly fertile area of Italy. Consequently, most of its energy flows into commerce instead of farming. Even its nobles find the surrounding mountain passes not (much) worth fighting over and take to the sea to find Muslim enemies. The Genoese have a reputation for being more mercenary than they are devout.

Pisa lies farther south along the coast, at the mouth of the river Arno. Its main religious buildings stand together in an open plaza, the half-completed Islamic-influenced baptistery and *duomo*. Both are striking buildings made of zebra-striped gray marble and show the nested tiers of pillars unique to the Pisan style. The cathedral was commissioned after a 11th-century naval victory over the Muslims, the chief enemy of both cities.

Genoa and Pisa are natural rivals, both situated on the eastern side of the Italian peninsula and competing for the sea traffic there. In times to come, the rivalry becomes ever more pronounced. (They would probably even hate being described here together.) Politics in the two cities are already based primarily upon mutual hatred. Things only grow worse as the two cities continue to expand.

The Cainites of Genoa and Pisa

The Cainites of Genoa and Pisa both share relatively similar goals: expand their city's control over the surrounding region, dominate Mediterranean trade and make handsome livings off the sea trade. They share such goals with their mortal herds, but, as Cainites, they have centuries to refine their methods, nurse hatreds and broker alliances.

Genoa is dominated by a closed circle of Cainites. A few elders control the city and most of the noble estates. They tolerate only a handful of ghouls and childer to dwell among them. The prince and elders cooperate with surprising zeal in opposing newcomers, migrants, and travelers who overstay their welcome. Even childer are sometimes asked (politely, if forcefully) to leave; most of them are discreetly delivered to foreign ports. There, the expatriates prepare the way for Genoese exports and colonies. Should they do well, they may even be allowed to return home.

Pisa, with its larger *contado*, has a more diverse body of Cainites active in politics. It also has more fractious and violent feuding. The trouble in Florence (see below) has spilled downriver, with the elders of Pisa evenly split over which Florentine prince (if any!) to acknowledge. An unscrupulous elder has even been accused of shipping Assamites onshore and sending them north toward the conflict. If this is true, he or she has never been caught.

Florence

Newcomers to the city and quick gains
have brought excess and arrogance to you,
o Florence, and you weep for it already.

—Dante, *The Inferno XVI*, translated by Allen Mandelbaum

Florence lies in the heart of Tuscany and is already the largest and most important city of the province. Located well inland among the hill-country, Florence nevertheless commands a strategic position along the river Arno and the trade routes.

Florentine architecture of the sort used in churches and other public buildings has a peculiar geometric character, and the Florentine baptistery is justly famous. Octagonal in shape, with a Byzantine mosaic of Christ adorning its interior dome, its foundations may well date back to the Roman period — or so people say. Surrounding it is a wide *piazza*, and not too far away stands the *duomo*.

The green gothic cathedral on which Brunelleschi will one day build his famous dome does not yet exist. In its place stands a much humbler structure, of the same character as the baptistery.

San Miniato al Monte is an excellent example of the current style. A basilica-plan church, with a flat marble façade covered in geometric patterns and a line of three doors, it has an almost Classical appearance. Stark, restrained, mathematical — the Florentine style provides quite a contrast from the flamboyance of Sienese or Pisan architecture.

Most of the buildings, however, are not green and white; Florence is very brown-oriented. In Dark Medieval Florence, wood predominates, but richer structures are of an earth-colored brick. Most streets have only earthtones to look upon; the colorful churches, then, are that much more noticeable and exciting.

The Cainites of Florence

Florence is a rapidly expanding, powerful and populous city. These factors conspired to keep the Cainite population high until about the middle of the 12th century. Until 1164, Cainites moved to Florence in droves, responding to the changing focus of power in the region. Hunting became scarce in the city as a result, and the *contado* was virtually abandoned. Inside the walls, existing elders struggled to kill or exile the newcomers. In the countryside, a relatively few vampires snapped up wide spheres of control. This chaos led to the downfall of Prince Alanus in 1164. A Lasombra sired in the eighth century, Alanus proved to be incapable of dealing with the rapid changes taking place in Florence. With him lies most of the blame for the current crisis. In particular, he could not stop the Cainite migration into the city. Most of the elders rejoiced when an Assamite took his life, but none have admitted to hiring the Saracen.

They are wise, for Alanus's death has only worsened Florentine politics. For the last 35 years, Florence has had not one, but two, princes: the Lasombra Anicius (called by his followers "the Golden") and his clanmate and rival, Panfilo the Cruel. Each claims superiority in age and generation and refers to the other as an anti-prince. The contest has shifted as the eight elders of Florence change allegiances in truly Byzantine patterns. Cainites tread nervously, afraid that the invisible lines separating the princes' territories have shifted overnight and that they have crossed them. Envoys to the city must find ways to meet with both princes without rousing the ire of either. The Cainite population has dropped considerably in recent years.

Not all Cainites are drawn into the fray, however. Two shadowy groups of supernaturals are hard at work in Florence and generally left alone. The Toreador work diligently to preserve Classical Roman taste in Florence. They have had some success in molding the local style along severe, antique lines. The façade of San Miniato is one of the finest works influenced by these

Toreador, some of whom are rumored to remember Rome before the sack of 410. There is also rumor that the Toreador are aided in their work by a cabal of mathematically-minded magicians. Some Nosferatu point to the geometric lines of the Florentine style and speak knowingly of Euclid and Pythagoras. No one, however, suspects the enormous impact these works are having on Florentine consciousness. By the middle of the 14th century, Florentine artists (with a little help from their friends) will rediscover mathematical perspective and realistic human portraiture — and thus, alter all of European art.

Siena

Siena is the second most prosperous city in Tuscany. While not a particularly important city in the history of the Italian peninsula, it is nonetheless a fascinating place and a good example of a prosperous commune. The Sienese state is completely landlocked. All of its commerce passes along the roads that run north and south from its borders. Most of Siena's wealth comes through local trade and long distance banking. Siena's perennial problem, however, is a lack of water. The Sienese must pipe water into the city via a series of aqueducts and underground conduits known as *bottini*. Siena is currently ruled by a council and a *podestà*.

Magical Siena

A pair of unique anomalies are associated with Siena. Do they indicate the presence of mages? Fae? Diabolists? A hidden chantry? Storytellers: Make of these what you will....

The Sator Arepo

On the side of Siena Cathedral, one can read the following inscription in a block about two feet square:

S	A	T	O	R
A	R	E	P	O
T	E	N	E	T
O	P	E	R	A
R	O	T	A	S

This translates as "The sower Arepo holds the wheels with his labor." It reads the same from any direction you choose. The Sator Arepo square is widely believed to be a magical charm and has also been found in buried ruins of Pompeii. What is it doing on the side of Siena's Cathedral?

The Diana

Some of the Sienese swear they can hear water trickling beneath the city. No source of water, however, has ever been found, regardless of how many wells are dug. The Sienese have named this ghostly river "The Diana." Perhaps, since Siena is chronically short of water, the Diana can be attributed to wishful thinking. On the other hand, in Dark Medieval Europe, there are a number of magical forces that could hide a river. Is it part of a chantry, is it nestled in some strange astral realm — or is it a faint echo of the River Styx?

THREE PILLARS

Siena is a hill-town, making it easy to defend, but also giving it a serpentine, rambling character. Someone wandering the streets can turn a corner and find a nearly vertical alley dropping away from her feet. Most of Siena's buildings are made of wood in the late 12th century, but the more important structures (including the city walls) are made of a characteristic reddish-brown brick. Siena's cathedral is made of black and white marble (the city's colors); inside and outside, the building is striped like a zebra. The Sienese are not quite finished building their *duomo*: The façade and the choir remain to be completed. Still, it is a magnificent structure in which they take pride. Siena is unusual in not having yet built a councilhouse — its government meets in rented rooms.

Cainites in Siena

Siena's unlife is dangerous. Three elders live in the medium-sized hill-town and two more are active in the *contado*. Of these, only three are Lasombra, including the current prince. Each vies for power in the city's politics and has sired an unhealthy high number of childer. The current prince has already called for one Lextalionis — only to have it fail spectacularly. He dares not call another.

Much of the prince's time is consumed in dealing with an ambitious Ventrue, Henricus Germanus, a relic of an attempted alliance between Siena and the imperial city of Augsburg. The German Cainite showed up during the negotiations. Now Henricus refuses to leave Siena, and he has proved surprisingly adept at avoiding the Final Death.

Also vexing is the continued power of the city's Hermetic magicians. A chantry has existed since the founding days of the city, but it has become increasingly powerful — or perhaps it is only now revealing its true strength. Even more troubling, several Tremere have been spotted in the magicians' quarter of the city; though none have seen them arrive through the city gates.

Rome

Ecclesiastical liberty is nowhere better cared for than where the Roman church has full power in both temporal and spiritual affairs....

— Pope Innocent III in a letter to the Bishop of Ravenna, translated by Brian Tierney

Medieval Rome, heart of the Papal States, is two cities in one. One Rome is a prosperous Italian commune, with a secular government of councils. The other Rome is the city of the Pope, spiritual head of Christendom. The two Romes don't always get along (in fact, they are often at war), but, to the chagrin of both, they need each other to survive.

The Roman commune is ruled through the Senate. This isn't the old Imperial Senate; it just stole the name. Other communes can have their council and *podestà* — but Rome is Rome and intends to have Roman names. The size of the Senate fluctuates wildly. One year, there will be only one Senator; the next, the Romans will change their constitution and appoint 50. Depending on the current make-up of the government, a Senator is sometimes more like a *podestà* or *consul* elsewhere, and

sometimes more like a councilor. The Pope favors a small Senate, because it is easier to manipulate. Thus, a large Senate is often a sign of rebellion among the people.

Rome is the home of the Pope, head of the Western Church, and, not coincidentally, Chief Bishop of Rome. The Pope is said (metaphorically) to keep the keys to Heaven and Earth, given by Christ to Peter, Rome's first bishop and Christ's appointed ruler of the Church. At this period, the Pope claims not only the right to appoint the bishops of every Christian kingdom, but also temporal authority over large areas of Europe. These claims are resisted (with varying degrees of success) by most of the European monarchs — and utterly rejected by the patriarchs of the Eastern Church.

Within Rome itself, the Pope occupies a precarious position. Rome is "his" city, in as much as he is its chief bishop, and since he, and the college of cardinals, and all the enormous wealth of the Church is concentrated there, he often controls much of its politics *de facto*, if not *de jure*. However, Rome is also a secular city-state, with mundane concerns — farming, trading, war, manufacture — and its citizens want the same independence that other communes have. They cannot, however, just drive the Pope out of town: He's the source of their political importance, and without him, pilgrimage money would dry up. So most of the time, they recognize his theoretical supremacy, and he lets them do what they want, manipulating Roman political decisions from the wings.

Rome will soon (c. 1198) become the center of a wide band of territory controlled by the Pope. Eventually, these holdings will become known as the Papal States, but at the moment, the Pope's hold over them is far from certain. What this means for Rome is unknown.

The city of Rome has shrunk drastically in size from its days of glory. The city proper is reduced to a small, walled section directly around the river Tiber. The rest of the old city (called the *dishabitato*) has reverted to farmland. Scattered among the fields outlying Rome sit the ruins of old marble and brick buildings, monuments and broken columns. Some of these hide catacombs, hidden chambers or other havens. (Unlike the Cainites of other cities, Roman Cainites never have to search far for a place to set up home.) Once inside the circuit of the new walls, however, Rome is a bustling Italian commune, albeit built on the crumbling ruins of the old empire. Alongside buildings of modern construction sit strange anomalies built out of old buildings. For instance, Trajan's triumphal arch has a noble tower built on its top — a way for its present owner to say "This is mine!" and get a few extra feet of height on his tower.

Several major landmarks define Rome. First of all, there are the ruins of Rome past, such as the desolate Capitol, the huge Colosseum, the Pantheon (now the church Santa Maria Rotunda) and the many triumphal arches. Then there are the church buildings: for example, St. John Lateran (later scene of various councils) and St. Peter's Basilica. There are many more; Rome is also known as "the city of a thousand churches."

Finally, the large brown Castel St. Angelo guards Rome's flank. Its core is an odd-looking round structure, much too wide and short to be a conventional tower. In fact, this used to be the mausoleum of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. Once the empire fell, the Romans discovered that this overgrown tombstone made a great place from which to throw dangerous objects at attacking foreigners. Over the centuries, it has gotten a new lease on life, some added battlements and walls. Ownership has passed through most of the major Roman families. This year one family owns it, the next year, another will.

One other physical feature of Rome worthy of note: It is surrounded by swamps. In the summer, these swamps are veritable founts of miasma and disease. Foreign Popes complain bitterly. Some Romans often leave for the season. Others just get sick and die.

A Papal Chronicle

The official start year for a **Vampire: The Dark Ages** campaign, 1197, is a hectic time in Rome. Storytellers who want a Roman Chronicle but don't want to jump right into heavy intrigue should probably start a few years earlier or later. On the other hand, there's nothing like starting a chronicle with a bang — and fewer things will draw out Cainite politics more than a papal election, a German succession and a war!

Events start rolling in 1197, when the German Emperor Henry VI dies, his son still too young to rule. Up until this time, the empire had nominally governed the central Italian towns. However, much as their northern neighbors, the central towns have developed independently, growing into communes and city-states and *contadi*. Upon Henry's death, the towns are left without much guidance, as various contenders vie for the throne. In January of 1198, Pope Celestine III dies. The new Pope takes the name Innocent III, and his reign inaugurates a new age of greatness for the throne of Peter — which starts with solidification of Rome's hold over central Italy. The city-states of the central peninsula fear continued domination by the empire. To protect themselves, most swear fealty to the Pope. In return for nominal sovereignty, the papacy tends to let the cities govern themselves for now, setting up various officials to watch over the areas. By this method, the papacy obtains submission throughout most of central Italy by 1199. It takes only the passage of time (and the death of Markward, one of the German heirs) to turn this nominal independence into actual control, a slow process fraught with a variety of small wars.

Storytellers can use this uncertainty to spin a variety of tales. What machinations, mortal and vampiric, are involved in a papal election? Which elders back which candidates, and which must flee for their lives? Which Cainites — especially among the hated Ventrue — travel with the armies of the imperial candidates? Do delegations appear in the troupe's town? How do the princes of the various towns react to their towns' submission? What claims does the Prince of Rome send out into the new Papal States? Can he successfully enforce them? Do the characters have to try?

THREE PILLARS

Cainites in Rome

Rome, as a large city and a political center, boasts a great number of Cainites. Many content themselves by maintaining a herd or profiting from the influx of wealth from trade and pilgrimage. Most vampires, however, keep at least one eye fixed on the Vatican. The Pope's court is as prestigious as that of any monarch — perhaps more so because of its international status. Lasombra and Ventrue want power. Setites want to corrupt. The Cainite heresy wants to change doctrine. Tremere want the ancient texts kept in the Vatican archives. Fortunately, the aura of faith around the curia (caused by relics if nothing else) keeps the papal throne relatively clean of direct undead interference. What frightens Roman elders most of all is the possibility that some Cainite, through ambition or mishap, might reveal the true extent of vampiric society to the Church's heart. (This nightmare indeed comes to pass in later years, when Fabrizio Ulfila of the Ventrue effectively sets the Inquisition in motion.)

The strongest clan in Rome remains the Lasombra, of which Prince Constantius is a representative. Most of the other clans of the Christian world sport some representative or other in Rome at all times. The Nosferatu are particularly numerous, especially penitential Nosferatu on the Road of Heaven. The presence of so many holy sites and persons draws them in, as do the extensive catacombs and ruins of the *dishabitato*.

Regardless of clan, the greater portion of Romes' elders and ancillae look eagerly toward the growing Papal States. Some fear an exile in the newly conquered territories, others hope that Constantius will appoint them as rulers of some minor city. The excitement reaches a fever pitch following the purge of Orvieto in 1199, the court of Constantius becoming center for furious politicking by all sorts.

Rome is also a major center for the Inconnu in Europe. These Cainites of imperial times are more often rumored about than seen. Cainites with Auspex occasionally glimpse toga-clad figures of impressive auras before they slip away. The eldest of elders are sometimes startled in dark hours by sires they thought long dead. Nosy Cainites never return from certain abandoned quarters of the city. In general, the Inconnu seem not to care for current politics — but occasionally, one resurfaces long enough to utter a warning or to deliver an ultimatum, then promptly disappears. Such activity makes them just visible enough to trouble the slumber of princes and elders. Who knows when a well-laid plan will falter through the interference of some creature old and powerful beyond reckoning? For this reason, most of them wish the inscrutable Inconnu gone, yet they can do nothing.

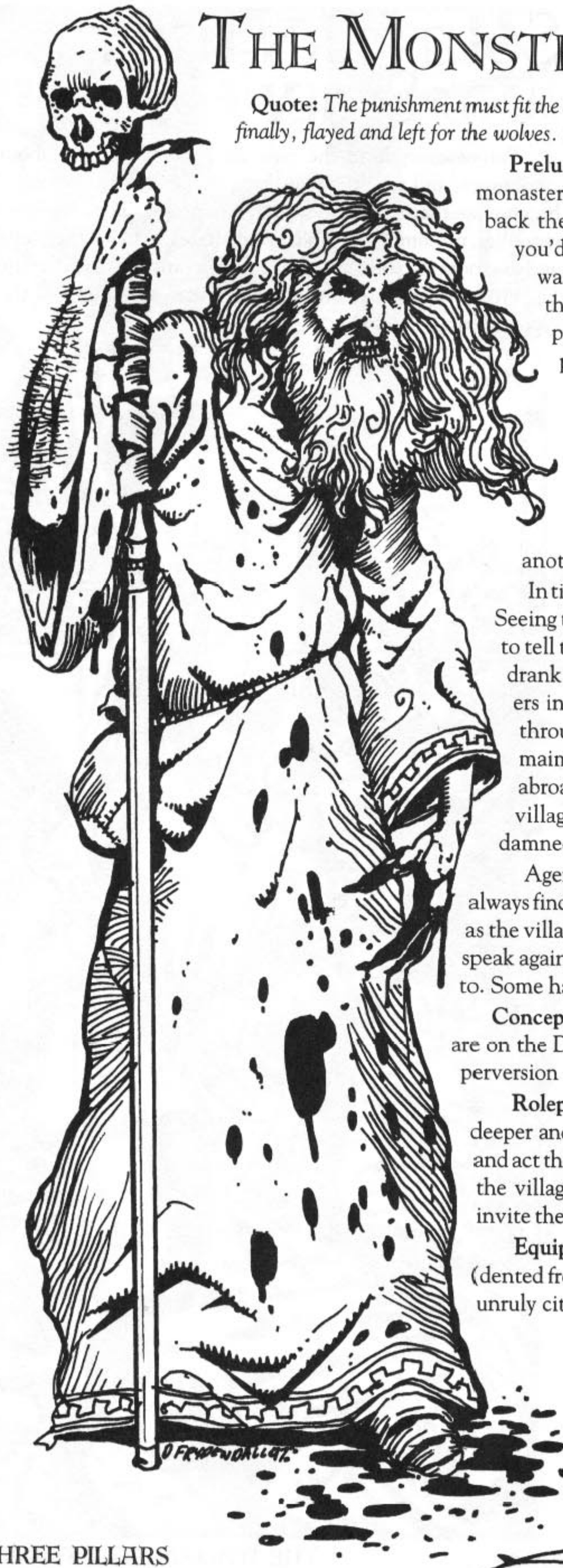
It is not easy to go about unlife as a Cainite in Rome. Scattered throughout the city are sites and persons of exceptional holiness. Rome, after all, is the city of a thousand churches; entering into any one of them could mean the

Final Death for a Cainite. Innumerable priests and nuns wander the streets. Should only one in a hundred have the deadly True Faith, that is still too many — yet how can they be avoided? Even Nosferatu beneath the city surface must reckon with the catacombs and the deadly tombs of saints long dead. The heart of Roman life and politics is religion; an ambitious Cainite cannot steer clear of all priests and altars forever. So, Cainites in Rome swallow their pride, dig deep havens, and are always ready to flee. Few prize the scars and scalds given them by holy objects, and one bloated Nosferatu is rumored to have a burn from every church in Rome — including an enormous crucifix incised onto his face.

Southern Italy and Sicily

Forget everything the past 28 pages have said about communes, and read the first three chapters of this book — because southern Italy and Sicily are feudal. They have no republics, no communes, and no city-states. Instead, the Sicily and the southern section of the Italian peninsula is ruled by the Emperor of Germany, who inherited it from the last of the Norman kings in 1194.

The Monstrous *Podesta*



Quote: *The punishment must fit the crime — he shall be stoned within an inch of his life, then pilloried, and, finally, flayed and left for the wolves. No man steals sheep in* my *city.*

Prelude: After the floods wiped out your village, the monks from the monastery in the next valley came to dispense food, and when they went back they took you on as a servant. The services were the first time you'd really paid attention in Church, and soon you found that God was paying more attention to you in return — speaking to you in the fields, sending his angels in the form of bright halos around people, and showing you things in dreams and visions. You persuaded the monks to teach you to read, so that you could become a monk yourself.

Then came the painful, seemingly random Embrace, and your first frenzied slaughter. You had never been made to do God's work, you realized when you had sated your hunger, and you should never have had the temerity to imagine that you were. Very well. If God didn't want you, there must be another power who did.

In time, you made your way to a village on the very edge of civilization. Seeing the opportunity for easy prey, you "persuaded" prominent citizens to tell the villagers that you had been sent as a contracted *podestà*, then drank them dry. You subdued the superstitious and ineffectual villagers in a single night of bloody horror. Some you killed and dragged through the streets; some you drank from; some you tortured and maimed. You sent visions and madness amongst them, and walked abroad wearing the faces of their dead friends. You made every last villager drink your blood, and then you told them that they had damned themselves, and that only you could save them.

Agents of the Church rarely come here, and when they do, they always find you a polite host. The Church disinterestedly acknowledges you as the village leader, and your position is now secure. The villagers dare not speak against you, and most are too mad or too tightly bound to you to wish to. Some have even joined you in your depravities.

Concept: God will certainly be regretting making an enemy of you. You are on the Devil's own unholy mission, and you believe the corruption and perversion of Christian things are your appointed duty.

Roleplaying Hints: You labor constantly to put your charges into deeper and deeper states of terror. You are incorrigibly evil, and you look and act the part — you growl and shriek insanely, and ask significantly after the villagers' children. If you meet any Cainites who share your tastes, invite them to join you for a meal, but be thoughtful and provide an apron.

Equipment: Tattered Roman-style robes of office, scepter of rulership (dented from use in meting out "justice"), fetid bag of...parts...saved from unruly citizens (an eye for an eye...)

Vampire™ The Dark Ages

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Monster*
Demeanor: *Defender*
Clan: *Caitiff*

Generation: *10th*
Haven:
Concept: *Monstrous Podesta*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○○
Stamina ●●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●○○○○
Manipulation ●●●○○○
Appearance ●●○○○○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○○
Intelligence ●●●●○○
Wits ●●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Acting ●○○○○○
Alertness ●○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○○
Dodge ●○○○○○
Empathy ●●●○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○○
Larceny ●○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○○
Subterfuge ●●●○○○

Skills

Animal Ken ●○○○○○
Archery ○○○○○○
Crafts ○○○○○○
Etiquette ●○○○○○
Herbalism ○○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○○
Music ●○○○○○
Ride ○○○○○○
Stealth ●●○○○○
Survival ○○○○○○

Knowledges

Academics ●●●○○○
Hearth Wisdom ○○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○○
Law ●○○○○○
Linguistics ●○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○○
Occult ●●●○○○
Politics ●●○○○○
Science ○○○○○○
Seneschal ●●●○○○

Advantages

Disciplines

Celerity ●○○○○○
Dementation ●●●○○○
Obfuscate ●○○○○○
○○○○○○
○○○○○○

Backgrounds

Allies ●○○○○
Generation ●●○○○
Resources ●●○○○
Retainers ●○○○○
○○○○○

Virtues

Conscience ●●●●○
Self-Control ●●○○○
Courage ●●●●○

Other Traits

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Road

Beast
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Willpower

●●●●○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool

□□□□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□□□□

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Weakness

WALES
ENGLAND
SEA
London
Paris
FRANCE
LEON
NAVARRE
ARAGON
Saragossa
TUBCAL
MEDI
HE ALMOH
ADES
KING
SICI

Appendix: Positions of Power

Who was the King of Aragon in 1104? When was Julian the Apostate's reign? Who was Pope when your character was Embraced? The following resources are printed here for your convenience.

Roman Emperors from A.D. 284

Diocletian	284-305
Maximian	286-305
Galerius	305-311
Constantius I	305-306
Maximian	306-308
Severus	306-307
Maxentius	306-312
Constantine I the Great	306-337
Licinius	307-324
Maximin Daza	308-313
Constantine II	337-340
Constantius II	337-361
Constans	337-350
Magnentius	350-353
Julian the Apostate	360-363
Jovian	363-364
Valentinian I	364-375 (West)
Valens	364-378 (East)
Gratian	375-383 (West)
Valentinian II	375-392 (West)
Theodosius I the Great	378-395 (East; West from 392)

East

Honorius	395-423
Constantine III	407-411
Constantius III	421-421
John	423-425
Valentinian III	425-455
Petronius Maximus	455-455
Avitus	455-456
Majoran	457-461
Severus III	461-465
Anthemius	467-472
Olybrius	472-472
Glycerius	473-473
Julius Nepos	473-480
Romulus Augustulus	475-476

West

Arcadius	395-408
Theodosius II	408-450
Marcian	450-457
Leo I	457-474
Leo II	474-474
Zeno	474-491
Basilicus	475-476

Kings of Aragon

Ramiro I	1035-1063
Sancho Ramirez	1063-1094
Peter I	1094-1104
Alfonso I	1104-1134
Ramiro III	1134-1137
Petronilla	1137-1162
Alfonso II	1162-1196
Peter II	**1196-1213**
James I the Conqueror	1213-1276
Peter III	1276-1285
Alfonso III	1285-1291

Kings of Jerusalem

Godfrey of Bouillon	1099-1100
Baldwin I	1100-1118
Baldwin II	1118-1131
Fulk, Count of Anjou	1131-1144
Baldwin III	1144-1163
Amaury I	1163-1174
Baldwin IV	1174-1185
Baldwin V	1183-1186
Guy de Lusignan	1186-1187

Kings of Portugal

Alfonso I Henriques	1139-1185
Sancho I	**1185-1211**
Alfonso II	1211-1223
Sancho II	1223-1246 (Deposed)

Kings of Poland

Boleslav I	1025-1025
Mieszko II	1025-1034
Casamir I	1034-1058
Boleslav II	1058-1079
Vladislav I	1079-1102
Boleslav III	1102-1138
Boleslav IV	1146-1173
Casamir II	1177-1194
Leszek I	1202-1227

Byzantine Empire

Justin I	518-527
Justinian	527-565
Justin II	565-578
Tiberius	578-582
Maurice	582-602
Phocas	602-610
Heraclius I	610-641
Constantine III	641-641
Heracleonis	641-641
Constans II	641-668
Constantine IV	668-685
Justinian II	685-695
Leontius	695-698
Tiberius III	698-705
Justinian II	705-711
Philippicus	711-713
Anastasius II	713-715
Theodosius III	715-717
Leo III	717-741
Constantine V	741-775
Irene	797-802
Nicephorus I	802-811
Michael I	811-813
Leo V	813-820
Michael II	820-829
Theophilius	829-842
Michael III	842-867
Basil I	867-886
Leo VI	886-912
Alexander	912-913
Constantine VII	913-959
Romanus I	919-944
Romanus II	959-963
Nicephorus II	963-969
John I	969-976
Basil II	976-1025
Constantine VIII	1025-1028
Romanus III	1028-1034
Michael IV	1034-1041
Michael V	1041-1042
Zoe and Theodora	1042-1042
Constantine IX	1042-1054
Theodora	1054-1056
Michael VI	1056-1057
Isaac I	1057-1059
Constantine X	1059-1067
Romanus IV	1067-1071
Michael VI	1071-1078
Nicepohorus III	1078-1081
Alexius I	1081-1118
John II	1118-1143
Manuel I	1143-1180
Alexius II	1180-1183
Andronicus I	1183-1185
Isaac II	1185-1195
Alexius III	**1195-1203**
Isaac III	1203-1204
Alexius IV	1203-1204
Alexius V	1204-1204

Kings of Castille

Ferdinand I	1033-1065
Sancho II	1065-1072
Alfonso VI	1072-1109
Urraca	1109-1126
Alfonso VII	1126-1157
Sancho III	1157-1158
Alfonso VIII	**1158-1214**
Henry I	1214-1217
Ferdinand III	1217-1252
Alfonso X	1252-1284

Kings of France

Hugh Capet	987-996
Robert II	996-1031
Henri I	1031-1060
Philip I	1060-1108
Louis VI	1108-1137
Louis VII	1137-1180
Philip II Augustus	**1180-1223**
Louis VIII	1223-1226
Louis IX	1226-1270
Philip III	1270-1285
Rasputin	Just kidding

Kings of Denmark

Gorm	940-940
Harald I Bluetooth	940-986
Svein I	985-1014
Harald II	1014-1019
Canute	1019-1035
Hardicanute	1035-1042
Svein II	1047-1074
Harald III	1074-1080
Canute II	1080-1086
Olaf I	1086-1095
Erik I	1095-1103
Magnus	1129-1134
Erik III	1134-1137
Olaf II	1140-1142
Svein III	1142-1146
Canute III	1146-1157
Valdemer I	1157-1182
Canute IV	**1182-1202**
Valdemer II	1202-1241
Erik IV	1241-1250
Abel	1250-1252
Christopher	1252-1259
Erik V	1259-1286

Kings of England

Alfred the Great	877-899
Edward the Elder	899-925
Athelstan	925-939
Edmund	939-946
Edred	946-955
Eadwig	955-959
Edgar the Peaceable	959-975
Ethelred the Unready	975-1016
Edmund Ironsides	1016-1016
Canute of Denmark	1016-1035
Harold Harefoot	1035-1040
Hardicanute	1040-1042
Edward the Confessor	1042-1066
Harold Godwinson	1066-1066
William the Conqueror	1066-1087
William Rufus	1087-1100
Henry I	1100-1135
Stephen of Blois	1136-1154
Henry II	1154-1189
Richard the Lionhearted	**1189-1199**
John Lackland	1199-1216
Henry III	1216-1272

Kings of Germany and Holy Roman Emperors

Charlemagne	800-814
Louis the Pious	814-840
Lothar I	840-855
Louis II	855-875
Charles II the Bald	875-877
Charles III the Fat	881-887
Guy of Spoleto	891-894
Lambert of Spoleto	894-898
Arnulf of Carinthia	896-899
Louis III of Provence	901-905
Berengar I	915-924
Otto I the Great	962-973
Otto II	973-983
Otto III	983-1002
Henry II	1002-1024
Conrad II	1024-1039
Henry III	1039-1056
Henry IV	1056-1106
Rudolf of Swabia	1077-1080
Hermann of Salm	1081-1093
Conrad of Franconia	1093-1101
Henry V	1106-1125
Lothar III	1125-1137
Conrad III	1138-1152 (Never crowned)
Frederick I Barbarossa	1152-1190
Henry VI	1190-1197
Phillip of Swabia	1198-120 (Never crowned)
Otto IV	1198-1218 (Recognized by Innocent III)
Frederick II	1212-1250
Henry Raspe	1246-1247 (Anti-King, never crowned)
William of Holland	1247-1256 (Anti-King, never crowned)
Conrad IV	1250-1254 (Never crowned)
Richard of Cornwall	1257-1272 (Never crowned)
Alfonso X of Castille	1257-1273 (Never crowned)
Rudolf I of Hapsburg	1273-1291 (Never crowned)

Kings of Hungary

Geza	972-992 (Duke)
Stephen I	992-1038
Peter	1038-1041
Samual	1041-1044
Peter	1044-1046
Andrew I	1047-1060
Bela I	1060-1063
Salamon	1063-1074
Geza I	1074-1077
Ladislas I	1077-1095
Kalman	1095-1116
Stephen II	1116-1131
Bela II	1131-1141
Geza II	1141-1162
Stephen III	1161-1161
Ladislas II	1162-1163
Stephen IV	1164-1165
Stephen III	1163-1172
Bela III	1172-1196
Imre	**1196-1204**
Ladislas III	1204-1205
Andrew II	1205-1235
Bela IV	1235-1270
Stephen V	1270-1272
Ladislas IV	1272-1290

Kings of Serbia

Stephen Nemanja	1151-1196
Stephen I	**1196-1228**
Radoslav	1228-1232
Vladislav	1232-1243
Uros I	1243-1276
Stephen Dragutin	1276-1282

Kings of Scotland

Kenneth I McAlpin	843-860
Donald I	860-863
Constantine I	863-877
Aedh	877-878
Eocha	878-889
Donald II	889-900
Constantine II	900-943
Malcolm I	943-954
Indulf	954-962
Duff	962-967
Colin	967-971
Kenneth II	971-995
Constantine III	995-997
Kenneth III	997-1005
Malcolm II	1005-1034
Duncan I	1034-1040
MacBeth	1040-1057
Malcolm III	1057-1093
Donald Bane	1093-1094
Duncan II	1094-1094
Donald Bane	1094-1097
Edgar	1097-1107

Popes and Antipopes (†) of the 12th Century

Paschal II	1099-1118
Theodoric	1100†
Albert	1102†
Sylvester 'IV'	1105-1111†
Gelasius II	1118-1119
Gregory 'VIII'	1118-1121†
Calixtus II	1119-1124
Honorius II	1124-1130
Innocent II	1130-1143
Anacletus 'II'	1130-1138†
Victor 'IV'	1138†
Celestine II	1143-1144
Lucius II	1144-1145
Eugenius III	1145-1153
Anastasius IV	1153-1154
Hadrian IV	1154-1159
Alexander III	1159-1181
Victor 'V'	1159-1164†
Paschal 'III'	1164-1168†
Calixtus 'III'	1168-1178†
Innocent 'III'	1179-1180†
Lucius III	1181-1185
Urban III	1185-1187
Gregory VIII	1187
Clement III	1187-1191
Celestine III	**1191-1198**
Innocent III	1198-

A Dark Medieval Timeline

1066	Battle of Stamford Bridge
	Battle of Hastings
	Norman Conquest of England
1067	Construction begins on Tower of London
1071	First Saxon revolt
1076	Diet of Worms
1077	Civil War in England
1079	Construction begins on Winchester Cathedral
1085	Christians capture Toledo
1086	Domesday Book commissioned
1095	Proclamation of First Crusade at Council of Clermont
1096-1102	First Crusade
1096-7	Crusaders arrive in Constantinople
1096	Construction begins on Canterbury Cathedral
1097	Battle of Dorylaeum
	Siege of Antioch
1098	Battle of Antioch
	Cistercian order founded
1099	Jerusalem falls
	Godfrey of Bouillon elected first Latin ruler of Jerusalem
1101	Final wave of crusaders defeated by Turks
1112	Burghers of Laon murder bishop and proclaim a commune
1113	Hospitallers founded
	Peter Abelard opens school in Paris
1115	Clairvaux monastery founded
1118	Council of Toulouse plans attack on Saragossa
1120	Knights Templar founded
	Construction begins on Autun Cathedral
1121	Council of Soissons, Abelard condemned
1122	Concordat of Worms, Investiture Controversy settled
1125	William of Malmesbury's *History of England*
	Flying buttress introduced at Cluny
1132	London burns
1135	London burns again
1139-53	Civil War in England
1140	Council of Sens, Abelard again condemned
	Gratian compiles canon law
1145	Muslims capture Edessa
	Pope Eugenius III proclaims Second Crusade
1147-9	Second Crusade
1147	Eugenius authorizes crusading in Spain and Eastern Europe
	Lisbon captured
1148	Crusaders withdraw from siege of Damascus
1149	Consecration of Church of the Holy Sepulchre
1150	First papermills built in Spain
1155-1230	Civil war in Norway and Sweden
1158	Order of Calatrava founded
1159	John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*
1160	First windmills built in France
	Construction begins on Avila Cathedral
	Construction begins on the first gothic cathedral at Laon
1161	London burns yet again
1163	Construction begins on Paris Cathedral
1164	Constitutions of Clarendon
1166	Construction begins on Poitiers Cathedral
	Serbian revolt
1167	Lombard League founded
1169	Church of the Nativity (Bethlehem) renovated
	Egypt submits to Saladin
1170	Thomas Becket murdered in Canterbury Cathedral
	Construction begins on Wells Cathedral
1173	Order of Montegaudio founded
1174	Saladin takes over Damascus
1175	Waldenses (heretical) group established
1176	Order of Avis (Order of Evora) founded
	Lombard League defeats Frederick I
1182	Massacre of Latins in Constantinople
1183	Aleppo submits to Saladin
1185	Bavarian revolt
1186	Mosul submits to Saladin
1187	Battle of Hattin
	Jerusalem taken by Saladin
	Pope Gregory VIII proclaims Third Crusade
1188	Saladin Tithe imposed in England
1189-92	Third Crusade
1189	Silvas, Portugal captured
1191	Richard I takes Cyprus
	Acre capitulates to Richard and Philip II
	Battle of Arsuf
	First Lord Mayor of London appointed
	Bodies of Arthur and Guinevere reported exhumed at Glastonbury
1192	Treaty of Jaffa
	Construction begins on Lincoln Cathedral
	Edicts against Cathar heretics
1193-1230	Livonian Crusade

1194	Construction begins on Chartres Cathedral
1196	Diet of Wurzburg
1198	Teutonic Order founded
	Pope Innocent III proclaims Fourth Crusade
1200	Order of San Jorge de Alfama founded
	Construction begins on Bourges Cathedral
1201	Construction begins on Rouen Cathedral
1202-1204	Fourth Crusade
1202	Order of Swordbrethren founded
	Crusaders take Zara
1204	Crusaders sack Constantinople
	Baldwin of Flanders elected first Latin Em peror of Constantinople
1204-5	Conquest of the Peloponnese
1208	Papal legate assassinated in Languedoc
	Proclamation of Albigensian Crusade
1209-29	Albigensian Crusade
1209	Sack of Beziers
	Cambridge University founded
1210	Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans) established
1211	King of Hungary grants Teutonic Order lands in Transylvania
	Construction begins on Rheims Cathedral
1212	The Children's Crusade
1213	Pope Innocent III proclaims Fifth Crusade
	Pope Innocent III deposes and restores King John of England
	Construction begins on Dublin Cathedral
1214	Philip II captures Normandy
1215	King John of England signs Magna Carta
	Fourth Lateran Council formalizes doctrine of transubstantiation
	Paris University receives first statutes
1216	Order of Preachers (Dominicans) established
1217-29	Fifth Crusade
1218-19	Siege of Damietta
1220	Construction begins on Amiens Cathedral
	First Mongol incursions
1221	Crusaders defeated at al-Mansura
1222	Construction begins on Burgos Cathedral
	University of Padua founded
1224	St. Francis receives the stigmata
1225	Teutonic Order invited to Prussia
1226-83	Teutonic Order conquers Prussia
1226	Diet of Cremona
	Revival of Lombard League
1227	Crusade against heretics in Bosnia
1229-33	Civil war in Cyprus
1229	Jerusalem restored to Christians by treaty
	Peace of Paris ends Albigensian Crusade
1230	Construction begins on Beauvais Cathedral
	Kingdoms of Leon and Castile unified
1231	*Liber Augustalis* law code for Sicily
1232-4	Crusade against Stedinger heretics in Germany
1232-53	Conquest of Valencia by James I of Aragon
1233	Inquisition founded
1236	Ferdinand III of Castille takes Cordoba
1237	Teutonic Order absorbs Swordbrethren in Livonia
1239	Proclamation of Crusade against Emperor Frederick II
	Swedish crusade to Finland
1241	Mongol invasion reaches Hungary and the Adriatic
	Proclamation of Crusade against Mongols
1242	First Prussian Revolt (against Teutonic Order)
	Battle on Lake Peipus
1244	Fall of Montsegur
	Fall of Jerusalem to Khorezmians
	Battle of La Forie
1245	Teutonic Order authorized to wage permanent Crusade in Prussia
	Council of Lyons deposes Frederick II
1248-54	First Crusade of St. Louis (King Louis IX of France)
1248	Aachen taken by crusaders
	Seville taken by Ferdinand
1249	Capture of Damietta
1250	Crusaders again defeated at al-Mansura
1251	First Crusade of the Shepherds
1252	Florin minted, reintroduces gold coinage to Europe
1256-8	War of St. Sabas in Acre
1256	King Llewellyn sweeps English from Wales
1258	Mongols sack Baghdad
	Treaty of Corbeil settles French-Spanish border
1259	Battle of Pelagonia
	Treaty of Paris restores peace to northern France
1260	Battle of Durbe, Teutonic Knights defeated in Livonia
	Second Prussian revolt
	Mongols take Damascus
	Battle of Ayn Jalut
1261	Greeks reoccupy Constantinople
1265	First English Parliament summoned

1266	Battle of Benevento
1268	Mamluks seize Jaffa and Beirut
	Fall of Antioch to Mamluks
	Battle of Tagliacozzo
1269-72	Second Crusade of St. Louis
1269	Rebuilding of Westminster Abbey begins
1271	Marco Polo departs Venice for the Mongol court
1273	Construction begins on Limoges Cathedral
1274	Construction begins on Ghent Cathedral
1275	Order of Santa Maria de Espana founded
1277	Charles of Anjou arrives in Acre, pressing claim to crown of Jerusalem
	Kingdom of Jerusalem split
	Genoese begin annual convoys to Bruges and Channel ports
1284	Edward I seizes Wales
	Genoese defeat Pisans at naval battle of Meloria
1286	Jerusalem reunited
1288	Marco Polo returns to Venice
1289	Tripoli falls to Mamluks
1290	Edward I expels all Jews from England
1291	Acre falls to Mamluks
	Sidon and Beirut fall
1293	Ordinances of Justice Florence bans magnate families from government
1295	Model Parliament in England, first representative parliament
1297	Battle of Cambuskenneth, William Wallace defeats English army
1302	Muslims take Ruad from Templars
	Treaty of Caltabellotta
	Truce between Sicily and Naples
1305	Clement V establishes Avignon papacy
1306	Hospitallers invade Rhodes
1306-7	Crusade against heretic Fra Dolcino in Piedmont
1307	Arrest of all Templars in France
1309	Popular Crusade
	Teutonic Order headquarters moved to Marienburg, Prussia
	Crusade against Venice
1311	Hospitaller headquarters established on Rhodes
	Battle of Halmros, Athens and Thebes fall to Catalan Company
1312	Knights Templar suppressed
	Pope Clement grants Templar lands to Hospitallers
	Council of Vienna
1314	Battle of Bannockburn, Scottish independence
	Last Templar master burned

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