DESENTATION OF STREET



Dinguisitors



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Contents

Prelude: Final Absolution	4
Introduction	14
Chapter One: Against All Demons	22
Chapter Two: Call to Arms	56
Chapter Three: The Mind of the Inquisition	116
Chapter Four: Characters and Drama	140
Chapter Five: The Word of God	170
Chapter Six: Storytelling	214

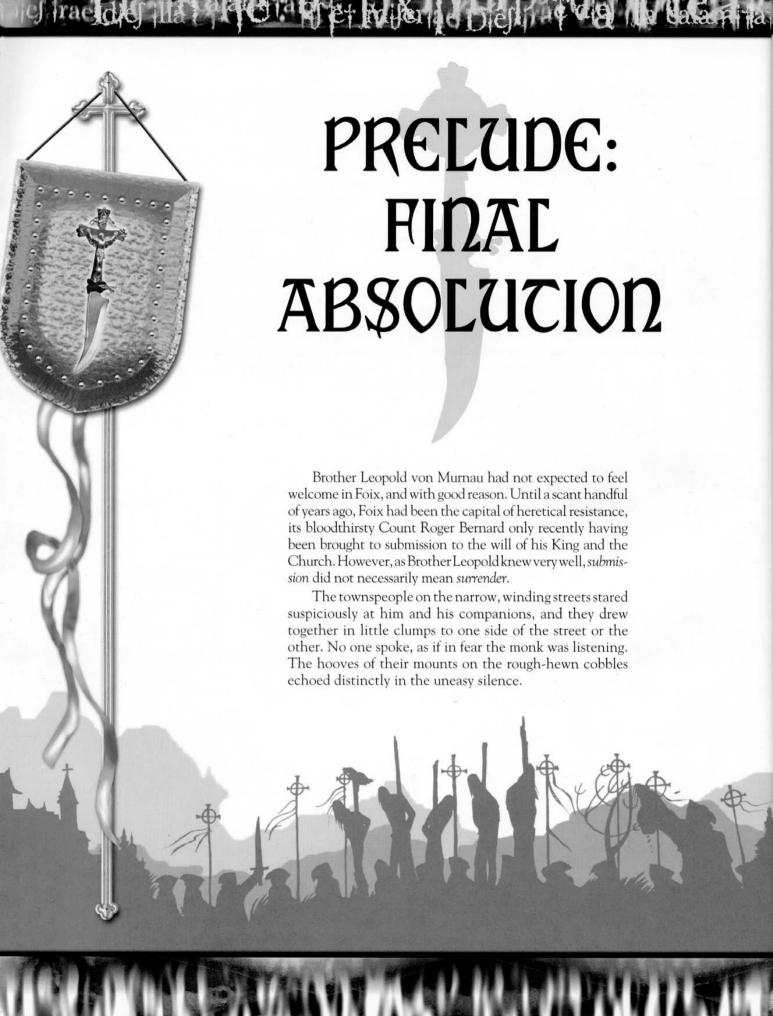


thave never cared much for sunsets.

The glorious array of colors across the western sky is nothing to me but the harbinger of twilight, and the night to come. And I have never found the night to be a time of rest, but rather of horror, for night is when Hell is strongest and those of us who stands trong against it must be most vigilant.

Tonight, I fear, will be no different. Death stalks the streets of Foix, and its cause lies on the table before me: a heavy black tome, bound with bronze clasps and marked with infernal sigils etched into the leather and bronze of its bindings. I have not had the courage to view its contents — nor do I need to. The book stinks to me of carrion; a charnel odor clings to its very pages such that I can barely tolerate its presence, an odor my companions cannot perceive. Yet it is not the only such volume in my possession, and if I condemn our Brother Renier for desiring such a thing, or falling unwittingly under its spell, then I also condemn myself....

—From the private journal of Brother Leopold von Murnau, Inquisitor, Order of Friars Preachers



Sir Baudioun le Breton urged forward his roan to come alongside Leopold's mule. The knight's eyes remained watchful, his hand resting on his mailed thigh, close to the hilt of his sword. Behind them trailed Philippe, Baudioun's young squire, riding his own horse and leading the pack mule and his master's destrier, as well. Both knight and squire wore white, though only Baudioun's mantle bore the broken red cross that identified him as a Poor Knight of Acre, as much a servant of God as the Dominican in white and black who rode beside him.

Leopold ignored the stares and tried not to think of the risk, but of their mission. They were not here to hunt heretics—the Church had other, even more dangerous enemies.

"I do not envy our fellows their commission, Brother," the knight commented in a low voice. He spoke French, the only language they had between them, for Baudioun was not conversant in Latin.

"In God is our refuge and strength," Brother Leopold replied, "and as He watches over the sparrow, He shall watch over us as well." He took a small book from the pilgrim's satchel that hung at his side and consulted it. "The chapter-house should be at the end of that lane there."

They had barely dismounted, however, when a beggar huddled in a recessed doorway lurched to his feet and staggered toward them. Baudioun did put his hand on his sword then, stepping between the ragged creature and his companions.

"Wait," Leopold murmured, laying a restraining hand on the knight's arm.

The beggar was cloaked in a ragged blanket, but as he pushed back its folds from his head, he revealed a monk's tonsure — though the once clean-shaven crown was now rough with stubble. "God be praised," he whispered hoarsely. "I had almost given up hope—" Then, belatedly, he added the code words, "Sed libera nos a malo." But deliver us from evil.

"Et ne nos inducas in tentationem," Leopold answered, deliberately using the prior verse. And lead us not into temptation. "I am Brother Leopold, and this is Sir Baudioun, our brother in the Lord's work."

Now that he looked more closely, Leopold could see the beggar was younger than he'd first appeared, despite his bedraggled state. Beneath the filthy blanket, he wore the red robes of the Order of St. Theodosius. "Brother, is something wrong? Or is it now the custom for your Order to embrace poverty and beg for your bread?"

The young monk didn't even flinch. "It is not," he admitted, "but it has kept me safe. A devil hunts these streets at night, Brother. I fear of all our brethren, I am the only one left alive."

+++

"God's blood," Sir Baudioun murmured as they stepped inside the remains of what had once been the Inquisition's chapter-house, a cramped dwelling above an empty shop. Then, at Leopold's reproving look, he added, "Forgive me, Brother. But what in the name of Our Lord happened here?"

Barely a stick of furniture had been left unbroken. Shutters had been torn from the windows, mattresses ripped open and bedclothes slashed into rags. And over it all was a sickening odor of old blood and burnt flesh, though Leopold was not certain how much of that scent was common to the room and how was much was in his nose only. The blood, at least, must be real; he could see places where the debris was marked with red-brown stains.

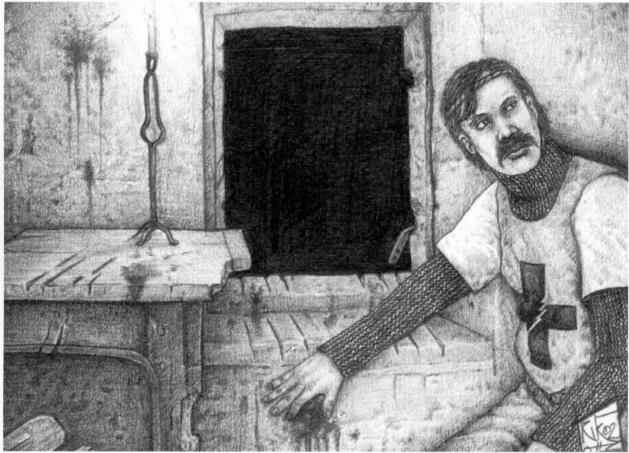
"It happened six nights ago." Brother Renier told them. "By God's grace, I was not here when the demon struck. But all the others...Brother Herve, Brother Raimond, and Sister Berengaria...." He shivered, wrapped his ragged blanket more tightly about his thin shoulders. "I gathered their bodies, the parts I could find I don't think Brother Herve even woke up, he was still in his bed. And Sister Berengaria, she must have tried to run even after she was first struck... I found her body lying in the yard. And her head... I found that only a short distance off—"

Baudioun crossed himself. "May God have mercy on their souls," he murmured in a low voice.

"How do you know it was a devil who did this, and not men?" Leopold asked. "The Count and his men have done such things, and even boasted of it."

"The Count has been in Toulouse these past weeks, or so the prior at St. Volusien told us," Brother Renier said. "And the door was still barred when I returned. When no one answered my knock, I finally pried open one of the shutters downstairs. And when I came upstairs—"Renier's voice trailed off; a helpless gesture toward what lay across the room finished his sentence for him.

"Now this is odd," Sir Baudioun said as he crouched on the littered floor to stir the debris with the point of his drawn sword. "You see that bloodstain on the wall there? Where the very plaster has been cracked? Something hit the wall there, and hard. Yet, look — no sign of blood here. The rushes



would have soaked it up like a sponge." He stirred the debris again. "See? All clean, and bone-dry."

"Brother Raimond's head was... was smashed in like an eggshell," Brother Renier added. "But he was over there, by the window."

The knight rose to his feet and strode to where Renier pointed. "Not much blood here, either," he reported. "Some... you can see where his head must have rested, here. But still...."

Brother Leopold glanced down at the floor, then looked out the window. A precipice fell away beneath that side of the house, down a steep boulder-strewn hillside to the river, 50 feet below. He could just make out the splintered remains of a pair of oak shutters on the rocks near the water's edge. The window ledge was scored heavily as well, as if torn by iron hooks.

Coming back inside, Leopold reached inside the satchel. The first book he pulled out had a reddish-brown cover in intricately tooled leather; with a hiss of irritation, he pushed it back inside and drew out the smaller volume he'd been consulting earlier. He opened it, ran his finger down a page, then stopped suddenly and looked up.

"Brother Renier," he said, viewing the wreckage of the chapter-house with new intensity, searching for the obvious — which was nowhere in sight. "Where are the *books*?"

†††

The priest was saying a well-attended funeral mass in the main sanctuary of St. Volusien when Brother Leopold arrived there, so the inquisitor retired to a quiet place in the apse to wait and pray. The notes he had from the Council did not tell him how to contact any Oculi in Foix; he could only hope, if he made himself accessible, that one of them would contact him. Baudioun and Philippe had gone to see about stabling for their animals. Brother Renier had scuttled off as well, saying something about retrieving his possessions, though Leopold did wonder what possessions the young monk could possibly have.

He had reached for his missal, but what he drew forth from his satchel was the same red-brown volume that had made itself inconvenient earlier. The title was embossed on the cover, along with a fanciful design of interwoven leaves and vines.

Libellus Secretum Sartaelis.

"Have you no shame?" he hissed at it. "Will you torment me even in the Lord's House?"

He started to put it back, but paused. Clearly, something demonic was at work in Foix; perhaps the *Libellus* might provide some clue as to its nature. On the other hand, as Leopold knew, its author was hardly a trustworthy source.

He hesitated for a moment longer, then turned and left the hallowed ground of the church to seek a private place in the cloister beyond. Only then, in the seclusion of a recessed archway, did he open the book to a random page to read the elegant Latin text:

I was beginning to fear you had forgotten all about me.

"Would to God that I could," Leopold muttered. Then he quickly shut the book and set it aside, because someone else had entered the cloister.

One of the monks had left the church, even though mass was not yet over, and was walking briskly along the passage beside the church. He paused at the corner and waited until he had Leopold's gaze. One of his hands moved in the sign language monks used when required to keep silence.

Brother, we must talk.

Leopold slid the *Libellus* back into his book satchel and followed the man.

+++

When Brother Leopold returned to the chapter-house, Baudioun and Philippe were busy cleaning up some of the worst of the debris, salvaging what furnishings might be repaired, and consigning the rest as firewood. Renier had been sorting through the scattered contents of cabinets, which had held materials from cooking utensils and herbs to scriptorium supplies. He had even found a wax-stoppered vial of holy water, blessed by the Bishop of Toulouse and miraculously unbroken.

Leopold appreciated their efforts, though the place still smelled befouled to him. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he felt a familiar hollowness somewhere in his belly, could almost *taste* the scent of evil somewhere disturbingly close.

"Well?" Baudioun asked. "What did Rodrigue's little spy have to say? Anything useful?"

"Perhaps. Jaufre the wineseller was found murdered in his rooms yesterday." Leopold stood next to the window, touched the deep scars cut into the wooden frame. Jaufre's window had borne similar marks. "The rooms and shop were all but torn apart, as if someone were looking for something. He had

possessed a few books from his youth, the spy told me; the chest where they were kept had been smashed open and the books taken. Yet his strongbox was untouched."

"Jaufre?" Renier whispered. "But — but he was not one of us...."

"Books again," Baudioun said as he scratched at his beard. "Odd, that. What would a demon want with books? Did this Jaufre deal in books as well as wine?"

"Not usually, no. A Castilian had offered him a book in exchange for a cask just a week ago, but Jaufre refused. He seemed to think it was heretical. The Castilian must have found a buyer, though, for he was back in the shop only an hour later with silver in his purse.

"In the meantime, Brother Renier," Leopold continued, turning to face the monk, "you had said that by God's grace you were not here the night the chapter-house was attacked and your companions killed. But I don't believe you said where you were... or where you've been these past six nights?"

Renier's eyes took on a haunted expression. "Anywhere. Everywhere," he said finally. "I've not dared take shelter in the same place two nights in a row, and even then I've hardly slept for fear of being taken in my sleep, as Brother Herve was."

"And the night the chapter-house was attacked?" Brother Leopold asked, once Renier fell silent. "Why were you not with your brothers that night?"

"I—I had the prior's permission to study in the library at St. Volusien. I found it easier to do my reading when the brothers were asleep."

"Then you must have made the acquaintance of Brother Jerome, the librarian."

"Yes... yes, of course."

"Who was in the infirmary that night with a fever and so forgot to unlock the book cabinets that evening — in fact, the abbot had to send a monk to get the key from him before morning prayers."

Renier's face paled, and he looked down at the table. His fingers played nervously with the unraveling edge of a coarse blanket, wrapped around a bundle that sat before him.

"You were not at the abbey that night, Brother." Leopold said sternly.

"No," Renier admitted. He did not meet Leopold's eyes. "Forgive me, Brother. I—I was at Jaufre's wine shop. I couldn't take it on hallowed ground, you see. Every time I tried, I found myself walking in the other direction—" "What?" A cold chill touched Leopold's spine; he found himself inhaling almost expectantly.

"But I swear to you, I didn't *know*," Renier said, barely pausing between his words. "I never meant for this to happen... but then they were all dead, and I didn't know what to do—"

With fumbling fingers, Renier unwrapped the blanket. Within the folds of wool was a leather satchel, not unlike the one that Leopold himself used to carry his books when he traveled.

The hollow sensation in Leopold's belly grew even worse, and he distinctly smelled a fetid odor like that of rotting meat coming from Renier's general direction. Leopold watched without surprise as Renier opened the satchel and drew out a thick black tome with bronze clasps.

"The Castilian's book, that Jaufre refused," Renier whispered, hoarsely. "I bought it."

"You did what?" Baudioun practically roared. "God's balls, boy! What were you thinking?"

Renier burst into sobs, rocking back and forth, his hands over his face.

"Baudioun!" Leopold snapped, glaring at the knight. "That's enough! Now is not the time for casting stones. We have greater problems to address."

The knight scowled and folded his arms across his chest, but he said no more.

"Renier," Leopold said firmly. When the monk didn't respond, Leopold reached out and took hold of his shoulders, forcing Renier to look him in the face. "Brother, listen to me. *Listen*."

The younger monk managed a weak nod.

"Our Savior is merciful and will forgive even the greatest of sins. But we need your help now. What is this book you purchased?"

Renier took a breath. "It's a nomen angelorum," he said. "All the known names. Even those who followed Lucifer, and were cast out of heaven."

"A book of demon names. Dear Madonna have mercy." Leopold rubbed his forehead. "And this man, the Castilian — he had no idea, did he? He probably couldn't read it."

"I don't think he knew," Renier agreed. "Else he would have charged me more. In truth, Brother, I would not be surprised to learn he stole it. He was anxious enough to sell."

"And now someone — or something — wants it back, I gather," Baudioun said. "Badly enough to kill and maim innocent men of God."

"Brother, what am I going to do?" Renier asked, his eyes fixed on Leopold for the answer.

Of course, Leopold reflected bitterly, we Murnau are always the experts on things diabolical.

"Burn it," Baudioun growled. "The thing is clearly cursed. It should be destroyed."

"No!" Renier snatched up the book and held it to his chest. "You can't!"

"We won't," Leopold said, holding up one hand to still Baudioun's protest. "Not yet, at least. I can see another use for it — if this creature wants to find it so badly."

"Ah, Brother, now I see your mind, and I like it." The knight grinned and laid his hand on the hilt of his sword. "Bait."

†††

A lexicon of demon names. Leopold shuddered even to think of such a thing; men had been burned at the stake for less. Certainly, it was something a sorcerer might send a murderous demon to retrieve.

Privately, he agreed with Baudioun; the book had to be destroyed. But such action was no guarantee of stopping the demon's deadly hunt. Its actions, even the killings, were those of a creature who lacked real understanding of what it sought. And besides, there was something in the inquisitors' souls that cried out for revenge — that no demon should kill three of their own and go free. And there was only one sure way to draw the demon in, where it might be dealt with.

The flicker of a few candles was all that illuminated their vigil at the chapter-house that evening, as night descended over the town. They had joined the monks at St. Volusien for vespers, right before sunset. Baudioun knelt in prayer, his freshly blessed and anointed sword held unsheathed and upright before him, his forehead pressed to its hilt. Philippe had been ordered to remain within the safety of the abbey — so that if the worst happened, at least one of their party might live to report to the Council of their fate.

Renier knelt as well, the precious vial of holy water clasped in his hands, and murmured his penances. His robe was not much cleaner, but at least his tonsure was freshly shaven. Leopold had heard his full confession and absolved him, though the matter of his status in the Inquisition would need to be referred to the Council of Faith in Toulouse.

Under the circumstances, Leopold did not feel qualified to judge him.

Having completed his own prayers, Leopold took a candle and went downstairs to the empty shop to see what else the *Libellus Secretum Sartaelis* might have to say on the matter. Even as he did so, he felt unclean; whether he was succumbing to the weakness in his own blood or his damnable curiosity, it didn't matter. It was his own secret sin, his thorn in the flesh — and for whatever reason, he could not resist opening its pages one more time.

Your knightly protector is right, you know. You really should burn that book.

That surprised him. For one thing, it wasn't like Sartael to offer its opinion quite so quickly, without any persuasion. That it also agreed with Baudioun's judgment, and his own, on this topic was doubly suspicious.

"I should?" he asked. "Why do you say that? I should think you'd advise the opposite...."

It's a dangerous thing to possess. I should hate to see you perish before your time. I've grown to enjoy our occasional conversations.

Leopold frowned slightly. Why would it want... ah, yes. Of course. He should have thought of it before.

"Your name is in that book, isn't it? Your true name? Is that why you want to see it destroyed?"

The thing that seeks that book has already taken five mortal lives. It is not a creature to be trifled with. Burn the book, and it will seek you no longer.

"You didn't answer my question."

The page remained blank, which Leopold took as an answer in itself. "How can you be so sure that burning the book will stop it?"

Are you asking for my assistance, Leopold? I could tell you so many things—about this beast and its master, what it is, where it came

from, what its fears and weaknesses are. All you ever have to do is ask.

It was all it ever wanted him to do... or at least, all that it would admit to. But as tempting as its offer was, he dared not accept it. Better to be ignorant and in God's hands than even taste the knowledge of the Serpent and be shut out of Eden.

"Perhaps," he said, just as he shut the book, so there could be no response, "that book is not the only one that should be burned."

But his threat was an empty one, and he knew it. He went back upstairs to join the others in prayer. Lord, have mercy on me, miserable sinner that I am, and forgive the weakness in my soul....

+++

A noise alerted him some hours later from his prayers: The hollow sound of hooves on rock, the muffled jingle of harness. And a faint new scent of decay and carrion, came in through the window on a breath of wind.

Leopold rose to his feet, crept to the window and peered out.

On a little rise of land across the river, barely visible even in the moonlight, a cloaked and hooded rider came into view. Leopold did not need to smell it to sense its unnaturalness; the horse's eyes shone silver with reflected moonlight, and it moved far too surely on the rough terrain. The rider pulled up and pushed back the hood to reveal a cruel face that seemed unnaturally pale and was framed by a black beard and long hair. He lifted something to his lips: a whistle, on which he blew a high, clear note, like one might use to summon a hawk.

The answer, however, came not from outside, but from within: a low, rumbling growl that they not only heard, but felt in the beams of the floor beneath their very feet.

"God's blood...." Baudioun leaped to his feet, sword held at ready. Startled, Leopold turned, and felt his own blood chill at the peril that awaited them

A demon — for it could be nothing else but the spawn of hell — was taking shape behind them, emerging out of the very wall. Easily as tall as Baudioun, and powerfully built, its features were bestial and grotesque, its massive jaw sporting great polished fangs. Its talons were long and viciously curved like a monstrous hawk's; its eyes glowed like live coals. And from its shoulders sprouted an unfolding pair of leathery batlike wings.

Even worse, it was closer to the table with the cursed black tome than any of them.

Baudioun raised his sword. "For Christ and the True Cross—"he began, starting forward boldly, but he never got close enough for a blow. The demon picked up the remains of a bench and flung it at the knight like a spear. The oaken missile hit Baudioun in mid-chest with the force of a trebuchet; he was hurled backward and off his feet into a pile of broken furniture.

He did not get up.

Leopold, however, had taken what advantage he could of Baudioun's attack, ducking and scrambling across the room to put himself between the creature and the book.

The demon's gaze followed him. Now that it had fully materialized, its hide was darkening to a mottled slate gray, rough and pitted as weathered stone. It sported a profusion of irregular warts and spikes.

It snarled, black lips curling back to display all its savage, jagged teeth. Then it raised one long arm and pointed at the black tome behind him.

"Addicere libellus!" Its voice was rough and harsh, little better than a growl, but its demand was unmistakable.

"No," Leopold said flatly. The creature's stench was worse now; the inquisitor's eyes threatened to water from the reek. He raised his hand, holding out his rosary and its silver crucifix defensively.

The demon cringed, almost as if it expected to be struck, though it did not back down. "Addicere libellus!" it repeated, though not quite so forcefully.

Renier stepped forward, clutching the vial of holy water in one hand; with the other he began to draw the sign of the cross in the air. "In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti—"

The demon's head whipped around to face this new threat. Its nostrils flared. One massive fist slammed into the young monk's midsection; Renier doubled up with a strangled gasp. Another backhanded blow knocked him against the opposite wall, then the creature moved toward him, jaws opening wide.

"No!" Leopold grabbed the black tome and held it up where the demon could see it. "Is this what you want, demon? Is it? Leave him... Leave him, in the name of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, or I will destroy this book, and you with it!"

It understood his Latin; it hesitated, crouching over Renier's crumpled form, its eyes fixed on the tome that Leopold held. "Addicere libellus!" it said again.

Renier moved, slightly. One hand uncurled, to reveal the vial of holy water, yet unbroken. "Don't... give it," he managed to gasp out. He was struggling for his very breath. "Murderer—"

With a snarl, the beast turned back to the victim within easy reach, lips curling back from its fangs as it went for the monk's throat.

As the massive jaws opened before his face, Renier raised his arm and smashed the vial right between the demon's eyes.

There followed immediately a sharp tang of burned flesh, and a bellow of pain and fury from the demon. Its powerful, taloned hands slashed across Renier's body, and then the creature clawed at its own eyes as it staggered backward, ripping into its own flesh to destroy the source of its agony. Glistening trails of blood streaked down the creature's rough hide, which was clearly not made of stone after all, as it could bleed.

"God's... blood...."

Struggling for wind, Baudioun had raised himself to his feet. He leaned against the wall for support. Blood streamed down his face and matted his hair, and he held his free hand to his side — but in the other he still gripped his sword. "My turn now, you foul cur of hell—"

The demon dropped to all fours like a great cat, arching its back and spreading its wings slightly for balance as it turned to face the direction of Baudioun's voice. Between the searing of the holy water upon its cursed flesh and the deep gashes it had inflicted on itself in response, its face was a gruesome ruin. Of its eyes, only bloody sockets and shreds of flesh remained. The tattered nostrils flared as it turned its blind gaze from side to side, seeking its foe.

Baudioun advanced, but moving slowly and holding his side; Leopold could see he was in pain. Dear Madonna, give him strength! Then Leopold began to pray aloud: "Dominus illuminatio mea et salus mea quem timebo. Dominus protector vitae meae a quo trepidabo—"

The demon, though blinded, was not deaf, nor had it lost its strength. With one sweep of a wing, it struck Leopold knocking him off his feet. The black tome fell from his hands and skidded across the floor.

The demon's head followed the sound. It fumbled blindly after the book, snatched it up in its talons, and then leaped toward the open window.

Baudioun met it halfway, swinging his sword into the thing's torso with all his remaining strength.

The blessed blade cut through the armor of its hide, slicing deeply into inhuman flesh and bone.

With a wail of agony the demon fell, convulsing on the floor at their feet. Despite its terrible injury, it still gripped the black tome with one arm. Desperate now to escape, the creature used its remaining limbs to drag itself toward the window again. "Magister! Magister!" it cried, its ravaged face straining in the direction of the opening. "Adiumenti Petros, Magister—"

"Go to Hell, you ugly bastard," Baudioun growled, and he brought his sword down on the demon's horned skull.

It gave one last, piercing screech, though from what remaining organ, Leopold could not tell, for Baudioun's blow had split its head in twain clear down to its breastbone. The thing's body collapsed and almost immediately began to wither. Its flesh dried up and crumbled away before their eyes, until all that remained was a coarse pile of gravel and ash, and the cursed tome the demon had sacrificed itself to recover.

"Thanks unto God!" Baudioun sank to his knees and leaned against the wall. "See to Renier, Brother. I'm broken, but I'll mend."

Leopold picked his way around the ashen remains and knelt at the stricken monk's side. The front of Renier's habit was soaked in his own blood; another stream of it now issued from his lips. "Bless... me..." the monk whispered, lifting one hand.

Leopold clasped it between his own. Renier was dying; there was little he could do but remit him to God's hands. "Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimittis peccatis tuis, perducat te ad vitam aeternam. Amen."

"Deo Gratias" Renier said, after which his lips moved, though no sound came forth. Then he moved no more.

Baudioun crossed himself and murmured a prayer. Leopold bent to gently close the monk's unseeing eyes. Why, Lord? Was this his penance, that he should die like his brethren? Why him? Why not me — for my soul is no less tainted. Why do You spare me still?

Leopold rose to his feet and went once more to the window. Across the river, the cloaked figure turned his monstrous steed and rode away, vanishing into the night.

* * *

Dawn is coming now, far more welcome than twilight. My candle is all but guttering, but shortly I shall no longer need its light. I have written a letter to the Abbot at Laurendine, informing him of the tragic loss of four of his Order, and assuring him they died in the service of Christ. Our brave Brother Renier will be laid to rest with his brethren here in the churchyard of St. Volusien, and I will arrange to have masses said for all their souls. When I return to Rome, their names shall be added to the growing list of holy martyrs in our sacred cause.

The black tome is in its satchel again, sitting on the table here. Baudioun, before his weariness and injuries finally persuaded him to sleep, once again bade me burn it. I cannot fault his reasoning in this, yet the reason I have not yet done so sits at my right hand, appearing innocent, though like the words that appear on its pages,

deceptive in that very appearance.

It goes against my very soul to do anything it wants of me, lest by doing so I make myself more open to even greater temptations, and greater sin. Yet its advice is in keeping with Baudioun's in this matter, and with my own instincts: This cursed tome must be destroyed. Is my hesitation due merely to my distrust of its motives, or because its evil has already planted a seed in my soul? And if Sartael — I can write its name here, though I refuse to honor it by its utterance — wants something, does that make that action evil by its very nature? Or is it deceiving me yet again, pretending one thing, knowing I will likely do the opposite? The fiend that summoned the devil-beast still walks the night, and might yet send even greater horrors to recover its property. But dare I trust Sartael's assertions that if the book is destroyed, the fiend will simply give up and go away?

Holy Mary, Mother of God, give me strength! For

I know what I must do....

—From the private journal of Brother Leopold von Murnau, Inquisitor, Order of Friars Preachers



The girl was going to die soon.

The demon obviously had no intention of feeding and letting her go. Osoro watched from the window as the girl's flesh turned white. She clutched at the demon's back, her body indicating that even if she could break away, she probably wouldn't.

The whole process — luring the girl into the shadowy corner, sinking fangs into her soft neck, draining her life's blood, and leaving her poor

corpse to rot there — probably took only seconds.

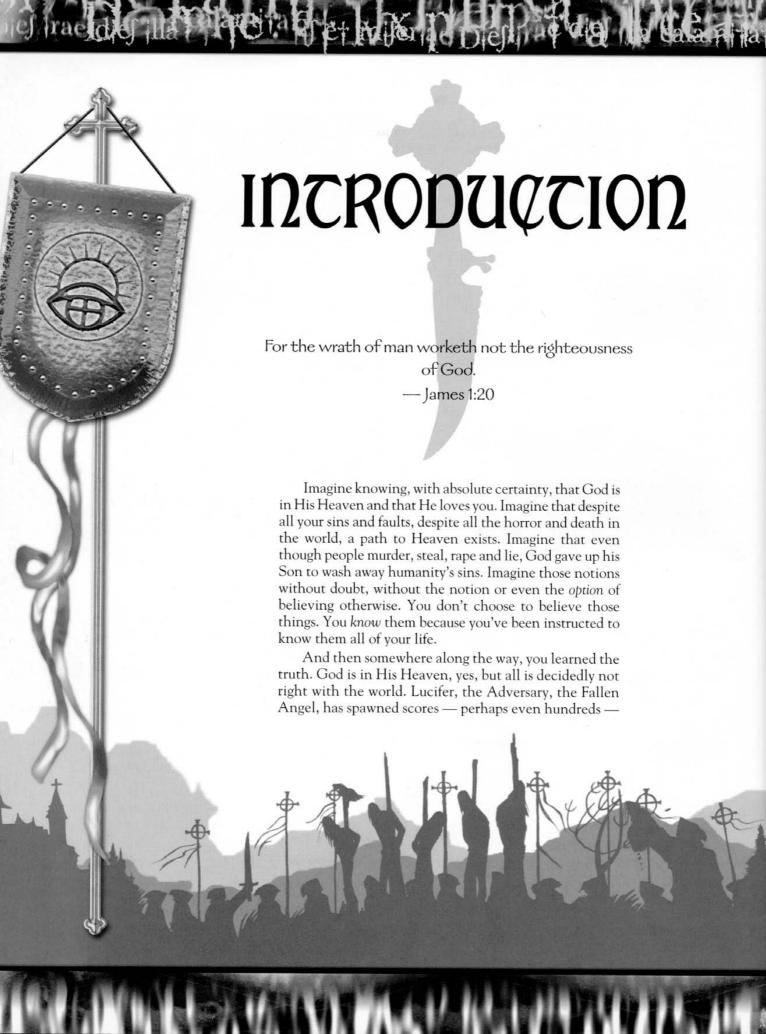
For Osoro of Madrid, those few seconds stretched on for eternity.

God had granted Osoro much. He had granted the young noble's father mercy from the Moors. He had granted Osoro a loving family and a modest inheritance. When the night-devils came for Osoro, calling the shadows to life and strangling his guards, God had granted Osoro the skill to remain hidden and the good fortune to find a way to burn his foes to cinders while he escaped. When Rodrigue de Navarre had approached him, God had granted Osoro the intelligence to know His Calling.

But Osoro would have given up anything, even his own life, not to have witnessed the things he had. Silently cursing the night he'd become an Eye of God, he watched the girl die. She was shaking now, her body presumable growing cold as the blood left it, and yet she still clung to the demon as she would a lover. The demon leaned out from her, as if trying to separate himself while still keeping his mouth latched to her neck. Osoro did not understand why until he saw steam rise up from the ground. The dead often lost control of their bodies, after all.

The girl's body crumpled to the ground, and the demon left it and walked away into the night. The creature looked human. No Christian looking at it would know it was anything other than a man, perhaps returning home after drinking wine with his friends. But Osoro knew. He knew that the demon had committed a breach of etiquette by leaving the body uncovered and drained in an alley. He knew this meant that conflict between demons was coming. He knew that he must report these things to his superiors in the Oculi Dei.

But he did not know the girl's name. After watching helplessly as she died, thanks to his vow of secrecy, he could think of little else.



of minor demons. Shapeshifters, blood-drinking corpses, familiar spirits, and other monsters emerge from the bowels of Hell to corrupt and bedevil good Christians. And it works, too: Sorcerers and cultists attest to that with their *maleficium* and their black arts. So, along with knowing that God loves you and that by Him you are delivered from sin, you also know, with utter faith and certainty, that monsters stalk the nights and they wish to *tear God down*.

How can you stand in the horrible glare of that truth and not act?

God's Soldiers

Dark Ages: Inquisitor is a storytelling game about the members of a secret organization within the Catholic Church dedicated to hunting down and destroying the get of Satan. These inquisitors aren't concerned with heresy (not to the same degree that the Dominicans and others of the time are, anyway). They hunt down demons, beings of true evil. They have a purity of purpose that the Crusaders would be hard-pressed to match. If they fail, after all, Christendom (and therefore the world) dies with them.

And yet, inquisitors are all too human. They still sin. They succumb to despair, lust, greed and any number of other human failings. They wield power from their faith in God, but this power marks them — some inquisitors can't sleep for the nightmares that torment them. Some are so bound by their sacred oaths that breaking them causes the inquisitor physical pain. Some even suffer the stigmata. It's a hard road for the blessed, and the fact that they fight creatures that would just as soon feast upon their flesh and blood doesn't make things any easier.

The Shadow Inquisition

The Papal Inquisition, as the history books reckon it, is still several years off. However, in the Dark

THE DARK MEDIEVAL

plete game. You will need a copy of Dark Ages: Vampire to play, as that book contains the core rules. Although it shares some themes and some systems with the World of Darkness game Hunter: The Reckoning, Dark Ages: Inquisitor is not a Hunter sourcebook and you need no Hunter books in order to play.

Medieval, the shadow Inquisition or the Holy Inquisition contra Diabolum enim et alii daemones (against the Devil and other demons) rose in the first half of the 13th century to combat servants of Satan. This is a rather broad category, of course, and part of the Inquisition's self-imposed task is to investigate these creatures. Any creature that looks human, after all, be it a mage, a werewolf or even a vampire, might still be human and therefore salvageable on some level. The inquisitors must be very careful when applying force, lest they damn an innocent soul to Hell. Likewise, the Inquisition works fervently to keep the existence of such creatures secret from the general populace (although most people believe in demons, it's one thing to believe they exist and quite another to actually see them). Even within the Church itself, only a scattered few clergy know about the shadow Inquisition's task. The rest are told only what they need to know, often to pray and not ask too many questions.

Who are these inquisitors? From what walks of life can the Inquisition draw its soldiers? The answer to that question is simply: "Anywhere that Satan's get rear their ugly heads." Which, of course, means that inquisitors can come from anywhere in Christendom. However, the Inquisition houses five societies, called orders, which make up the bulk of their membership. Three of these orders are clerical — their members are monks, nuns, and knights who have taken vows to uphold the Cross. The other two are lay orders, one a noble house and one a secret society of people with nothing in common but their faith. Players in Dark Ages: Inquisitor chronicles take on the roles of characters from one of these five orders.

Leaps of faith

An inquisitor, as mentioned above, wields power that stems from her faith in God Almighty. Pages 287 through 291 of **Dark Ages: Vampire** describe "the Blessed," and that section provides a quick and dirty approximation of what inquisitors are capable of doing.

At some point during an inquisitor's life, either before or after she joins the Inquisition, she feels the touch of God. This revelation can happen over a period of years, or can strike quickly like a lightning bolt from the heavens. However it happens, in that moment the inquisitor is blessed, and now can wield her faith as a weapon against the Devil and all his servants. Yet, the character is forever held to a higher standard of behav-

ior. She must behave as a true Christian or she runs the risk of slipping into Callousness.

Calloushearts

Man is born into sin, and try as he might, that sin follows him. All inquisitors are capable of letting their commitment for the cause outstrip their Christian mercy. When that happens, the inquisitor becomes Callous and the dark, base parts of her soul show through. This is a dangerous place for an inquisitor, as it opens her to further sin and degradation. Callousness can be avoided by careful reflection and prayer, but this isn't always possible on the battlefield. Some inquisitors learn to cope with Callousness by making confession and living down their sins. Some simply learn to avoid it altogether. Some learn to enjoy it.

Themesand Mood

While many of the themes and moods discussed in Chapter Eight of **Dark Ages: Vampire** apply to **Inquisitor** games, a few are worthy of special mention.

Theme

Dark Ages: Inquisitor has several themes. One of the most obvious and important, of course, is *Faith*.

Faith is an important theme in any **Dark Ages** game, simply because religion is such a motivating force in the Dark Medieval. The threat of Hell is *real* to the people of the time. Inquisitors are not, by nature, cruel, evil, or sadistic, but they can and will torture others (and not just monsters) to get information or to extract a confession. They don't do this sort of thing because they enjoy it (necessarily). They do it because if they don't, they put their own souls at risk.

Of course, causing pain, suffering, and death to another Christian also puts one's soul at risk. So how can an inquisitor know whether what she does is right and just? She simply has to have faith that God approves of her actions.

Faith as a theme can be taken in a number of different directions, depending on the desires of the Storyteller and players. If the troupe would rather play characters who really *are* on the "right side," defending Christendom from the monsters who stalk the nights, it's easy to tell that sort of story. A quick look through **Dark Ages: Vampire** can inspire an entire chronicle's worth of vampire-hunting stories,

and that's without even considering the possibilities presented by other creatures as antagonists. In this case — the monsters really are out to harm humanity and possible really are demonic in nature, despite what some of them might think — the theme is one of righteous faith. The characters are stalwart defenders of God, and they don't need crises of conscience to create conflict. The conflict inherent in fighting powerful monsters is enough.

On the other hand, faith can be tested. Some of the "monsters" in the Dark Medieval are more pious than the humans who are supposedly in the business of saving souls. The Church is corrupt at many levels — the Inquisition's leadership knows this, but is careful to keep such doubt from the minds of the rank-and-file. What happens to the characters' faith when they meet someone within their Church — chosen, supposedly, by God — who is obviously lustful or greedy? Or in league with the monsters? Do they give up on God, or on the Church, or even on the Inquisition? Do they reconcile this test of faith and fight the good fight?

Another important theme is Fanaticism. The members of the Inquisition are, for the most part, fanatical. Most Christians of the day are devout, surely, but those who fight unspeakable horrors from Hell need that extra bit of fervency. Unfortunately, it isn't something they can turn off. When a Knight of Acre channels his faith through his sword and delivers a blow strong enough to cleave a vampire in two, it isn't something commonplace. Even though, in game terms, that act is only the result of a level-one power, the Knight might well feel obligated to spend time in prayer, thanking God for helping him smite his foe. In short, Inquisitors are fanatics who have direct proof that they are right. Anyone who countermands their faith, anyone who professes to know the "truth" (if it differs from their understanding of the truth) is the enemy and can expect only condescension, argument, and perhaps out-and-out hostility.

With either of these themes comes a secondary theme of *Desperation*. Just as in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, where the War of Princes rages across Europe, inquisitors are constantly in battle. But whereas Cainites battle for territory and blood, the Inquisition fights for the souls of all good Christians in the world (fairly epic, as goals go). Combined with either of the above themes, **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** poses a question — what would the Inquisition do to protect, shepherd, teach, and save the Flock?

SENSITIVITY

atholicism is a living faith, still practiced today by millions of people all over the world. The characters in Dark Ages: Inquisitor are not meant to be representative of modern-day (or even most medieval) Catholics any more than Assamite vampires are meant to be representative of modern-day Muslims. Inquisitor is a game about the extremes to which faith and fanaticism will push people, and those themes could explored with nearly any belief system providing the backdrop. The existence of a real-world Inquisition (albeit with some dates altered here) simply makes it an ideal choice for our game.

Storytellers and players should be comfortable enough in their faiths, and with religion in general, to understand that this is only a game before even reading these words. If you feel as though your faith is being challenged by anything you read herein, put the book down. It's that simple.

A more appropriate question, really, is: What wouldn't it do?

Mood

Dark Ages: Inquisitor is a horror game. Whether that horror takes the form of vicious monsters attacking with fang and claw or subtle demons possessing innocent children and using their bodies to do their work, or even the more cerebral horror of lost faith and sin, an undercurrent of fear should run through any chronicle. The Storyteller can evoke this horror with many different forms of imagery (and this is discussed further in Chapter Six), but the players should remember that this game is not about slaying monsters and collecting treasure. The stakes, after all, are somewhat higher.

Chapter by Chapter

As mentioned above, Dark Ages: Inquisitor assumes that you have Dark Ages: Vampire. None of the core rules for the game (the information found in Chapter Four of the latter book) are repeated herein. However, everything that you need to use the shadow Inquisition, as characters or as antagonists, is right here at your fingertips.

The **Prelude** tells a story of two inquisitors in the course of an investigation, and grants a look at the sorts of challenges the blessed face.

Introduction: The part you're reading now. Themes, sources of inspiration and a lexicon of terms can be found here.

Chapter One: Against All Demons is an account of what the Inquisition knows about its foes, told from the perspective of a very frightened inquisitor.

Chapter Two: Call to Arms details the formation of the Inquisition and its orders, how each of those orders recruits new members and where their strongest holdings are across Europe, the spiritual beliefs of the Inquisition, and what challenges face the organization.

Chapter Three: The Mind of the Inquisition explores the organization and chain of command of the Inquisition, and presents detailed write-ups of the five orders.

Chapter Four: Characters and Drama presents all the information you need to create inquisitor characters, as well as the rules needed for running games involving them.

Chapter Five: Blessings and Curses describes the God-given powers that inquisitors wield... and the Curses that are their price.

Chapter Six: Storytelling gives the Storyteller helpful hints on running Dark Ages: Inquisitor, as well as three sample stories to get your troupe off and running.

Sources

When most people think of the Inquisition, they think of the Spanish Inquisition, which of course is some centuries off. However, numerous books, films and other media exist that highlight the themes of **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**.

Books

The Inquisition, by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh. A great history of the Papal and Spanish Inquisitions, with plentiful detail on the practices and theologies of the time. Invaluable. The Perfect Heresy: The Life and Death of the Cathars, by Stephen O'Shea. A good, populist portrait of the Cathar Heresy and the birth of the Inquisition. Worth having for the look into the mind of the Church during the period.

The Name of the Rose, by Umberto Eco. The definitive inquisitor story and a pretty good model for how a **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** story might run. Go and read it now. The film's not bad either.

The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, edited by Henricus Institoris, et al. While not yet published at the time of **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, *Malleus* gives a good idea of what some inquisitors might believe witches (and other supernatural creatures) are capable of. This is the actual historical document, translated to English.

Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, by Jeffrey Burton Russell. The author has several books out on witchcraft and the role of the Devil in tradition and church history. Useful for ideas on what people in the period actually believed.

The Brother Cadfael mystery novels by Ellis Peters (also a video series). A good overall picture of the time period and life inside a monastery... with a monk who keeps getting out and poking his nose into other people's business, just like inquisitors do.

Movies

The Name of the Rose. A little cumbersome at times, but well worth it for Sean Connery's portrayal of a character who could easily belong to the Red Order.

Flesh & Blood. Director Paul Verhoeven in peak form delivers a tale of rape, plague, siege and Medieval mercenaries.

The Advocate. Not period, but just in case you don't think folks took this sort of thing seriously....

The Brother Cadfael Mysteries (videos). This series, based on the aforementioned books, is very well done (and possibly rentable).

The Exorcist. Not period, of course, but that's not the point. Watch the movie for a sense of the desperation to which the Inquisition is driven by the enemy's tenacity, and for a sense of the sheer Hell the Adversary's minions are willing to put innocents through.

Websites

Armarium Labyrinthi: Labyrinth Latin Bookcase (http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/library/latin/latin-lib.html). Has links for the full Vulgate Bible and a half-decent Latin-to-English dictionary.

The Catholic Encyclopedia (http://newadvent.org/cathen/). Excellent (though not unbiased) source for church history and beliefs.

Catholic Liturgy Library (http://www.catholicliturgy.com/) Has the Latin text for the Catholic Mass, if anyone's that interested.



The Medieval Names Archive (http://www.panix.com/~mittle/names/) Good for finding appropriate character names, from historical sources. Maintained by SCA folks who take their research very seriously.

Lericon

The following is a list of terms that readers will encounter in this book. Some of them are merely religious in nature, some are specific to the game.

Ascetic: The practice of self-denial as a way of religious life; from the Greek asketikos, meaning laborious.

Convent: A monastic community of men or women.

Council of Faith: A ruling body of inquisitors. Large cities or regions have a Council of Faith, which performs trials and arbitrates inquisitor activity. The Supreme Council of Faith is located in Rome.

Eremitic: A monastic vocation in which individuals withdrew from the world to live as solitary religious; from the Greek eremos, meaning desert.

Grand Inquisitor: The supreme head of the entire shadow Inquisition. During the Dark Medieval, the only Grand Inquisitor to date has been Cardinal Battista Marzone.

Holy Office: The public face of the Inquisition; the arm of the organization concerned with mundane heresy. Most members of the Holy Office know nothing of the shadow Inquisition.

House of Murnau: An order of the Inquisition; a Bavarian noble house promised *en masse* to the service of the Inquisition.

Indulgence: Remission of punishment granted a penitent for acts such as going on Crusade or on pilgrimage.

Inquisition: Also called the shadow Inquisition or secret Inquisition. An organization within the Catholic Church dedicated to seeking out and destroying supernatural evil.

Inquisitor: A member of the shadow Inquisition. Usually, but not always a member of the one of the five orders.

Novice: Woman or man who has entered a convent or monastery but has not yet taken final vows.

Oblation: Offering oneself or a child to serve God as a nun or monk.

Oculi Dei: An order of the Inquisition; a secret society that spans Europe. Also called Eyes of God.

Order of St. Theodosius: Also called the Red Order. An order of the Inquisition; both monks and nuns who have mastered the Holy Art.

Orders: One of five groups from which the Inquisition draws its members.

Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre: An order of the Inquisition; a military order of monastic knights.

Sisters of St. John: An order of the Inquisition; a group of nuns who often exhibit the gift of the Holy Sight.



The pale man turned the chalice about in his hands.

"Brother Guy, do you think this cup is beautiful?"

The monk nodded, warily.

"Why?"

The monk paused, and then stuttered a bit. "I do not know, master. I find it pleasing to look on."

The pale man pursed his lips. "Hmm. What about women? Do you find them pleasing to look on?" The monk nodded, carefully. "So different, women and gold. And yet, your vows preclude you from either. No money, no sex. And that is well, for the world is base and unclean, as you know."

"Yes, I know."

The pale man stood. "So why find beauty here, Brother Guy? Why not in knowledge, or in prayer?" He loomed over the monk, who was obviously frightened. A deerfly flew in through the uncovered window, and the pale man idly batted it away.

"I find beauty in those things, as well, master, I just—"

The pale man crushed the chalice, as casually as someone else might snap a twig. He dropped it at the monk's feet. "Still beautiful, is it?"

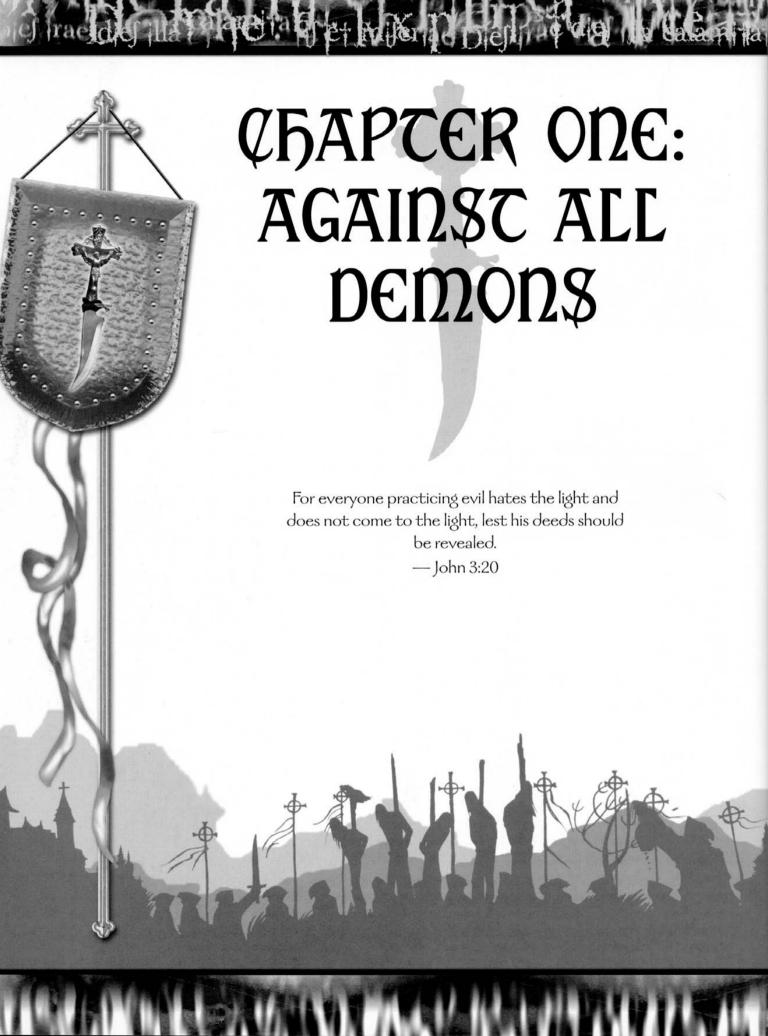
"No," said the monk, almost sadly.

"Hmm." The pale man stood at the window. "Look there, a light. Oh, I forget, you cannot see so far. Still burdened with the sight of the world." He turned and looked down at the crushed chalice. "Not beautiful anymore, yet nothing except form has changed." He pursed his lips again. "I do wish we had a woman here." The monk's eyes widened. The pale man shook his head. "Ah, well. Take down your hood, Brother Guy. I shall lend you a eye. Then, perhaps, you'll see as I do."

Brother Guy knew better than to argue. He knelt, exposed his neck, and prayed for surcease from the pain he knew was coming. He felt the pale man's fingers caress his neck, felt the flesh part, felt the cold, sickening feeling of the eyeball being inserted into his skin, then sting of the skin knitting again. All the while, he prayed. Our father, rid us of the evils of the world and through your Shining Blood, make us like the angels you have seen fit to grace us—

"I do believe the light is growing closer," remarked the pale man. "Good. Perhaps it's a woman. Go and prepare a bed."

Brother Guy scrambled to his feet and hurried to perform the task. The master did tend to obsess, but it was always best not to upset him. He reached up to the back of his neck, but couldn't bring himself to touch it. Angels, he thought, angels. I must remember they are angels.



God hears me. I have to believe that.

I spent my childhood very much as I am now. Cold. hungry. filthy. and afraid. I grew up in Paris with no family. I dodged those who would have sold me into a life of sin — and such men do indeed ply their trades, regardless of what some nobles would have the people believe. Men do purchase young boys for perverse pleasures, men with lust in their souls and their bellies and their purses full. When every need is fulfilled in humanity, that is the beginning of sin. When a man no longer needs to work to fill his belly, his mind grows perverse and creates other appetites, or so it has always seemed to me.

Since joining the Eyes of God, I have learned something of appetites. I have learned what the damned feed upon. We are their meat and drink, our screams, our pain, and sometimes our very living blood. I saw the demons first in Paris, and chance and time brought me later to the attention of a man called Aignen le Libraire, who praised my ability to survive and ordered that I be educated and inducted into the Oculi Oci.

Aignen le Libraire. Damn his eyes. Had he never found me, had my skill in hiding and skulking not impressed him. I might harbor some hope of living through the night.

He ordered me educated, and that task fell to a priest called Bernard. Father Bernard taught me as though I were taking holy orders, and during that time I began to believe that God hears me. I still believe that, despite my current peril. And I know that Bernard believes that as well.

His screams testify to that.

Satan's Get

Ouring my time with Father Bernard, scarcely a day went by that something did not remind him of some legend he'd been told or horrible tale he'd heard in confession. He passed these stories along to me, and with them his own thoughts on the nature of the Adversary. Father Bernard is a very learned priest, and while I don't pretend to even a small portion of his knowledge. I flatter myself that I have a near-perfect memory. I shall recount some of the wisdom he passed along to me during the course of this writing. If nothing else, the reader will need it as a frame of reference to understand what happened at the monastery.

Yes, the monastery. That is as good a place as any to start. Hopefully, these papers will find their way into the hands of someone capable of using them. The Oculi Oci do not work alone. Other men and women who have taken holy office track down Satan's get, but while we merely observe them, the others taken action. I do so wish that I were one of those capable few. I have no skill at swordplay, and no miracles have ever visited themselves upon me. All I can do is remember, and that is my talent.

Here, then, is my testimony.

The Monastery

Several nights ago. Father Bernard and I arrived at the monastery. I shall not write its name here, not yet, for should I be interrupted before finishing this the consequences might make themselves felt on others like myself.

The monastery. Suffice it to say that this "house of God" is old and vast, much of its structure extending underground. Father Bernard said that at one time, the entirety of the building was above ground, but an earthquake some years ago changed that. I only know that as we approached. I did not feel the same sensations that truly holy ground bestows. I have visited churches and cathedrals where God made His presence felt, and the result varies from a sense of peace to a welling up of righteous anger. As the monastery loomed into view and its longest shadows reached out to overtake what little sunlight remained. I felt only dread.

Something was waiting for us. One light burned in the otherwise darkened place. We had made no arrangements, merely followed our usual custom of finding a church or monastery to sleep. Bernard was nervous as well, but it was a long, difficult walk back to the last village we had visited. We walked to the door and he knocked.

The door opened far too soon, and I thought again: It was waiting for us. But the man who opened the door gave rest to our fears. Looking back now, I remembering feeling thankful that so holy a man would be our host, for the light of God fairly shone from his eyes. How bitter that memory now seems! He told us a name, which I shall not recount here, since it was obviously a falsity. No demon would be truly known by a Christian name. I simply think of him as the Pale Brother, and that is the name I shall use for him here.

The Pale Brother said that he had seen us coming down the road and had beds prepared already. Bernard and I were both a bit taken aback by this: the road on which we had traveled wound and curved: at most points, the monastery had not been visible to us. Had we been wise, we would have run, but we let our fatigue and the Pale Brother's charm guide us. That night, we

slept in beds far too comfortable for any monastery.

It was on the following day that the horror began.

The Grounds

The monastery, as I have said, was as much below ground as above. I did not venture below ground on that first day, and would to God that I never had at all. But the monastery grounds proper held enough to keep me busy.

The Pale Brother was nowhere to be found when Father Bernard and I awoke in the morning. We were annoyed to find that the sun was high in the sky when we left our rooms: no one had called us for morning prayers, and we had heard no bells. The first monk that we saw we questioned, but he scampered away from us when we approached. Indeed, the entire place looked rather empty. We heard no chanting, saw no one working fields, heard no footsteps — as we walked those hallways, looking for someone to answer our questions, we felt alone. No, truly, we felt deserted, as though everyone and everything, God included, had fled this place.

Father Bernard told me then to leave the monastery and walk the grounds, to ascertain how large an area it encompassed and whether I



could see any villages from any point. He would continue searching the interior of the monastery. he said, and would find the Pale Brother and demand some answers. I agreed, but I shame to admit that cowardice drove me. I nearly asked him to accompany me, that we might start out for the nearest village and leave this place behind. I did not suggest this: after all, the Eyes of God should know no fear.

I walked through a small side door, which shut behind me. The monastery grounds had not seemed extensive the night before, but walking around them I discovered that they were much larger than a casual observer might notice. The ground sloped and dipped in odd ways — owing, no doubt, to the uneven foundation of the place. I could see into the walls through gaps at some points, and saw monks walking about, but far fewer than I had seen in other such places.

The Strange Monk

I had walked perhaps halfway around the place when one of the monks hailed me. He, too, was outside the walls and looked much healthier than the Pale Brother I had seen the night before. He greeted me with a cry of "Jubilis!" When I asked him what I was meant to rejoice, his gave a quick, dismissive reply that I did not fully hear — something about celebrating Christ's glory. I had the distinct feeling that he was expecting some other response, one that I was not privy to. However, I was grateful for company, and this fellow seemed amiable, if eccentric.

His name, it turned out, was Guy. Brother Guy hailed from Toulouse, and he brought with him stories of the Crusade against the Cathars. Some of these tales I had heard, but others — including the one I have transcribed here — were startling and new to me. I wondered if the Oculi Oei farther south had heard these stories, and whether or not they were aware how easily the Adver-

sary could infiltrate the hearts and souls of the Christian populace.

I questioned him on other topics, as well, including the strange shape of the monastery (he, like Father Bernard, cited an earthquake as the reason) and the Pale Brother. The latter, Brother Guy told me, did not emerge from prayer during the day, so great was his faith. He considered the day sacrosanct, and refused to eat, wash, or perform any other worldly function while the sun shone. I felt my heart sink at this news, for Brother Bernard had often told me that pallor and unwillingness to eat in public were often signs of heresy and worse. I did not voice these concerns to Brother Guy, however, as I regarded him to be a good man and did not wish to place him in danger. As I discovered the following day, he would not have been the one placed in peril by that revelation, and I am doubly fortunate that I held my tongue.

Those Who Serve Demons

"God." Father Bernard often said. "has much on His mind in these troubled times. and so the task of eradicating Satan's minions falls to us." The good priest went on to explain that the followers of pagan travesties often call up creatures from the basest regions of Hell in attempts to placate their "gods." or ensure that their crops flower, or whatever other end their misguided hearts might conceive. Father Bernard was quick to draw the distinction between the pagans who were merely ignorant of Christ's Grace (and could therefore be saved) and those who remained willfully damned even after the Holy Church had made God's Truth known to them. Those servants who know the Truth often incorporate elements of our own blessed sacraments into their perverse rites, damning them as heretics and worse.

Reigning in Hell

I should mention here that servants of demons are not powerless. While some are indeed weak-willed fools who merely cower before what they perceive as a mighty being, the worst that one can accuse those sops of is weak faith in Our Lord. They may stand and watch at black ceremonies, but rarely wield the knives themselves. At the first hint that the Pope's men are in the area, they either flee or confess. Father Bernard once admonished an overly harsh Knight of Acre to tread lightly around such folks — they are often the method by which we can discover true evil.

Brother Guy's Tale of Heretics

While in Toulouse, I found myself visiting a small village quite by accident. The priest there was a heretic, preaching unclean things to his congregation. However, as many of his

flock believed as he did. I could only watch and pray for my own soul.

The taking of communion was celebrated strangely here. Only once during my stay was bread taken; ordinarily, the priest used only wine but allowed the entire congregation to drink from the chalice instead of reserving that right for himself. I did not drink from the chalice when he offered it, as I sensed something wrong with this place and did not wish to

become party to it. As it was. I made the right choice.

I had been there slightly more than a fortnight when the sound of horses approaching woke the village. In the distance, we could see riders carrying fire, and the villagers fell into blind panic, for they had all heard stories of the dreaded armies of Arnaud Amaury and how they had razed other hamlets. I borrowed a horse from one of them and rode off in the direction of the fires, hoping to find who might be leading this army and save the village. This was not to be.

Amaury's armies did not arrive that night. Instead, a small troop of men and horses not nearly enough to march onto a true battlefield - descended upon the village. I moved away from the road and hid. Cowardly, I know, but here I stand today alive, while the

village was burnt to the ground and all therein slaughtered.

The attackers? Knights, and rich, by the looks of their armor. I am not learned on heraldry, but their crest was strange. I remember black roses on their shields, and I remember two of them spoke to each other in a strange language I had never heard. They pulled the priest himself from the church and lashed him to a stake, and as he burned which took only moments. I noted - he screamed blasphemies to the sky. His tongue grew and lashed from his mouth, and from my hiding place I could see it was forked.

The strange knights finished their bloody work and were gone before daybreak. I dared

not follow them.

However, more favored or greedy servants of demons sometimes wield power of a most profane sort. Some have augmented strength, and some can suffer grievous wounds before falling. Some even demonstrate an affinity for the black arts. and I shall discuss these wretches momentarily. The point, though, is that while a servant of a demon might not be touched by the supernatural in any visible way, that by no means makes him helpless. Salvation might be possible for such souls, but I personally rather doubt it. They have made their choices, after all.

Another kind of servant bears mention, however. Some demons and warlocks fashion constructs of flesh to act as soldiers or quardians for them. Jews. indeed, have long been rumored to animate stone creatures in order to obtain Christian children for their rites (I heard as much growing up in Paris, although Father Bernard stubbornly refuses to accept that this abhorrent custom is still practiced). These creatures are unpredictable and deadly, but thankfully few beings seem capable of summoning them up.

To continue. I here recount tales of both willing servants and "noble pagans." as well as the evil of sorcery and the loathsome magical creatures that such evil begets. The first experience was my own, before I ever came to join the Oculi Dei. The second comes from Father Bernard himself, who heard it from one of our sisters in the Red Order. The third tale, likewise. I heard from Father Bernard, which he in turn gleaned from the confession of a leper in Ulm. The final tale is one I heard from another of our Order only a few months after joining the fight.

Willing Servants

My story is this: As I have already written. I grew up in Paris. The cathedrals and other buildings of Paris are perhaps beautiful, but the streets are filthy. I survived as best I could, but I did so on sin, stealing whatever I could and trading it to whomever would give me food or coin. I did not sell my body, though I was asked on many occasions and once even threatened at point of sword to submit to such a violation (my escape, while an exciting tale, is not relevant to this document). Only once did I ever even consider the act of lust as a means of survival, and it was on that evening that I encountered a group of thralls in service to some unknowable creature from beyond God's Sight.

I had been spending time often with a man of my age named Vincent. Vincent, like me. was a poor bastard and made his meager living on the streets. Unlike me, however, circumstances had driven him to desperation, and he had begun to take "clients" in return for food or money. I often tried to counsel him to practice the more dignified (and somewhat safer) art of filching, but the despicable submission to the lusts of men had become a kind of penance for him, each act of pain and sin becoming as a cleansing punishment for the last. And then a full week went by and I did not see him. On the streets, such absence usually means that the unfortunate has been caught and hanged or simply murdered and buried in a common grave, so I went to church to pray for Vincent's soul. Imagine my surprise when he sat down next to me.

I suppose I looked like a corpse myself. I had not, as I recall, eaten in more than three days and had a cough that drove me to my knees if I tried to walk any faster than a brisk amble — not a good situation for a street thief. When Vincent sat down, he looked better than ever Id seen him. He was rosy-cheeked and plump, his hands even and his nails clean. I asked where he had been and told him I had given him up for dead. He told me that the contrary was true; he had been reborn and wished me to come with him. He said that he had a master now, someone who would take care of him and feed him. Always suspicious, I asked the price of this newfound health. He told me that I knew the price very well, and asked me which I would prefer — submission to a man and living in warmth or dying in pain on the streets with my soul intact. I know the correct answer now, but then, the prospect of death terrified me. I went with him that night.

The place to which he brought me was a tanner's, and I saw a guild symbol above the door. He knocked in a certain rhythm, and after an answering knock, he entered. I followed, and immediately upon entering the room, all my fear vanished. I felt comforted and lulled, and the hunger in my gut and the pain in my throat from the cough faded. All around me I smelled sweetbreads cooking (which was then and remains my favorite food). Someone lit a candle and I saw that we were not alone. Some ten or twelve young boys, none older than myself or Vincent, lounged about the room in various stages of undress. Among them were men wearing odd black hoods apparently made of leather—and little else. We had walked into an orgy of sorts, and I have neither the ink nor the stomach to recount the things I saw. Suffice to say that had good King Louis ever heard word of these depravities, all involved would have been hanging by their necks when the sun next touched their bodies.

I was shocked, to be sure, but at the same time the room still felt comfortable. I turned and looked out the still-open door and saw nothing but cold and misery, and I let the man behind me close it, shutting me into the warmth and sweet smells. A man wearing only a hood and a tanner's apron approached and took Vincent by the shoulder and led him to a corner, and there pushed him too his knees. I stood and watched, the horrible queasiness in my stomach fading quickly.

I did not take part in these blasphemies. My only sin was watching them happen, and believe me when I say that I have paid for that crime on many a sleepless night since. The worst of it, if the reader will permit me to exorcise my demons to paper, was the expressions the boys wore. They did not look to be in pain, but neither did they seem to enjoy the attentions of their "benefactors." Instead, they looked resigned and lulled. Indeed, they had given themselves over to the comforts of the body, paid their price in flesh, and so their undernourished souls had no will to resist.



As I watched, the man in the apron, having slaked his lust with Vincent, took him by the shoulder and led him through a door into another room. I followed and watched from the doorway as hands from writhing bodies pawed at my legs and back. The man bade Vincent lay on a table streaked with blood, which he did. The man tied him down with strips of leather and I began to wonder: If this place was truly a tanner's, why did I smell no manure or rotting flesh?

As the man in the apron took a sharpened knife from a holster on the wall. I found myself guessing at the answer to that question, though I tried with all my might to leave it unresolved.

The man raised the knife . but Vincent only remained quiet and compliant. The man began to chant, and though I did not understand Latin at the time. I have since learned it and know that the man spoke to a being he called "Cyphiael the Flayer." I remember enough of his chant—"As you demand. I take this boy's skin and deliver unto you his flesh, blood and bone, having deposited within him my seed that you may find his meat corrupted and sweetened"—to guess what the object of the ritual was. And just before I ran. I smelled a curious scent overpowering that of sweetbreads, rising up from nowhere, a scent of wood smoke and bile.

As I ran. fear alone keeping my illness from driving me to my knees. I heard sounds like a great dog chewing at a bone. The men, mostly nude, dared not chase me. I later told this story to Aignen le Libraire, but I have no idea whether the tanner's shop still stands. That is my story, of those who serve demons not a quarter-mile from the Salvation of the Church.

Servants such as these are not dangerous to determined inquisitors. Any of our orders. Eyes of God included, can roust them from their hives if we know when and where to strike. However. because they commit crimes against common as well as canon law, simply alerting the town magistrate or ruling noble is an equally effective way to dispose of such creatures. The caution there is that a particularly zealous judge may simply condemn all involved, and not make an attempt to exact confessions or save the souls of those who might wish confession. Sometimes, execution is indeed the only recourse. but more often than not, as I've stated, many such "willing" servants are actually good souls who have lost their faith, and deserve one final

chance to reclaim it. If they do not take that chance, of course, sending them screaming into the fires of Hell is the only option.

Warlocks

Sister Anna is a Red Sister at the St. Sixtus Convent in Rome. She met with Father Bernard when last he ventured there, and told him of another visitor whom they had entertained. The visitor, she said, came in the guise of a priest, and asked for shelter during a violent storm. They granted him a bed, naturally, and most of the Sisters thought nothing of it.

Sister Anna had misgivings, though, or so she reported to Father Bernard. She crept near his door late at night, unable to sleep for "strange dreams that seemed to be warnings more than mere fancies." Listening, she heard him chanting and thought for a moment he was praying. And then, through a crack in the door, she saw his true activity, and, according to Father Bernard, she made the sign of the Cross even when recounting the tale.

The priest knelt in front of his bed, on which he had opened a length of cloth. On the cloth were what looked like holy relics of some sort — bones of a saint, perhaps — although Sister Anna had no way to know for certain. What terrified her, however, was that each of these items glowed with an odd, white light. Some might have mistaken this for a miracle, but Sister Anna felt no presence of God therein. What she felt was that this "priest" was bewitching useless trinkets to sell, there in Rome.

Fearing for her life. Anna did nothing, and the next day the priest left before Anna could tell anyone her suspicions. While this tale is not as shocking as mine, to be sure, consider what it implies: Somewhere in or around Rome travels a warlock, a damnable sorcerer, dressed in the frock of a priest and carrying false relics. How he somehow managed to sleep on Holy Ground I do not know.

The reader, should he choose to pursue warlocks, will find that very little about them makes perfect sense. Father Bernard, in speaking with members of the Red Order (apart from addled nuns) and the House of Murnau has heard tales of such damned souls sacrificing their own blood and the blood of others to unseen forces to call down their spells. The simplest trinket in the hands of a witch or warlock can kill or maim a healthy man. Indeed, tales arrive from Riga of barbaric pagans who summon up blizzards and monstrous wolves from the very mountain air.

All in all, the methodology behind this "magic" matters little. Satan simply chooses a pattern that seems familiar to the would-be sorcerer and grants that sorcerer whatever "spells" he might wish to know. The truth, of course, is that all such power is infernal in origin. Never be tempted to "apprentice" under such a being, nor to hear his hypotheses on magic or faith or God. The Red Order reportedly does so (the reader must forgive me for writing this) but their number houses more heretics than a village in Albi.

The true danger in such beings is that they are in prime position to seduce others. Consider: They can apparently call on their powers at will. allowing them to deliver proof that their damned way grants succor and fulfillment. whereas the True Path must be taken on faith. Many weak-willed souls might abandon the Savior for a chance to fly about at night or summon up fire from their hands, and if the price is merely drinking the boiled fat of a child, so what it? God will show His justice in His own time, but until that time, it falls to us to protect the flock from those who might tempt them.

How, then, to best combat such creatures? Although their Hell-spawned powers can seem strange and horrifying, remember that they are mortal. Steel, iron, and wood have much the same effect on warlocks as they would on you or me. Likewise, many (though obviously not all) cannot enter Holy Ground, and since identifying such beings is problematic, leading them to church can force a warlock to reveal his hand. As with any creature of darkness, however, warlocks should never be hunted by a lone Inquisitor. Warlocks may attract followers, and even if none of those hapless fools know a bit about magic, if each one carries a knife, it won't matter.

Magical Constructs

Father Bernard once went on Crusade, but never reached the Holy Land. The Crusade that he accompanied was halted by plague, specifically a horrific illness called the "Bulbous Death." That plague seemed limited to the Holy Roman Empire, and while Emperor Frederick turned back and the Crusade was postponed. Father Bernard stayed to hear confession from some of the dying. One such was a man who had lived in Vienna, but fled the city after witnessing what he believed to be a sign of the Apocalypse. He wandered for a time, but then fell victim to the Bulbous Death and met his end shortly after Father Bernard heard his story.

In Vienna, the man said, are sorcerers of the worst kind. He was a farmer who brought his goods into the city to sell, and one day a storm prevented him from reaching the city until after dark. He found himself on the road next to a man from the lands of Ouke Konrad, who wore the

garb of a knight and helped the farmer keep control of his horses on the muddy ground.

The farmer asked the man why he traveled so late, and the man replied that he often traveled by night so as to draw bandits out of hiding. Bandits, he said, were the worst kind of scum, and in his native lands they were punished most harshly. As an honorable knight and servant of God, he wished to visit God's wrath upon such sinners. The farmer was impressed and a bit taken aback by the man's zeal, and asked his business in Vienna.

"In Vienna." replied the knight, "is a hive of blasphemers who are not only bandits but sorcerers as well. I shall root them out and destroy them, and burn their remains in the town square so that all will know what evil the town has hid." The farmer, again, was frightened and disturbed by this, but did not admit as much. When they entered the city, he never expected to see the knight again, but he did.

The farmer slept in his cart while in the city, and when his goods were gone decided to start back the next morning. He was awakened that night, however, by a sound he described as something like an owl screeching and a hound baying all together. He looked out from his cart and saw the knight stumbling from a house. The knight had clearly been in battle and carried three severed heads in one hand and a bloodied sword in the other. However, he was not unscathed. His armor bore holes as though some great beast had slashed it open, his raiment was charred as though burnt, and several arrows protruded from his back. He strode from the house unevenly and the farmer was about to call out to him when the creature — a great beast that the farmer had thought to be a mere statue on the building — leapt on top of the knight. It ripped the sword from his hand and tore his chest open with gruesome talons, and still the knight fought on. He battled the creature with the force of God — so hard, reported the farmer, that the beast's flesh rippled like water when the knight's fists struck. In the end, however, the knight could not prevail. The beast tore his heart from his chest and sprang like a great cat back to the house from which it came, carrying the knight's corpse in its claws.

The farmer fled, and his fate I have already recounted. I have no idea what master the Beast of Vienna might serve, only that one might find allies against it in Masovia.

Misled Pagans

The tale I heard from an Eye of God called Brian, however, has a much-different ending, and recounting it may serve to lighten my heart. I hope it does, for my wrist is pained with writing and my ink runs nearly dry. Tomorrow I shall have to find alternate means of writing. I think. For now, however, know that Brian was an Eye like myself, and like me, grew up wanting and hungry. He, however, grew up on the streets of London. When he joined our order, he returned to England and traveled "Beyond the Pale," apparently to the island of Ireland where the natives are savage and hungry and many have made dark pacts with forces beyond the ken of good Christians. On his travels, he came upon a village of such people.

The village, he told me, held not more than three score souls. They farmed what they could and herded cattle, but did well and rarely wanted for anything. However, although the True Church had reached villages in all directions, this particular hamlet remained entirely heathen. Brian found no village church there, and none of them could recite the Ten Commandments or say even simple

prayers. Indeed, only those villagers that ventured to trade with others even knew of Christianity. Brian, in horror for these people's souls, attempted to teach them.

He found them fairly receptive, and for a full week, taught all who would listen. Brian, as Ive said, is not a priest, but as an inquisitor knew enough to set these people on the right road. He also planned to send a priest to the village to perform the sacraments for these ignorant souls as soon as possible, for every unfortunate villager who died without knowing Christ's grace was surely bound for Hell. He had planned to stay for a month and then set out for another village to recruit a holy officer. As it turned out, it was well that he stayed as long as he did.

By the end of the first week, a man he had taken under his wing was enthusiastic about his impending baptism and even requested to travel along with Brian to fetch a holy father. One evening — a full moon. Brian recalled — they stayed up late into the night talking of Christ's death and resurrection, and the villager mentioned that his people believed in a similar phenomenon with regards to their "goddess," a being called Aoife. When Brian questioned him on this, he replied that Aoife came to the village sometimes in the guise of a beautiful, naked woman, clad only in runes scripted in blood upon her body. While there, she would demand a hideous inversion of Christ's Sacrifice — whereas the Lamb of God gave of himself for our Salvation, this woman would require a man from the village to give himself up for her continued survival (See how the agents of Satan corrupt our own Gospel for their own purposes!). The villager said that the woman had not been seen in his lifetime, and Brian guessed that she was merely a fable of time gone by. With that, they went to sleep, intent on continuing the discussion in the morning.

When Brian found the man's bloodless body, broken in a thorn-bush nearly a half-mile from where they had spoken the night before, he knew that this "bloodied woman" was no mere tale. These people were not merely ignorant, they were enslaved, even if they knew it not. As Brian, like me, was not a warrior, nor did he carry any sacred relics, he ordered the man's body be kept in state until he returned with a priest. When he returned, four days later, with a very frightened young father with him, he discovered that the bloodied woman had returned — but that the villagers had risen up against her.

Brian's words, it seems, had taken root in the village and when the woman had returned, they attacked. Having no true weapons, they used torches and farming implements, but these proved enough (here I should note that iron and steel often bite deep of such forest-dwelling creatures, but more on this later, should I find a source of ink). They drove the woman deep into the forest, but upon the rising of the sun, she seemed to vanish. Each night since, the villagers had posted guards, but the woman did not return.

The priest blessed the murdered villager's remains and buried him as a true Christian. Each of the other villagers was baptized and Saved, and before Brian left the priest promised that he would make sure that the Church sent a father to minister to the village. Brian, of course, had some influence within the Church as well, and he is confident that a new chapel is currently being built there. The bloodied woman whatever she (or it) truly was, has no power over God's Faithful. So much time and ink gone, and still the true crux of my tale is untold. But enough for now. God willing, this will continue.

The Swamp

I have found an alternate source of ink. Let us leave it at that, for now.

Before my tangential ramblings. I was describing that first day on the grounds. I shall continue with that description now. Recall that Brother Guy and I were walking together, and that we eventually came to the north side of the monastery.

The earth on that side of the monastery sloped away into a bog. I dared not approach, having no wish to become stuck in the treacherous ground. Brother Guy told me of legends he had heard, which made me in turn think of beings that Father Bernard had described to me at other times. I will again recount Guy's horrible tale, but I will first break my narrative to write of other creatures of which Father Bernard spoke. I have no need to rush tonight, I think, and ink is no longer a concern. God forgive me.

Demons of Flesh

Father Bernard held the belief that flesh was easier for demons to corrupt than spirit. He asserted to me once that while a man had to give his permission to become a blood-drinking horror. creatures such as were-wolves and the monstrous, misshapen beasts of the swamps and forests were simply hapless souls who ventured too close to unclean places and found their very bodies forfeit. He called these beings "Demons of Flesh" and lamented that destruction was often necessary — redemption was well beyond these creatures. "Pity them if you wish." he told me not two nights before we arrived at the monastery. "but never trust them nor show them mercy. Like mad dogs, they will take hesitation as opportunity and spread their poison to you."

Oculi Dei and others of the Faith study bestiaries and tales of fancy looking for representations of demonic beings, but the truest and most reliable source of descriptions for Demons of Flesh has been the tales of the peasantry. While some of our most scholarly orders find their members in nobility, we should never discount the wisdom such people can provide. They, after all, live in close proximity to demons that would never dare approach churches or cities. Thus, the peasants and serf who work the lands for their lords fall prey most commonly to these creatures. When I hear of rebellion in distant lands, I often wonder: Did the noble lord protect his charges from Satan's Get?

Oid he even try?

Brother Guy's Tale of the Swamp

I saw the creature with my own eyes, but understand that I never saw it in the light. By day it might look like a man, or some other natural thing, but by night it wore what I am sure was its true form.

One of the monks here was an herbalist and grew various sorts of plants in his garden. ranging from mushrooms that we added to our dinners to grasses that we chewed to alleviate stomach pain. One night, that monk and I ventured to the swamp to find a particular root, which he told me was

meant to be used for a salve for burns.

Once there, however, he showed me something quite different. We had walked a good distance from the monastery, and he pointed to a peculiar flowering bush. It looked like no plant I had ever seen, and the ground around it had been meticulously kept clear of weeds and invading plants. I noticed, too, that while bark from nearby trees had been stripped away by browsing deer and goats, this plant's leaves were large and full. Intrigued, I asked the monk what manner of flower this was.

His demeanor changed and he beckoned me close as though making ready to tell me a terrible secret. "This," he said, "is bloodroot. It is a flower that grows only in Iberia, but I have managed to raise it here. Look there," and at this he pointed at the blood-red veins in the white flower's blossom, "that is the reason I have taken such great pains to grow the flower. The root of this plant, properly prepared.

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He did not finish, for at that moment a deerfly dove into his mouth and he fell backwards, choking. When he stood again, he was mad with fear, his eyes darting about the darkened wood, looking for some unknown enemy. I did not approach him, but tried to soothe him, telling him that it was only an insect, but he backed away from me. He said something before his back touched the trees behind him, but his mouth smarted from the sting of the fly. I imagine, and whatever he said did not come clear. Something

about "poison" and "blood." I think.

When his back reached the trees behind him, he seemed to realize he had gone too far and turn his back on me. The demon made itself known at that moment, as though it had only been waiting for the poor monk to see it and thereby savor his fear. The creature was a brackish green color, and taller by half than any man I have ever seen. It had four arms — I saw it with my own eyes! — each of which ended in hideous claws, and its hide looked much akin to the shell of a beetle. It reached out and seized the monk, and drew him into the forest where I could not see. I must say I am thankful for that, for although he did not scream long, the sounds his body made while the demon feasted left no doubt in my mind that I would never see the poor herbalist again.

The flower? The next day, under the high noon sun, I returned to that spot. I found no trace of the monk, nor the demon, nor indeed the bloodroot plant. I found only blood and upturned earth, and have

never spoken of any of it until now.



Werewolves

Many of the legends I hear of shapechanging beasts come from England and my native lands. I do not know why this is: wolves hunt in every forest and mountain in Christendom, to my knowledge. Perhaps the monsters of Hungary and Poland and simply more circumspect, or perhaps the evil infection that creates them has simply not spread any farther east than the Elbe. No matter.

I have never seen a werewolf, and neither has Father Bernard. He, however, once heard the confession of a hysterical peasant who was convinced that she was damned as a monster. The good priest, reasoning that since the woman is now dead he was breaking no vow to tell me of her words, told me the story.

The woman came to him as he left a small town at the base of the Pyrenees Mountains. He had already gathered his meager belongings and was setting off down the road, but she caught up with him and begged him to hear her confession. Never one to refuse a soul in need. Father Bernard started back to the church, but she recoiled. "I can no longer enter holy ground, Father," she said, "for I am damned."

Now worried that the girl might be either possessed or mad. Father Bernard agreed to hear her confession outside of the church, but no farther than the entrance to the churchyard. She agreed, and confessed her sins.

She was guilty of the sin of sloth, she said, and often wandered away from her chores to eat berries on the slopes of the mountain. The night before, she said, her mother told her that a lamb was missing and that she should find it. She looked for the animal at first, but soon fell asleep beneath an overhanging rock.

She awoke to snarls and howls. Surrounding the rock were five wolves, black and monstrous things, she said, one bigger than the family's horse! She ran, but the wolves leapt from the rock and forced her up the mountain. She tried several times to escape their harrying, but each time one would dart in and snap at her legs. Finally, exhausted, she collapsed, and the largest wolf sprang. But instead of succumbing to fear, she told Father Bernard, she committed another sin and gave in to wrath. The anger she felt was indescribable and horrid, as though she could kill and eat everyone in her village to fill the burning pit left by the rage. As the wolf landed

on her, she embraced that wrath, rather than giving herself over to God, and as the wolf's jaws closed home, she too became a wolf.

She shamefully recounted the rest of the evening, so far as she remembered. The wolves had their own guttural tongue that she somehow knew, and they told her of her place among the so-called "Lords of Shadows." She endured their blasphemy, in which they asserted that the moon was in truth a powerful goddess and that she created the world: the stories of Creation in Genesis and the Gospels of the Lord were naught but a myth. For an entire night, running as a wolf, naked under the moon, she absorbed these lies. She managed to escape just before daybreak, and somehow regained her human skin upon reaching the village.

Father Bernard never told me how she died, only that he saw it happen. He is a gentle soul, and I doubt capable of violence even against such an affront to God, and so I'm sure he did not end her life himself. However, he did learn more about werewolves from some source. God willing, I can ask him again someday what his source was, but for now I can only recount what he told me.

However it was that this girl-beast died. Father Bernard asserts that killing such a monster is no simple matter. Sword and arrow wounds do not even slow such creatures, much less kill them. For all that, werewolves are not immortal, nor are they impervious to all harm. Fire, the great purifier, will drive them off like common animals, and precious silver, provided it has been blessed by a priest of the Church, renders them pained and crippled. Arrowheads made of silver are difficult to fashion, but it can be done by a skilled silversmith.

Those who would hunt werewolves should beware, though. They are hellishly fast and strong, and what's worse, they travel in packs like the beasts from which they descend. Many, Father Bernard asserts, can vanish into shadows and reappear even stronger than before — no doubt drawing power from the darkness that spawned them. And, as they can appear as men, they can easily wield the same sorts of weapons that men can, meaning a werewolf might be a skilled swordsman as well as vicious beast. However, to the trained eye, they cannot hide among the mortal flock, for their eyebrows grow together and their second and third fingers are always the same length. Also, the eyes are a curious almond shape and when presented with fresh meat of any kind, a werewolf will pant, not matter the form he currently wears. Other signs appear infrequently as well — I have heard reports of a pentagram appearing in blood on the palm of a werewolf during the full moon, but Father Bernard could not confirm this when I asked him about it.

Perhaps their most insidious trait, however, is their ability to breed with humanity. I do not know what power such a child might possess, but I do know that pagan peoples are especially susceptible to a werewolf's advances. After all, pagans have no higher code of behavior to guide them and no way to bless the silver that might save them (even if the poor wretches had access to it). Werewolves can therefore quite easily dominate entire settlements of heathens. And that means that in any remote village that one might chance to visit, any or all of the villagers might actually be werewolves, merely hiding until their goddess, the moon, shines down upon them before they strike.

A Christian bitten by a werewolf might find himself overcome by bestial urges, chiefly feelings of lust and wrath, when the moon grows fat. The herb called wolfsbane, made into a poultice and applied to the wound, might calm these feelings. However, a man thus injured should be guarded at all times by stout men armed with blessed silver blades. Women thus bitten should be blessed and then dispatched, as they are naturally too weak to resist the urgings levied by the werewolf s bite.

Hideous as the notion might be that a single bite from such a demon might convey the curse. these near-mindless savages are inferior to another breed of werewolf. Brian, the Eye I mentioned before, told me another tale of the British Isles, but only after he was in his cups. The thing he saw frightened him so that he could not recall it with his wits about him, and indeed when I questioned him the following morning he could not remember telling me the story at all, and refused to discuss it.

After the village of which I wrote before. Brian continued on through the Irish lands to see what else needed his attention. When he arrived at a small village more than a fortnight's travel from the one plagued by the bloodied woman, he counted himself very lucky. The townsfolk were

Christian, and offered hospitality that he could not fault. He remained there for nearly a week, but saw nothing of concern, and therefore prepared to leave.

That night, he said, was a "silver moon", but I believe he meant "sliver" (as I said, he was not entirely sober when he told the story to me). He left the cottage where a family had given him lodging to answer nature's call, and saw a man standing on a hilltop nearby, framed by moonlight. Even though he saw only the man's silhouette, he was immediately taken with fear that this stranger meant ill towards the village. As Brian watched, the man raised his arms to the sky and spoke, although the Eye was much too far away to determine what was being said.

The man began to dance, and Brian felt that he was witness to some pagan ritual. As he moved to wake the village priest, the stranger on the hilltop changed. Where before a man had stood, now a great beast, massive and barrel-chested and with the head of a wolf, now threw its head back and howled. Brian said a fear took him like nothing he'd ever felt, and he raced back to his bed and hid there until morning, whereupon he awoke and counted the whole incident as a dream. Indeed, the morning after he told me the story, he maintained that it had been only a dream. I am not so sure.

I believe what he saw was a werewolf, but not nearly the same simple creature that confessed to Father Bernard. I believe the demon Brian saw was a warlock of some kind, who had sold his soul specifically for the power to change into that blasphemous hybrid of wolf and man. Satan, after all, cannot create (as only God can do that) but can change and grant the ability to change. God alone knows what other powers such a being might possess, but changing shape is almost certainly not the extent of it.

Brian assured me that the village still stands. I pretended to be assuaged, but truly. Brian has no way to know.

Grotesques and Monsters

The word "werewolf is recognizable to peasants and nobles alike across the land, as indeed are stories of "witch," "sorcerer," and "ghost." But what of creatures like the one Brother Guy described in his tale of the swamp? What of monsters and demons newly spat from the pits of Hell, who have not learned to disguise their natural form by wearing the flesh of a man?

Such things exist, I promise you. They do not lurk in cities often, but are often drawn to bodies of water large enough to hide their misshapen bodies. Brian relates folk tales from Scotland and the beasts that lurk in the Lochs, but asserted he had never seen such a creature. Tales from Venice speak of slimy, half-human mockeries that slither up from the canals and feast on bodies interred in San Michele. Sailors, of course, spin yarns of monstrous sea serpents and devil fish that can crush ships in their jaws. And nearly every village has a monster in the nearby woods, ready to snatch up naughty children.

Most of these tales are false. Im sure. But enough of them are true that any soldier of God should be wary. If you hear such a tale, ask the teller if he has ever seen the beast. If so, ask to hear the story and make sure he understands that God is listening through you. Inform him that lives might be lost (or saved) by the veracity of his words. Most times, the storyteller will recant and admit that the yarn is only that, and then you may breathe a sigh of relief and assure him that no harm has been done. But if the narrator holds fast to his words, then you must seek out the beast.

Listing off the possible creatures one might hear of is futile. What you must remember, should you need to seek out a monster, is that iron and steel often bite such creatures quite deeply. They are minor demons, vicious but ultimately stupid creatures birthed, perhaps, by some sodden wench who lay with an incubus in return for an extra year of youth. They have no plans or desires apart from hunger, and a careful inquisitor can follow their trails easily enough. Peasants and even knights, provided you can convince them of the beast's existence, will often take up arms against a creature such as this. Just remember that in raising a hunting party, you assume responsibility for the lives of those who join it. Tread carefully: the hunt should end with a celebration, not a wake.

As I read back over what I have written thus far. I realize that my narrative is lacking. While the reader no doubt has learned much of our foes (and God grant that it might be useful). he has learned nothing more of the monastery and of Brother Guy, whom I have said was a traitor. I have more to say on the subject of Lucifer's minions, but let me come to that by way of relating my experiences at that damned monastery.

Brother Guy and I continued our walk around the grounds. The conversation, after his tale of the beast in the swamp, became more civil and we spoke of events in Rome and other, mundane things. As we rounded a corner, we walked into full sunlight, and I felt cheered again. As we walked along the outer wall. I saw the front gate that Father Bernard and I had entered the night before and was reminded of the Pale Brother. In the full light of day, the memory did not seem so threatening. I remarked to Brother Guy that by day, the monastery seemed much warmer and friendlier, even more devoted to its purpose as a house of God. He smiled and said that while living there took some getting used to, he wouldn't leave for the world.

We entered through the main gate and I immediately set out to find Father Bernard. that I could tell him of the strange tales that Brother Guy had told me. I could not find him. Brother Guy and I began searching and calling for him, and for the rest of the afternoon. I learned the

twists and turns of that monastery.

I have said before that memory is my talent, and I thank God for it. I remember every corner in that cursed place, every twist of every corridor I saw, and it has served me well. As we wandered throughout the building, we saw other monks, but never close to us. We would see a brother enter a room down a long hallway, or hear one walking on the floor above us. but never did one actually cross our paths. I did not bother to question Brother Guy on this, as I was too intent on finding Father Bernard.

The Catacombs

As we searched. I attempted to keep myself oriented as to our direction relative to the grounds outside: more specifically. I tried to reckon where we were in relation to the swamp. This proved futile, however. The inside of the monastery bore so little resemblance to the outside that they might as well have been two different places entirely. Indeed, I did not realize we were underground until I felt the air grow cold and damp. Brother Guy, who had wandered off in the other direction. returned with a lantern and we ventured deeper. His cheery demeanor had curdled a bit: he was now clearly afraid, although why a monk would be afraid in his own monastery was beyond me at the

We continued further underground, the air growing colder and the stones covered in an odd, gray moss that crumbled to dust when touched. Rats watched us curiously, and occasionally one arew bold enough to run up one of our robes. Rats do not frighten me, but Brother Guy seemed horrified by them, and finally laid his hand on my shoulder and told me that we could not go on. I answered that since it was unlikely that Father Bernard was down in these catacombs anyway. there was no point in us continuing.

When I said that, a look flickered across Guy's face for an instant. It was a momentary wince. a look of dread or fear, but I knew that it was in response to my statement about Father Bernard. Equally. I knew that it was entirely possible that my mentor was indeed somewhere in these halls. and that I had to find him. I turned and set off down the dank corridor, and Brother Guy followed.

We came in moments to a crypt, and Brother Guy refused to enter. A great stone casket sat in the center of the room, and without the lantern close by. I could not read the faded inscription. However, even in the dim light, I was able to discern details that chilled me to the bone.

I saw scratches on the stone, chunks gouged from the casket, and I quickly realized the reason why. That easket was no resting place for a dead monk, but a bed for someone – something – that rose every night, opening the casket and therefore wearing away at the stone. I had heard stories of such creatures as this.

I must get more ink. Damn my eyes. I must do it again.

The Crypt

I again have ink. Hopefully enough. I resign myself. I must do what I must to preserve this account, though to be the most hor libe and muclean of sine against 90%

As I have said. Brother Guy and I were in the catacombs of the monastery, in a crypt which was, in truth, the resting place of some unclean thing from Hell. I knew that I could not remain, but Brother Guy's horror convinced me that he was yet untainted. How wrong I was. As I learned later, he was not afraid for his soul, but merely terrified of displeasing his master.

I have written before of servants of demons, but Brother Guy is (or rather, was) a special case. I mentioned that I would write more of Satan's armies, and if the reader will pardon my departure from narrative for just a moment, I wish to commit to paper what I know about some of worst mockeries of humanity on God's Earth. The dead do indeed rise, but with no assistance from God—they rise, horribly, of their own accord, hungry for own flesh and blood. Father Bernard called such creatures "undead," and I am sure that Brother Guy served such a being.

The Undead

As horrifying as werewolves surely are, they are not the most frightening creatures that we face. The truly terrifying fiends are those that have somehow escaped their covenant of flesh and continue to walk the earth even after their bodies die. Father Bernard and Brother Guy both knew much of these creatures, but Brother Guy's revelations on the subject will come later in this writing. What Father Bernard told me, however. I wish to recount here.

The undead. Father Bernard explained, need some form of sustenance to fuel their continued existence. Some eat of human flesh, which naturally kills those on whom they feed. Horribly, some undead — the most human-looking of them — feed on the blood of the living. However, these walking leeches can somehow generate a feeling of pleasure in those unfortunates whose blood they imbibe, so that when the blood is drained the victim feels only a euphoric haze. Father Bernard asserted that these creatures maintain secrecy in large part thanks to this effect — when the feelings of pleasure fade, the victim either forgets the experience or yearns for it again, allowing the corpse to return when the victim has regained his strength. Entire districts or villages may therefore fall under the dominion of such creatures, as the citizens therein all live, toil, and pray only for the bliss that the creature's bite can bring. Of course, the creature is under no obligation to let his "meals" live, and so even the Eyes have no way of knowing how many good Christians die under their fangs each night.

Rodrique de Navarre himself battled the undead in Iberia, and reports that their Hell-borne gifts are many and varied. Chief among these gifts is the ability to shrug off wounds caused by steel. Arrows and swords, he says, are all but useless. This makes sense, as what could such wounds truly mean to one already dead?

Besides unnatural toughness, the undead are also stronger than their frames would indicate. Aignen le Libraire reports that a truly horrifying creature once assaulted him — while it was clearly an undead mockery of a person, it wore the shape of girl-child. And yet, four stout men were required to hold the creature down while Aignen performed the last rites for it, and even then it escaped by tearing off the arm of one of the unfortunate men. The creature was also preternaturally quick, as Aignen discovered when he tried to ride it down after it fled the scene, and it outran his horse. He reports, however, that the creature could not maintain these speeds indefinitely: when it reached the river's edge, it stood there confused and he was able to impale and destroy it.

Father Bernard believes that the more blood such a creature ingests, the more powerful it becomes. He also believes that impressive displays of strength, such as those that the girl-creature exhibited, drive the undead to feed more quickly. It may be that such beings actually "starve" if deprived of blood for too long, but testing this kind of assertion is of course difficult. If it has been attempted. I am not privy to the results.

Whatever the case, some among our number have stated that the undead do not age, and will in fact continue to hunt ("live" is decidedly the wrong word) until Judgment Day. This is not true.

however, as I can attest to the bodies of such creatures changing over time. The progression of their corpus is as follows.

First, the creature dies. This can happen, obviously, at any time during a person's life, and so an undead child and an undead adult might actually be comparable in strength. Since these mockeries do not seem to form from deaths that destroy the body — burnings, for example — it would seem that the body must be intact in order for the blasphemous "resurrection" to take place. Immediately after rising from death, the creature is indistinguishable from the way it looked in life. It's heart still beats, and it's need for blood is slight. It possesses the strength and ferocity typical of such creatures, but in much smaller measure than it will in years to come. These creatures often serve more powerful masters, even demons or witches, much as young wolves stay close to their mothers until they learn to hunt.

In a matter of time, perhaps years, perhaps decades, the undead truly dies. This is the stage in which they are the most active, and the easiest to notice and destroy. The change is marked by a distinct pallor. Also, the unclean thing can no longer eat or drink true food, and relies entirely upon living blood for its sustenance. It's physical prowess improves, and reports from the lands of the 5word Brothers far east of here state that such creatures can bring terrible other effects to bear as well, calling up aid from wolves and bats, and even forcing their wills on those around them. These creatures are deadly, but yet as vulnerable to fire as any heretic. In fact, the very sight of fire causes them to flee in terror. Happily, they also gain a new weakness — sunlight. The light of day repulses and burns these creatures of darkness, and any of us who hunt the undead should take pains to do so by day only.

If the undead beast manages to survive for much longer (and again, exactly how much longer is a matter of speculation) the infection may reach its final stage. I actually had the misfortune to see a creature thus afflicted, and a piteous sight it was.

Father Bernard and I stopped in Tours, and while he slept. I walked through the streets. Although I ventured out at night. I was unafraid — as a street urchin in Paris, the darkened, empty streets had comforted me. This night. I became aware of a low moaning sound emanating from a nearby chapel. Carefully. I followed the sound. Rounding a corner. I saw what I thought to be a leper. It was dressed in rags and its skin, what little I could see by the light of the moon, was gray and riddled with sores. It was standing by the church crying out. I realized, for forgiveness. I watched for a few moments as the creature paced, and while it did I saw that it wore golden rings on its fingers. That creature had been, in life, a nobleman.

I dared not reveal myself, as I was unarmed and had no wish to lay down my life that night. I simply watched as it sobbed and gibbered, perhaps uttering one word in seven that I found at all intelligible. It stood there for nearly half an hour, and then slouched off, as if dejected. I followed as long as I could, but it turned and for one horrible second I beheld its face.

Calling that ruin a "face" is face too kind. It looked like a gargoyle had come to life — no, even gargoyles are not so hideous (and as I have written, they are not always harmless chunks of stone). I cannot describe that creature, and I do not have the skill to render a drawing, for which the reader should consider himself blessed. Know this: As I stared at that misshapen, oozing pustule that was once a man of noble birth. I knew what Hell must be.

That, then, is the final stage of undeath, to roam the world with one's senses and mind intact but one's body a shambling, leprous travesty of all it once was. I have no idea if that creature retains its strength and speed or any of its other powers, but I should advise any who read this to assume that such hideous creatures are more powerful than their younger cousins, not less.

And so, as Brother Guy and I stood there in the mausoleum and looked in horror at the crypt, I knew that I could not continue on with the terrified monk accompanying me. I went with him, back up to the surface, and I must say that I was relieved when sunlight again touched my face. I told him that I wished to go off to pray alone, and he thanked me for my company and took his leave. I was careful to note where he left his lantern — on a peg not far from the main entrance to the monastery.

From there, I retreated to the room in which Id slept the night before to collect my thoughts. I noted bitterly that there was no sign that Father Bernard had ever returned to the room since we'd left it that morning, and I feared for his safety anew. I guessed that I had perhaps three or four hours before sundown, but as no bells ever sounded in this damned place. I could not be sure. Reflecting back on what I knew of the undead. I decided that I needed to steal back to the crypt before sundown, assuming that the creature that lay therein would not awaken until night.

I did indeed pray that afternoon, for deliverance, for safety, and finally for speed and stealth. I took Brother Guy's lantern from its peg and crept again to the catacombs. Just before I disappeared into the bowels of the place, a ray of sunlight filtered through a crack in the stone and

warmed my face. I thanked God for it.

Sunlight has not touched my body since. It has been at least three days, but without bells or sunrise to clock the hours, who can truly say?

Descent

I reached the crypt and, without stopping to study it further, continued on. All the while rats followed me, perching on the rocks and skittering around my feet as though trying to hinder me. I thought of Brother Guy's story of the bloodroot and how his fellow monk had been choked by a deerfly — could the monsters that no doubt nested below this monastery command such base creatures as insects and rats? Were these rodents even now acting as tiny spies for their sleeping master?

I could not stop to kill the rats. Even if I had a means of doing so, there were far too many of them. I could only press on, deeper into the sunken walls of the place.

I found rooms there, much like the cells above ground, but much smaller. Each one had a strange smell, much like a cemetery after a hard rain. I did not linger in any of them, but merely noted their locations. None of these rooms had doors, but most had moldy drapes, stained black from the foul air, hanging over their openings. Reflecting back on the door through which I had entered, I realized that were that door shut a large number of darkness-loving beasts could survive down here for months, provided they had some source of food. I did not pursue that thought at the time, for I was terrified enough already. I had found nothing to indicate that Father Bernard — or indeed anyone at all — was down here with me, and I began to lose hope.

I made very slow progress, for my lantern was dim and I had no wish to twist an ankle in one of the numerous dips in the floor. I had therefore not traveled far from the crypt when I realized my lamp was dying, and that sundown was close at hand. Cursing myself for being so foolish as to come here. I began running as quietly as I could, trying to put distance between myself and the crypt. I had no idea where I was going, only taking turns left or right as instinct moved me. I came to what appeared to be a dead end, and then I found something that brought my heart to my throat.

Father Bernard had been here. Scratched on the wall was a series of numbers: II:III:II. This series was a signal that Father Bernard and I had used before; it referred to the passage in Exodus where Moses encounters the burning bush, and meant that something else was here for me to find. But all I could see, as my lantern guttered and strange sounds around testified to stirrings in the monastery — and therefore sunset — was bleak stone and moss.

I fell to my knees and prayed for wisdom, for deliverance, for a miracle, for any intervention that God saw fit to give me in His wisdom. In the distance, through that stale, cold air. I heard a horrible creak as the stone lid of the crypt opened. I opened my eyes and looked around, wildly, and just for a moment, the walls seemed to change.

Forcing myself to concentrate. I breathlessly whispered a prayer that I might remain unseen and undetected, and stared again at the wall. Seconds before the light failed, I saw what I was meant to see: A gap in the wall, only two feet in width, and nearly invisible unless viewed directly. I crept through that gap and after slipping through a narrow passageway, found myself in a room similar to the cells Id seen before. By feeling around the walls, I judged the room to be larger than those tiny alcoves, but the ceiling was so low that I need only to reach up slightly above my head to touch it. I

could find no other egress or ingress from the room, other than the way I entered, and I was completely without light. I could do nothing but wait, and so, exhausted, I slumped against the wall nearest the entrance, hoping that anyone or anything entering the room would wake me. Fortunately, that hope was not in vain.

Murder

I slept for the remainder of the night, and no creatures of Hell troubled me. Indeed, when I awoke, I forgot briefly where I was, but the pitch-blackness and stone floor soon reminded me. As I sat up and began to wonder how I should escape this predicament, I heard footsteps and saw light approaching.

I pressed myself against the wall next to the entrance into the room. I had nothing to use as a weapon, as the burned-out lantern was somewhere in the dark and I had no time to find it, and so I knew that if the being approaching was a demon. I would surely be killed. Resigning my soul to God. I balled up my fists and drew them over my head.

Brother Guy entered the room and I stuck him before I realized who he was. He was carrying a lantern, which by grace of God did not break when he dropped it. He collapsed to the floor, stunned, and I bent to help him up when I noticed something that nearly sent me mad with fright.

My blow had dislodged his hood and the back of his neck was now exposed to me. There, just above the nape of the neck, was a single, blue eye, staring unblinking out at me. It followed me, tracking my movement, and I knew then that Brother Guy was a servant of the obscene thing that slept in cold and darkness in the crypt.

I struck as surely as I could, kicking at his face and throat. He fell over onto his back and grabbed for something in his belt. I seized the only weapon I could — the burnt-out lantern I had taken from the monastery the day before. I swung it at him with all my might, my eyes shut tightly, and was rewarded with a solid crunch and a grunt. I opened my eyes to find Brother Guy had staggered back against the wall and was gurgling as the glass from the lantern worked its way into his throat.

I could do nothing but watch him die. And, God forgive me, but I was so relieved when his breathing finally stopped and his death-rattle echoed about the chamber that I bent knee and gave thanks for it. Please, reader, understand that I am no killer or heartless fiend, despite my origins as a criminal. Brother Guy may once have been a good and faithful monk: I shall never know. But he had sold himself (or been forced) into servitude of a demon of the Pit, and was damned long before I

had the misfortune of meeting him.

And yet — what of the stories he told me? Were they true? Was he testing my loyalties? Was there information I was meant to glean or clues I should recognize in his tales? Were they simply mad ramblings? Was he trying to redeem himself somehow, by passing along information I might use?

My God. what have I done?

Deception

I have composed myself and have offered prayers on behalf of Brother Guy. I have no way to know his intentions upon finding me in the catacombs, and I can only hope that they were honorable. As my deception since his death at my hands has not been discovered. I must assume that he was not leading any evil forces to me. I realize this makes me guilty of murder. I must atone for this crime in time, and so I shall, but for now I continue with this writing.

After Brother Guy died, I dimmed the light from his lantern and waited. I was sure that the monster looking through the eye on the back of his neck would find me soon, but when an hour went by and no sound disturbed the catacombs. I began to wonder. Finally, I realized what had happened and how fortunate I truly was.

Brother Guy was a servant, willing or no. I still believe that his master could see through his hideous eye. But during the day, the master slept, and so had no knowledge of Guy's death. When this theory came to me, I reasoned that the only way to test it was to venture back through the catacombs to the monastery and see if the sun shone. I stripped Guy's bloodied robe from his body and donned it, and, taking up his lantern, made my way back through the dank halls.

The trek seemed somehow shorter, and even the breathless walk past the horrid crypt did not seem too difficult. The rats did not follow this time, or if they did. I did not see them. I was, truth be told, so anxious to get back into the sunlight that I did not look. I rounded the last corner and saw what I wished to see — the ray of sunlight that had warmed and cheered me before I had descended into the catacombs the day before. I walked towards it — it was all I could do not to run—and when barely a foot remained between me and blessed sun on my skin, a voice stopped me dead in my tracks.

"Guy?" it said, and my heart sank. When I turned, whoever it was would see that I was not Guy, but that I was wearing his bloody garb. I did not turn, but answered in the closest approximation to his accent that I could. "Where have you been?" asked the voice, apparently fooled for the moment. I responded that I had been in the catacombs, praying that the mysterious man behind me would not ask why. He did not, but I heard his footsteps approaching. His hand touched my shoulder and I turned around, keeping my head low.

I needn't have worried. The man standing there was elderly, and so bent that I was surprised he could walk. More important, though, he was blind. His eyes were a milky white color and were as dead as the monk for whom he mistook me. He leaned in close and sniffed, and his nose wrinkled.

"Have you fouled yourself, boy? You stink of blood and offal." He grinned at this, and I was repulsed by the sight of this crippled, blind man in monk's clothing taking perverse pleasure at the rank smell of my stolen robes. I told him that I had fallen in the darkness and must have landed in some rancid substance. He told me to follow him immediately, that I could wash "on the way," and that he had something important for me to do.

I could do nothing but obey. Behind me, the ray of sunlight grew fainter as we walked back into the darkness, down a path that I had never seen.

The Prison

We walked through new hallways, the blind man by sheer memory, me following by the light of the lantern. I stopped to wash my stolen robes in a stream, and endured more sickening humor from the old monk. I began to suspect that his feelings for Brother Guy were not entirely innocent, and wondered if Brother Guy had ever submitted to his desires, whatever they might be. How can a man so old still feel lust for flesh? But then, this monastery houses all manner of sin. I should not be surprised.

As we walked, I grew reckless and spoke, and asked what was required of me. His answer at once relieved me and chilled my blood, for he spoke of interrogating a blasphemer priest that had blundered into the catacombs the day before. The master, he said, had captured the priest and wished him to be questioned and, if possible, converted. My heart rose in my throat, but I somehow found the voice to ask after the priest's condition. The blind monk replied that he was unhurt, for now, but that the master would take over interrogation tonight when he rose and then the monk would talk, would he or no.

That the "blasphemer priest" in question was Father Bernard I did not doubt. I worried, however, that this "master" would recognize me. Indeed, if my assumption about the demon looking through the eye implanted in Brother Guy's neck was accurate, the demon would know upon arising that night that Guy was dead. And so it was without hope that I followed the blind monk into the rank depths of the monastery.

Defiled Ground

"Some ground is holy by nature." Father Bernard told me once. "and some made holy by faith alone. The first is sacrosanct, and not Satan himself could despoil it. But ground consecrated by man is frail in comparison, and the servants of Lucifer can indeed befoul it."

These words rang in my head while the blind monk led me to Father Bernard's cell. The monk spoke little, probably trying to feel his way along, and I passed the time by remembering Father Bernard's lessons on the havens that demons choose for themselves. Those lessons may prove useful, and so I commit them to paper now.

Demons choose to lair in strange places indeed, but Father Bernard believed that such hives could be divided into three categories: those designed by Satan for that purpose, places built by man but later inhabited by demons, and befouled holy ground.

Unholy Ground

Satan, ever attempting to copy God's good works, gifts his followers and children with "consecrated" places of their own. Many such places are the sites of pagan worship, which only makes sense. Such sites are a beacon to those with unrighteous thoughts, and this helps to explain why so many pagan villages in the British Isles and in the Polish Principalities have werewolves and other demons lurking nearby. Doubtless they feed from the frightened populace, or present themselves as pagan gods as did the blood-besmeared demon Aoife that Brian encountered.

Recognizing such a place, unfortunately, is difficult. Father Bernard mentioned that some especially devout souls become ill in such areas, but this is by no means universal or even reliable. Worse, some such places exude, rather than menace, an odd calming sensation. Whether this is meant to lull victims into a stupor so that any demons in the area may feast or to mislead those who might search for a den of evil, I cannot say. Either or both may apply: indeed, the tanner's shop I mentioned earlier seemed to engender such feelings.

Satan's ground can often be found in the deep forests, but then, so can many of his minions. Signs of wolves nearby might indicate that such a locale is near, as might patches of upturned earth or certain kinds of moss and mushrooms. In particular, so-called "faerie rings" quite often point the way to such otherworldly dangers, as do bobbing lights in forests.

The danger here should be obvious, especially if the reader recalls what I have written already. As one ventures farther away from civilization, the Oevil's forces hold greater sway. Traveling in groups is essential, as is carrying fire and steel. Sometimes a place consecrated to Satan can be burned and thereby destroyed, sometimes nothing short of a miracle will dislodge the Adversary's talons. Those who do God's work must be prepared to give of themselves, for sacrifice is often necessary to cleanse and make safe the world.

Stolen Places

The tanner's shop I had the misfortune to visit in Paris is a good example of the next category. Such places — shops, homes, even chapels and monasteries (obviously) are not immune — were built

with the best of intentions. At some point along the way. Satan's minions wormed their way in and nested. Any residents of such places are pressed into service, driven off, or killed outright. Many demons can appear to be completely human, and so the new inhabitants of such a place go about their agenda (spreading Satan's gospel, though the details inevitably vary) with their neighbors none the wiser.

That, of course, is the most treacherous and insidious fact of such havens — to all appearances, they are completely normal. A chapel or other house of God that falls under the influence of the Adversary is, of course, more easily noticed, but this sort of blatant evil only takes place in more remote locations (as witness, again, this monastery — at least a day's walk from any help). Even the more perceptive inquisitor cannot search every home, workshop, and cathedral. How, then, to root such worms out?

I would humbly suggest that those of us in cities make inquires of the street urchins, as I myself once was. Grant them the sacrament of confession and perhaps a hot dinner, and let them know that you can be trusted. This requires patience — as I ve indicated, most men who make offerings to street children do so with less than Christian motives — but in time they will see that you mean no harm. And then, ask them for information. No one notices urchins (indeed, they strive not to be noticed) and often hear tidbits of information that not even the most careful inquisitor would. They often do not know what the rumors they hear mean, but by paying them for such information, a skilled investigator can often determine where in the city the demons are nesting. After that, it's simply a matter of what kind of action one is prepared to take.

A warning: The sacrament of confession is of utmost importance when recruiting help from the poor (or indeed, from anywhere). The demons of the city are not above using such sources of rumor and gossip for their own purposes, and by trusting too much, one might be mislead...or betrayed. Any information gained during the sacrament of confession, however, one may assume to be true, as even the powers of some hellspawn to alter a man's beliefs or thoughts cannot hold against the strength of our sacred customs.

Blasphemous Infestations

Infesting a small chapel or convent-house is one thing, but defiling true holy ground is something else entirely. Ooing so requires power that few of us are prepared to fight, and indeed, any once-holy place that has become a haven for demons must be reported to Rome at once.

How, the faithful reader might wonder, is such defilement even possible? Is God's blessing so easily sullied? I asked these questions of Father Bernard, and he responded with the distinction I have already made — places made holy by God's design are indeed unassailable. Places made holy by the faith of man, however, can indeed be corrupted.

This distinction is subtle to the point of being illogical to many unlearned scholars, but Father Bernard tells me that in the Holy Land, there are sites considered sacred by the Infidels which radiate much the same aura of light and grace that true, Christian holy ground does. The Muslim faith, being as it is a perversion (or, at best, a misinterpretation) of Christianity, is evidently not beyond God's mercy — He still allows their faith to infuse an area and protect it from demons. But it is exactly such places as these that Satan's minions can befoul and corrupt.

How is this done? I thank God that I do not know. Surely some blasphemous ritual must be required, involving. I would guess, the blood of innocent Christians. Perhaps in the manner of pagans of old, simply the slaughter of animals will do. I cannot say. What I do know is that onceholy ground emits an aura that no one touched by God can ignore. It grates upon the soul like sandstone on flesh, and fills those who can hear with righteous fury. Again, the revelation of such a place would likely inspire the Pope Himself to take action, as it is nothing less than a challenge to God's power.

I am again running short of ink. I do not know if

Interrogation

Ooes sin in the name of God reprieve the sin? I cannot know. I do not doubt that I will die here in this monastery, without ever seeing the sun, sins heavy on my head, bound for Hell. Please. God, be merciful and allow me this last confession, all I know and have learned on paper, my crimes here, in the absence of the priest's ear.

Oh. God. I beg of You. do not forsake me.

The blind monk and I reached a cell. Unlike the other cells I have described, which were enclosed only by drapes and cloth, this one was clearly designed for prisoners rather than prayer. The door was oak, and a stout crossbar locked it. I wondered what manner of creature it was designed to hold to warrant such extreme security? Whatever the true function of the cell, Father Bernard was now it's inhabitant.

The blind monk lifted the crossbar with strength that belied his frail body, and we entered. Father Bernard was slumped against the far wall, chained by the wrists. His clothes were in tatters, and I could see blood trickling from half a dozen small wounds. He looked up at me, and his eyes widened. I shook my head and gestured to the blind monk, trying to indicate that I had not betrayed him. I do not think, however, that he understood entirely, for he began crying out to me, calling me by name, and calling me a traitor.

The blind monk asked me what I made of this. With a choked voice. I answered that the young monk he had traveled with had disappeared into the catacombs some hours before, but I did not know what became of "him." The fiend chuckled, and said. "Worry not, then, of betrayal, Father Bernard. Your young bum-boy is dead. A shadow would not be stealthy enough to escape the master here."

As much as the inference incensed me. I was gladdened that the monk was so overconfident. Obviously, the master was either not as powerful as he made himself out to be, or God did indeed watch over me. Father Bernard, now seeming to understand what was happening, quieted, and the blind monk stepped forward.

"Father Bernard, we know that you are more than a simple priest. Tell us what your true mission is, please, before sundown."

"My mission is to serve God." Father Bernard had apparently answered this question before.

"If the master questions you, he will not leave you intact, body or soul. So, answer me instead.

Why are you here?"

"I came here seeking shelter and discovered a hive of evil. I am here now only as a prisoner."

The blind man coughed as though wishing to correct him, but said nothing. From a table in the corner of the room, he picked up what looked like a scourge, but larger than I had ever seen. He raised it up in front of Father Bernard, and I could see that the ends of tassels were laced with tiny shards of iron. I understood, then, the origins of the wounds in my mentor's flesh. "Surely this looks familiar, Father? Shall we extract a confession, Brother Guy?" He raised the evil device, but before he struck, I spoke.

"Let me," I said. The blind monk turned to me and grinned. I was almost ill at the sight. His teeth — what few he had — were blackened and rotting. He held out the whip for me, and I took it. The handle felt moist from his hand, and I could see bits of flesh and smears of blood on the end of the weapon. I looked at Father Bernard and nodded, and then struck — but hit only the stone wall next to him.

He cried out quite convincingly, and the blind monk asked again after his purposes. Father Bernard refused to answer, of course, so I struck again.

This continued for several moments, but Father Bernard and I were doubtless thinking the same thing: If no information was forthcoming, the monk would either change the method of torture (and indeed, I saw other devices on that table, devices of steel and wood that I could not identify) or the sun would set and the "master" would take over. Finally, as I raised the whip for another stroke, I ordered Father Bernard to confess, that I might put his words to paper and the torment might end.



Father Bernard smiled, and said "I will talk, then, for truly I can bear no more of this, but I will speak only to you. The blind pig must leave the room, for I cannot bear the smell of him."

The blind man only laughed, and pulled me from the room. "You may take his words down," he said. "but remember to write clearly so that the master can read. You'll find paper on the table, and quill and ink. I shall return with the master in an hour."

An hour! I felt my stomach lurch. In an hour I would be before the master, and surely he would know that I was an impostor. I walked back into the cell and closed the door, and quickly explained to Father Bernard what had happened. I shame to admit that I did not tell him how Brother Guy had died, only that he had, but I did tell him of the eye in the man's neck. I asked for my mentor's advice.

He thought for a moment, and then told me to return to Brother Guy's body and cut the eye from it. If Guy was accustomed to hiding the eye under his hood, this meant the eye saw only fabric. As long as it was on my person the master might also be fooled by my ruse. This was a gamble, of course, but I could only trust in God, for I could not abandon my mentor. However, I would of course need some sort of confession for the master, and so I had to hurry.

I left the room again, and crept quietly along. By grace of God alone did I sneak past the blind monk, who sat in the corridor nearby, a strange smile on his trembling lips. I ran as fast as I could along the hallways, lingering for only a brief moment to look for the ray of the sunlight that would mark the hallway I could take to reach the surface — but I could not find it. Only moments later. I found Brother Guy's corpse and, using a dagger I found in his belt, cut the blue eye from his neck and tucked it into my sleeve. As I left, I saw rats creeping towards the body, and noted that their snouts were bloodied. Leaving a man, even a servant of a demon, in such a place to be food for rats rankled at my heart, but I had no time to prevent it. I ran back along the hallways and reached Father Bernard's cell, quite out of breath.

I took his confession, writing as clearly as I could with my hand shaking. It was all lies, of course — we fabricated our travels, our mission, and names of our superiors. We named as our mother house a chapel in Toulouse that I knew had been burned by the Crusade against the Cathars. It took only half an hour, but we had a convincing collection of lies. All that remained was to wait for the "master" and take our chances.

The result was tragic. I will continue, though it pains me to do so.

The Master Awakens

My first — and, for the time being, only — encounter with the "master" was that night. Barely had the ink begun to dry on Father Bernard's falsified confession, and the two of us said a brief prayer in hopes that the ruse would hold, and perhaps bring this nightmare to its end, when the door opened and the master entered.

Oear God, understand that of all the sins I have committed in my life, I committed the worst when I saw that creature. If not for the stern gaze of Father Bernard lending me strength from across the room, I would have confessed all before that creature. It radiated a palpable aura of holiness, or what I would have sworn to be holiness, in other circumstances. He turned, and I recognized the Pale Brother.

I thought that my time had come. He would reach out for me, and wring the life from my body, for surely he would recognize me just as I had him. But his gaze did not rest on me, instead looking past me to the confession on the table. He picked it up and glanced over it, and spoke in the same soft, soothing tone in which he had offered me a bed two nights before.

"Your writing skills are improving, Brother Guy," he said. "However, the priest has been lying."

I was so taken aback by this statement that I spoke without thinking. Fortunately, I had grown quickly accustomed to speaking as Brother Guy and the Pale Brother did not notice the difference. "How do you know, master?" I asked, inwardly wincing at how easy it was to refer to him — to think of him — as a superior.

"You could not have known. Brother, having been with us such a short time. But the Faith has eyes and ears everywhere, and news always finds its way to me. The Crimson Curia is not blind outside of Rome — no offense meant to you, Brother Solomon." He nodded to the blind monk, waiting patiently outside.

"The Crimson Curia?" I knew that I was playing a dangerous game — one statement might reveal my deception. But now I was stalling for time. If I could keep the Pale Brother talking. I thought, until dawn... but with so many hours to fill?

"The Curia, good Brother, is a not a mystery to which you have been initiated. But perhaps it's time you were?" With that, the Pale Brother produced a dagger from his robes and raised his palm, as if to cut it. I had no desire to see bloodshed, especially as precursor to some blasphemous ritual, and pointed at Father Bernard.

"Master. I am of course humbled by your confidence in me. however. I fear that my beating may have shortened this priest's life. If you wish to gain more information from him, perhaps that should take precedence?"

Father Bernard acknowledged my ingenuity with a small nod, although it placed him at greater risk. The Pale Brother nodded as well, and with a poisonous smile replaced the dagger in his robes.

"Know, for the moment. Brother Guy," he said, "that the Curia's agents are everywhere across the land. They are, for the most part, faithful like yourself and Brother Solomon, brought into our mysteries by the Blood of Cain and the Ooor of Will. They deliver news, both to those of us with our own ministries and to the See of Nod.

"This account, though it betrays some small knowledge of our Faith, also betrays that the good Father has no real appreciation for how deeply into his Church we have burrowed. I know, for example, that this village," and here the Pale Brother indicated a section of the "confession" which indicated that a small town was utterly free of demonic taint, "is not only besieged by agents of Satan, but that inquisitors from the Church will arrive in less than a fortnight to cleanse it." He

paused and grinned at the Father, and I saw that his teeth were pointed and rust-colored. "I also know that they will fail and die to a man in the attempt, so powerful is the Cainite who rules that village's nights.

"There are other details, as well." the demon continued. "This bishop you mention as being compromised is actually one of our most dogged foes. Your route is not accurate, as a priest such as yourself, so infused with the power of God. would certainly have attracted attention in any of the places where our congregations meet, and yet we have not heard of you until now. I compliment you on the attempt. Father, but now I would like some answers and I have very little time." He turned to me and gave a dismissive wave. "Brother Guy, you are free to go. However, kindly keep to the catacombs that I may summon you if I need you again." How he meant to summon me, I do not know, but I feared that the eye in my stolen robe was intended to play a role.

What could I do? I turned and left, and Brother Solomon shut the door and barred it. I asked, without thinking, if he meant to lock the master in. He replied with some surprise that the master had no need of doors.

With a sick feeling. I stumbled away. My knees buckled in fear and revulsion, but also, God forgive me, in relief — I had escaped. My head swam with revelations and suspicions: If the demon's words could be trusted, this evil, this bloody heresy, extended into the Curia in Rome Herself! But our route had not come from a Papal edict: the Eyes look to Aignen le Libraire for their orders. Had the demons here known of our coming even before we arrived? Were others within the Oculi Oei their pawns? And the way the Pale Brother spoke of God and his "faith" indicated that he did not knowingly serve Satan — what, then, of his cryptic reference to "Cainites?" Something about the conversation stirred a memory of an overheard conversation between an Eye and Aignen le Libraire himself, but try as I might, I could not call the exact words to mind. This failure from me, whose memory is my only source of pride!

I had few answers and many questions, and Brother Guy's stories and Father Bernard's lessons both swam in my mind. I decided then to write them down, and asked Brother Solomon for more paper and ink, and a quiet place to write.

He did not ask me for my reasons, or what I planned to write. He merely told me where I could find what I required, and I retired to a cell only a few yards from the prison where Father Bernard was being questioned.

And that is where this narrative began. I mentioned before that I could hear Father Bernard's screams. They began only moments after I began writing. At first, they were prayers, verses from the Bible, and other admonitions to himself to remain strong. Since, they have degenerated first into pleas for aid and for God to hear him, and then into inarticulate cries. Father Bernard told me about questioning heretics once, and said that they will scream for hours on end before revealing any information. As long as they scream, they cannot speak. Oh, cruel fate, that now the righteous are inquisited by the heretics!

Here I sit, then, in a cell lit only by a single candle, and I have had to replace it several times. Fortunately, candles are in greater supply here than ink, and Brother Solomon has not required anything of me in trade for light. I have not seen the sun nor have I seen or heard from the Pale Brother, and Brother Solomon has not passed along any word of Father Bernard. I am too afraid – or perhaps too ashamed – to ask after him.

I can think of nothing else to do but continue on transcribing lessons from Father Bernard. I have spoken until now of servants of demons, of demons fashioned from flesh and stone, and of those hideous creatures that drink the blood of the living. But other "breeds" of demon plague God's Earth, and Father Bernard held special contempt for these last, those without true bodies.

Demons of Ether

Some heretics, including the Cathars who burned in Albi, believe that the material world is base and evil. This rather pessimistic view is not only a disservice to the men and women who walk the earth, but also assumes that the spiritual is inherently good. Demons of Ether put lie to that assertion.

Father Bernard spoke of these Demons as creatures whose natural form is insubstantial, but warned that most of them are capable of assuming or stealing solid form for a short time. The differences between them, then, chiefly concern how easily they can do so. I shall write as much as I can of these creatures. Know, dear reader, that at any time I might be forced to stop.

At least the old bastard gave me more ink this time.

Ghosts

When a man dies, the best he can hope for is his eternal reward in Heaven. Ooubtless some souls — perhaps many in these decadent times — feel the fires of Hell. And yet, stories often find their way to the ears of the Eyes of God, stories of spirits returning from the grave to acts as guides, supplicants, and sometimes tormentors of the living.

Are these restless souls, in fact, the shades of once-living men and women? Or are they, as many inquisitors believe, "familiar spirits" that take on the shape of the deceased in order to fool the living for sport or spite? I have heard arguments in support of both views, and can honestly say that either or both of these are possible. What follows, then, is what Father Bernard and I have learned of ghosts, whatever their origins may truly be.

Whether or not they are the lingering souls of humanity, phantoms do indeed plague the living. They haunt places where death is strong — leper colonies and cemeteries commonly boast stories of ghosts, as do battlefields and field hospitals. One of the worst such places, however, is one that I saw with my own eyes, and I will relate that story here.

Surely, the reader has heard of the massacre at Béziers. Arnaud Amaury and his men demanded that the town surrender those suspected of heresy, and when the town refused, Amaury ordered his soldiers to burn the town and slaughter all therein. Though this atrocity took place more than twenty years ago, and thus before my birth. I visited the remains of the town recently.

That night I was taken with nightmares the likes of which I cannot begin to describe. I felt the horror of being pulled from my home, lashed to a stake, and burned alive. I heard the screams of my family, my friends, and those with whom Id spent my entire life being put to the sword. And somewhere above the human din. I heard an endless dirge, a keening lament, an unending, eternal prayer for the dying. I heard voices echoing as if from a deep chasm, some wailing in sorrow, and some laughing as if in derision. And just before waking, I heard a voice say, "Caedite eos. Novit enim Oominus qui sunt eius."

Massacre them, for the Lord knows His own.

These nightmares were not mere dreams, they were visions from life, for when I described them later to an Eye in Narbonne, his face turned ashen. He told me that he had spoken with one of the knights who'd participated in the slaughter and that my descriptions were accurate down to details. The phrase Id heard was the order of Arnaud Amaury to his troops, according to that knight. The dead of Béziers do not sleep easy, and they visit their wrath upon any who dares sleep too near the site of their murder. Or perhaps they call out in endless supplication for forgiveness for the crime of heresy. I have no way to know, and despite my curiosity, no force save a mandate from God Himself could induce me to journey there again.

Ghosts may exhibit any number of strange powers. Many induce madness or fever in their victims: indeed, those people who actually see ghosts often go mad for a short time after. Mortal men were never meant to glimpse the beyond, and refusal to pass on to the hereafter is perhaps the greatest sin that the dead can commit. However, for the most part, ghosts cannot become solid. I hear tales, though, of ghosts stealing the bodies of the living. Such "ghosts" might very well be minor demons instead of restless souls, though, given their quick response to exorcism.

A soldier of God confronted with a ghost should remember that they are ultimately powerless, mere reflections of their former selves. However, a demon masquerading as the soul of a deceased person might well have power enough to cow and even injure, and so it is best to assume that any "ghost" is a demon until proved otherwise.

Faeries

What exactly faeries are is a point of contention among my order. Most feel that they are demons of some form, used to masquerading as pagan gods and now feeling the sting of divine justice as Christendom threatens to drive their evil from the hearts of their worshipers. Others feel that faeries are a different phenomenon entirely, beings created by God for a purpose we do not yet fathom. Finally, a growing number of inquisitors assert that they may not exist at all.

I, for one, do believe that something exists to justify legends of the Fair Folk, but what that might be in truth I do not know. Legends of these beings vary so widely that any real classification is impossible. For example, in one village, a "boggart" might be a malicious little imp that hides household items and leaves small, stinging bites on the livestock, whereas in the next village over, the same name is affixed to a helpful little sprite that drives away rats and watches over the children. I would assert that these more benevolent spirits might actually be minor angels, but as I am neither a priest nor a scholar of such matters. I acknowledge that this is only conjecture.

Faeries inspire legends all across Europe, but many of those legends seem to stem from the British Isles. I have no real idea why those Isles play host to so many of those creatures, but I have heard some theories. Apparently, in those Isles (Ireland especially) tales about the Fair Folk commonly involve a deal between them and mankind. Leaving a saucer of cream out for a house spirit, for example, or avoiding certain places after dark in respect for the "faerie courts" are not uncommon. These customs are innocuous enough, and every village has such strange traditions, but in the British Isles, most folks say that they originate in ancient pacts made with the Fair Folk. Now that I think of it, Father Bernard once mentioned that similar stories reach him from the steppes of Russian Principalities, stories of children admonished to behave, lest the strange nightfolk take them away.

These stories might be only that — tales meant to entertain and frighten children. But consider the implications if they are not merely fanciful. What if villages dot the land wherein most, if not all of the populace, follow traditions that they cannot justify? These traditions stem from "ancient pacts" — perhaps pacts that predate Christ's birth, or at least predate a given village's Salvation at the hands of the Risen Lord? What if, by following those traditions, the people are not committing any particular sin or heresy, but are strengthening some nightmarish creature from the depths of Hell?

I do not mean to sound alarmist, but after all, the stories of the Fair Folk are not always cheerful. Just as many concern flesh-eating creatures and terrible, but beautiful enchantresses that steal away young men. Faeries are not harmless, and I believe that they bear closer scrutiny than we have heretofore given them. But we have so few men willing and able to serve as Eyes in the first place, and more immediate threats demand our attention.

As for how to combat the Fae and what an inquisitor might expect from them, God only knows. The legends, as I ve said, are so diverse that drawing any kind of distinction is impossible. Many legends grant faeries powers of deception and illusion, so an Inquisitor who suspects that they are near must endeavor to keep his wits about him. Certain prayers for clarity of thought may indeed help. Likewise, accounts from other Inquisitors claim that faeries can be driven off by the sound of church bells, an iron blade, throwing salt or bread at them, reciting Biblical verses, any phrase in Latin, or any one of a hundred other remedies.

A servant of God who runs afoul of faeries is indeed in great peril, simply because these tricksters have taken great pains to conceal their true weaknesses. Pray for wisdom and strength, and do not be seduced. That is all the advice Father Bernard gave me.

Demons

Actually, demons might take the form of any of the creatures I have spoken of in this writing. The demons to which I refer here are simply those many readily identifiable as such, and so I must ask that the reader steel himself, as the pages ahead will doubtless shock him.

Demons are, first and last, the fallen angels who rose up alongside Lucifer and were cast into the Pit. The Book of Matthew speaks of the demon Legion, and the other Gospels make mention of such creatures too. Im told. How indeed they came to plague mankind is something of mystery. but they do so with regularity. Demons can come to Earth by themselves, escaping the eternal punishment that God damned them to, or can, shamefully, be summoned here by misquided or insane heretics. How they might escape is thankfully beyond my knowledge, but as the reader will recall from tale of the tanner's shop. I know something of how demons might be summoned.

Summoning a demon, to all accounts, requires sacrifice. In the tanner's shop, that sacrifice consisted of first poisoning the flesh of a young man by the sin of sodomy, and then flaying him alive. The remains of the carcass. I must assume, served as a meal for the demon Cyphiael once it reached our world. Other demons are likewise imprisoned, either in material objects (including plants and even places: I have discussed such tainted locales already), in people or animals (as Legion did in the Book of Matthew) or beyond our world in the Void. Each demon has a name and once had a purpose under God, as each was once a member of the Heavenly Host. However, in choosing to rebel against the Creator, they renounced their purpose and station, and have been stripped of their former power.

Not to say that demons are powerless, of course. Satan grants his minions power beyond any of the creatures I have herein described. Demons, once freed from their prisons, may take the form of human beings or animals, walking among herds nearly invisibly. They are as powerful by day as by night and have no special vulnerabilities to metal weaponry. Indeed, any damage a demon's body sustains heals immediately upon setting of the sun: until then it is only a minor inconvenience, as

demons, like animals, do not possess souls and thus feel no pain.

As far as the magics and hell-spawned powers that demons may call upon. I lament to report that each demon is unique. I have never personally encountered a demon (thank God, the experience at the tanner's was quite close enough for me!), but I will relate the following story. May it serve to enlighten even as it terrifies.

The Crusade of 1204 destroyed Constantinople, as the reader probably knows. I was born eight years later, and so growing up heard stories from traders and soldiers in Paris. Some had been to the Queen of Cities, some had fled in the wake of the Crusade. I thought nothing of it except sometimes to wonder what an entire city burning might look like. And then, after joining the Oculi, Father Bernard and I spent the night at the manor of a noble lady of the House of Murnau. She said that an older cousin had gone away on the Crusade, and returned uninjured. The cousin, a man

Shadow Demons

A special type of demon bears mention here. I believe that demons can conjure up certain

types of servitors, and among the most insidious are night-demons.

The creatures are more powerful than many of the other demonic monsters I have discussed. They bear some resemblance to the undead in that fire and sunlight seem to repel them. but do not appear to drink blood. Instead, they draw their strength from the very shadows around them. While they can assume human form, and can even mimic the voices and faces of certain people, their natural state is one of living darkness, completely impervious to any natural harm. The shadows around them can strike and bind their foes, and can even kill by strangulation if need be. These demons can also deepen shadows so that no torch can pierce them, and even extend their dark grip into men's minds so that they will do the bidding of the night-creature.

Rodrique de Navarre supposedly knows much of these creatures, and asserts that Iberia in particular is infested with them. I do not know, and nor does Aignen le Libraire, why that region should play host to these horrors, but Navarre believes that these demons are Moorish in origin, and the dark-skinned invaders brought them along when they conquered these lands so many years ago.

I have never encountered such a being, nor has Father Bernard. God willing, I never will. for how can one fight living darkness?

called Oieter, had been a cheerful man before leaving, always ready with a jest or kind word. When he returned, much of his humor was gone. He would still joke, but his jests were barbed and unfriendly. He stayed away from the rest of the family, and built a small cottage on the edge of their property for himself. He did not attend church with the rest of them, but prayed on his own (so he said) and received visits from the priest to give confession. This continued for three years, until the noblewoman reached hertwelfth birthday. And then he began taking an interest in her that can only be described as prurient.

The noble — Else by name — said that she was too afraid to report to her parents the unclean things that Oieter suggested to her. She confessed them to the priest, but the fool only told her to reject his advances and keep her heart pure. (No doubt Oieter's donations of riches he "found" on Crusade did much to endear him to the priest.)

Else, as a member of the House of Murnau, sensed the evil in her cousin even before she knew anything of our fight. But as she was the only member of the family with whom he would associate for long, none of the others noticed. Else heard voices in her sleep telling her to do something about her cousin, telling her that he meant to destroy the family and bring a great evil to Earth, but she did not know how to go about it. Finally, after awakening from a particularly horrific nightmare, she ventured out to his cottage.

When Else told this tale to Father Bernard and myself, she blushed at the admission that she stole out of her home, and crept like a thief to her cousin's small cottage. She told us that she could feel the air grow thicker as she approached, and felt an odd heat coming from the cottage, though she saw no light burning. The door was open only a crack, but enough for her to see.

Dieter knelt on the floor within, and Else could see strange symbols inscribed in blood all around him. He was speaking to someone, but Else saw no one else present. However, what Dieter said was quite enough to hold her attention. "Despite my attempts, O Master," he said. "she will not submit. I can take her by force—"

"No." came a voice from nowhere. Else's eyes filled with horror at recounting the story:



even after so many years, the memory of that voice still chilled her. She compared it to a horse being gelded, and said that it was loud enough to rattle her teeth, yet she had to strain to make out its words. "If you take her by force, I shall have to shred her body to be reborn, and then she cannot receive my seed."

"Surely. I could find another girl—" began Vieter, but he was again interrupted.

"No!" The voice deepened and Else felt a rush of heat coming from the room. "She must be the one to bear my child. But there is another way."

"Anything. O Master." said Dieter eagerly. Else heard a lascivious chuckle and knew that her cousin had made a mistake in agreeing too quickly.

"Take the knife, then, my servant, and cut along your breastbone." Dieter looked doubtful, and began to rise. "Now," came the voice, and the walls of the cottage shook as though struck.

Dieter raised the knife and cut, panting in pain. "Deeper," ordered the creature. Dieter tried to protest, but the room grew hotter, and Else made the sign of the cross even as she related the story to us, more than a decade later.

Kneeling there on the floor. Dieter sliced himself open from chest to navel, and slumped to the floor. The heat and gloom left the room, but the body lying there amidst the blasphemous inscriptions seemed to swell as though flyblown. And then a hand protruded from the slit in his belly, followed by a strong-looking arm. The demon, it seemed, had found a womb after all.

Else ran then, ran back to her home, woke her parents, and told them what had happened. They cursed themselves for not sensing the evil on their very land, and immediately called their guards to arms and ventured to the damned cottage. There, they found the scene as Else had described, but found only the hollowed-out corpse of her cousin. The demon had already left.

Else has not seen any trace of it since, but by the inscriptions in the cottage and by certain texts that her brother apparently found on Crusade, she discovered its name, which I will not inscribe here. She has not, to date, discovered the way to imprison or destroy it, but knows it must find her eventually. She has never married and refuses to do so, as any children she bears would be at risk from the creature that must stalk her still, waiting for her to let down her guard.

Else is never without at least five strong men to guard her. She keeps a holy relic, a set of beads blessed by Pope Gregor and Cardinal Marzone both, on her person at all times. And she rarely sleeps.

Demons do not age or die, and they are often patient. This is the reason that they are the worst of our foes. Even the undead seem to age and decay, but demons have all time to torment, dodge, and move against us. Many have minions, either human or otherworldly creatures. Some can move as spirits and possess the bodies of men, some can drive men mad with a glance. I wish I could offer some word of hope but this: Most demons are still confined. By continuing our work, we prevent them from being released.

The Possessed

An innocent possessed by a demon is as dangerous as any creature described herein, more so because a guiltless soul still struggles within the corrupted body. A demon possessing a person can modify the body as it wishes, and this means that tails, extra limbs, claws, fangs, or even stranger alterations such as spitting a caustic substance or the skin taking on a green hue is not unknown. The demon may cause the host to fall down and foam at the mouth; many among us believe that this indicates that the person battles the demon.

Exorcism is often helpful, but by the time the demon has taken hold enough to alter the body, it is often too late to separate them. The body must then be burned, and although this also kills the unfortunate host, we believe that this consigns his soul to God.

Heresy and Blood

That is the end of my knowledge, and I have but little else to confess. I still await summons from the "master," and my inkwell again begins to run dry.

I cannot submit to that old monster's lusts again. I cannot. I have ink enough to confess that I submitted to Brother Solomon after the ink ran dry the first time. What was I meant to do? Write in my blood, or in my own shit? I am not a saint, for God's sake, I am not even a monk! I was only supposed to watch! It was never to be like this. I was safer on the streets of Paris, and though I was hungry and cold and filthy there I never longed for water to rid my mouth of a man's rank taste.

Forgive me, God. I don't want to die here. I would leave, but I cannot bring myself to abandon my mentor. Not yet. I still hear him screaming, but his screams grow faint. I hope that he is strong enough to resist, to resist confessing our true nature to the Pale Brother. I do not know what manner of creature that false monk might be, but I assume him to be undead. The pale skin, and the fact that he rests by day and does not eat hint at his nature. And yet, I feel as though I should remember something else about him.

He spoke of the See of Nod. What is Nod?

"And Cain went out from the Lord's presence and settled in the land of Nod, East of Eden." The book of Genesis. God cursed Cain to wander forever, but forbade anyone from killing him.

And didn't the Pale Brother mention something about Cain? He referred to a "Cainite who rules the nights."

Oh, dear God. I remember now.

The Cainite Heresy

Aignen le Libraire mentioned this once, to Father Bernard, when he thought I could not hear. He spoke of a heresy more insidious than the Cathars, the Bogomils, or any other. One that was pioneered by the creatures of the night, the undead, the blood-drinking monsters of which I spoke before. These creatures beliefs are unclear to me, as I tried not to eavesdrop on my mentor's conversation, but from what I did hear, they hold Cain to be a figure tantamount to the Savior Himself. They believe that he lives still, and that in his blood is salvation. I remember blood playing a role, because the blood is held as sacred and the flesh as base.

And the Pale Brother spoke of a See, and a Curia? Good God, how can this be? How can God allow this? In Rome? The Pale Brother spoke of Rome? But Aignen said more. Im sure, he spoke of chapels given over to this heretical worship, to communion wines mixed with blood, but I

was sleepy and did not quite hear.



The eye twitched in my robe. The Pale Brother summons. I must make my decision now. Oh. God, please hear me. Please deliver these papers to someone who can help, somehow. The name of the monastery is



"Leopold von Murnau What a sorry sight you've become".

Leopold sighed, partially out of exasperation, and partially because it was easier to breathe through his mouth. His cousin — second cousin, perhaps? He couldn't recall — reeked of decaying flesh.

"You might have been the head of our household, Leopold. You might have led us to great things."

"God calls us all in His way, Berthold. I am sorry that His calling wasn't clearer to you."

"Spare me." Berthold tossed his red locks behind his head and drew a dagger from his glove. "Now, if you please, Leopold. The book. I have great plans for it."

Leopold looked at the dagger in his cousin's hand. It was stained with rust and blood. Berthold had never seen a battlefield in his life; the war between sons was his ideal fight. He had killed two of his own brothers in order to secure an inheritance, but his plans had all come to naught when his father had smelled the evil growing on him and cast him out. Evidently, the lad had turned to other paths for power.

"Berthold, please. I have faced down the unbreathing spawn of Satan. A child with a knife poses little threat. I beseech you, mend your ways and look to God before your soul is irretrievably lost."

Berthold sneered. "You talk too much, cousin." He lunged for Leopold, aiming the dagger at his throat. Leopold simply sidestepped him.

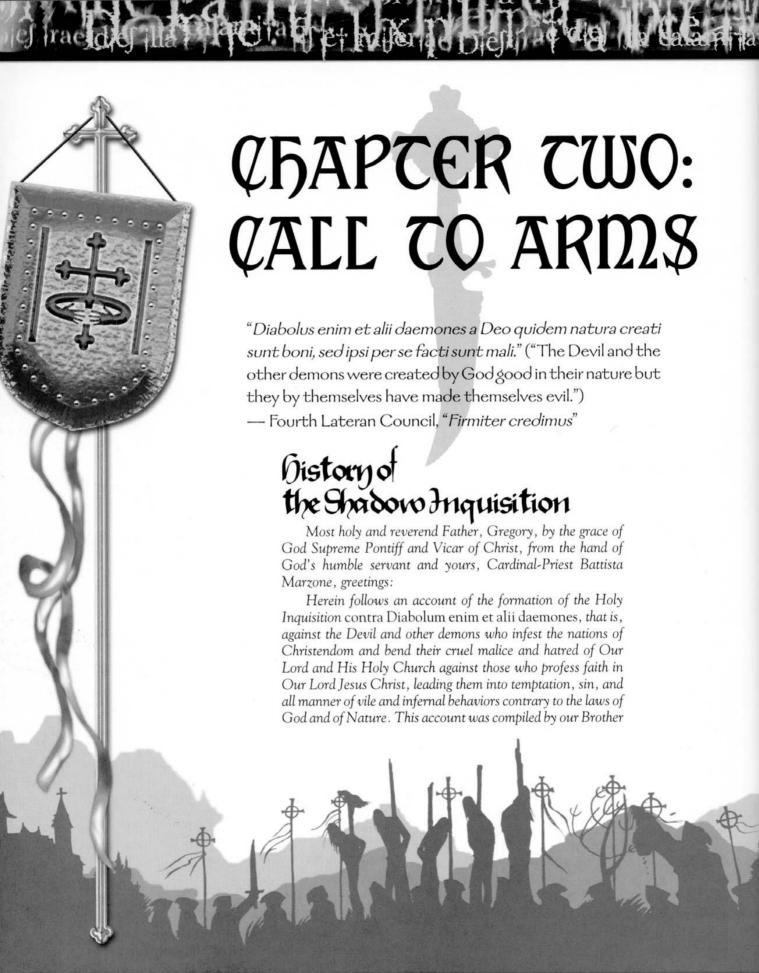
"Again, laskyou, Berthold, in the name of God the Father and the Son, stop this madness. Your life and soul will be forfeit, I promise you, if you do not." Leopold's tone grew more stern and he stood straighter. Berthold faltered for a moment, and then charged again.

Again, Leopold moved out of his path, and Berthold this time tripped over a chair and went sprawling. For one sick instant, Leopold thought he had impaled himself on his own dagger, but Berthold stood again and cursed in rage.

"For the last time, Berthold, *please*. Do not do this. Come with me and remand your life to God. You might do great things for the family and for Christendom." Leopold held out a hand. Berthold considered for a long moment, and then raised the knife over his head as though to throw it at the Dominican.

"Your God cannot help you here, alone, on my lands, cous—"Berthold stopped short and looked down at the crossbow bolt protruding from his chest. "How...?"

"Oh, cousin," Leopold shook his head sadly. "With God, all things are possible." He looked behind him, through the window, and saw a figure wave. "And besides, I am *never* alone."



Aignen, and is presented to your Holiness as evidence of the great battles being fought against the minions of the Evil One in churches, cities, towns and in the countryside throughout Europe, battles both historical and of these current days, for the salvation and redemption of Christian souls that might otherwise be enslaved in bondage to sin, heresy and the most foul demons of the night.

But God has not abandoned us to torment through the Devil's wiles, but has established upon the Earth his Church, so that men might learn how to avoid the temptation of sin, believe in the mercy of Our Lord, repent of their sins, and so be saved. Furthermore, God has granted to those of faith power over demons, even as Our Lord and Savior did command and cast out demons from those who had by their sin become so afflicted. Yet it is clear that demons have preyed upon mankind, through their wicked sorceries, cruel hungers, and temptations to sin and depravity, from the earliest nights of creation.

—Excerpt of a letter to Pope Gregory from Cardinal-Priest Battista Marzone, Inquisitor-General

In the Beginning

— From the History of the Holy Inquisition Contra Diabolum enim et alii Daemones, as recorded by Aignen le Libraire of the Order of the Sword of St. James, for the Oculi Dei of Languedoc

Demons are an ancient breed, having been created originally by God as spiritual and angelic creatures in perfect innocence, who by their own actions turned against God and became evil, and so were cast out of heaven. And having a hatred for all that is good and desiring to thwart the will of God that all men should be brought to salvation through Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are permitted by God to tempt and persuade men to turn from the paths of righteousness into sin. And so man is brought into sin by the suggestion of the Devil, and in the next world, the wicked shall suffer the same fate of perpetual punishment with the Devil.

Scripture itself tells how our Lord was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness, who offered Him all the wealth and glory of the world if Christ would but worship him. So also does the book of Job recount all the torments the Devil was permitted to inflict on a righteous man to test his faith. So we not only know the Devil as a tempter of righteous men, but also that the wealth and glory of the world is Satan's to promise as a fiefdom in return for fealty — as any prince or count will grant a fief to one who serves him well. Therefore, the Devil clearly has power in the

world, to cause hardship and sorrow even to good Christians, and to tempt them with the riches and glory of the world away from God. Why does God permit this? Surely it is to test our faith, for as the sword becomes stronger when tempered with fire, so too do we who put our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ become stronger against the temptations and Dark Arts as we are tried and tempered in battle against our Adversary.

The Early Church

Scripture records that Christ gave his disciples the power to cast out unclean spirits in His most Holy Name, and to all who believed in Him; and so the charge continues to this day, that the Church should always stand boldly against the Adversary, and not permit the servants of Satan to take prisoner any Christian soul.

In the early days of the Church, the fourth Council of Carthage, in its seventh canon, prescribes the rite of ordination for exorcist, which was then one of the minor orders, along with lectors, acolytes and door-keepers. Exorcists were given a book of ritual exorcisms to use, to purge converts, infants, and members of the Church from demonic influences. In particular, the exorcists performed their rituals over those not yet baptized and thus secured in the faith and under the protection of Christ's blood. Over the centuries, those duties have fallen to ordained clergy, who used the Pontifical, or Missal, rather than the ancient Book of Exorcisms. Even so, it is the duty and privilege of all good Christians secure in their faith and recognizing a soul in torment to call upon the name of the Lord and banish demons, not merely clerics alone.

The lives of the saints are full of such exorcisms: St. Antony, who fought many times with demons, and taught that the sign of the cross and the name of the Lord caused demons to run in fear; St. Kentigern, who cast out a multitude of demons by the sign of the cross, saying, "Whoever envies the salvation of men and is against the word of God, I command them in virtue of that same word of God that they depart straightway and not to pour any impediment onto those who would believe." Upon hearing the saint's words, a vast horde of grotesque creatures, horrible in form and in aspect, quickly departed from those gathered there.

Our blessed Brother Dominic is recorded to have cast seven demons from a woman who interrupted his preaching with her cries, by making the sign of the Cross and commanding the demons to depart in



Weapons of the Adversary aving been so confounded by the holy faith of the saints, the Devil has conceived other, more subtle ways to plague and subvert God's Church, seeking ever to turn the hearts of men away from salvation. As when a besieging army realizes the walls of a city are too strong and thick for their engines, they then turn to sapping the strength of the walls from beneath their foundations, so the Devil has sought to undermine the foundations of our Faith and bring our defenses crashing down. And in this he has two primary weapons: Heresy, that subverts and distorts the Truth of the Gospels, and the Dark Arts, that tempt men away from God's Grace through base desires, hunger for power, carnal lusts, and terror, and so enslave them to the will of deceitful demons.

—Excerpt of a letter to Pope Innocent III from Abbot Gervèse le Fèvre of St. Denis, of the Order of St. Theodosius, dated March 1214.

the name of the Lord, so that she vomited forth blood and charcoal, and fell to the ground in a swoon, but then recovered and became a favored sister of the saint's new order for women.

With my own eyes I have witnessed our blessed Sister Teresa of St. John command demons to depart from the bodies of the afflicted, and I have seen those same once piteous victims, who had spoken nothing beforehand but blasphemies and curses, or emitted the sounds of animals rather than natural human speech, rise up, put on modest attire, and proclaim thanksgiving to God for their deliverance. And so did our beloved sister teach all in her order, and they continue in her charge to this very day.

Christendom Under Attack

To those who sin and fall away from the true teachings of the Church and the Holy Gospel, the Church has been a reproving parent, one favoring patience, proper instruction and persuasion back to the true path of righteousness for these wayward souls. For those whose fault is based on ignorance, a swift return to the proper doctrine of the Church and repentance for

their former error is all that is required for their redemption, for they were merely deceived. For those who remain stubborn, the Church has only the last resort of excommunication, to deny these recalcitrant children the benefits of holy sacraments, until they repent and confess their faults — much as a rebellious child might be sent from the table until he repents of his rebellion and is then restored to his place at the table and in his parents' approval.

True heresy, however, comes when ignorance is no longer an excuse — that is, when the heretic knows or has been taught the correct doctrine of the church and then makes a conscious choice to believe in false doctrine. So it was, I regret to say, with many in the counties of the Langue d'oc, in Toulouse, Carcassonne, Foix, Albi, Narbonne, and the many towns and villages in the valleys and foothills of the Pyrenees. The devout, apostolic poverty of the heretics and their hardworking, gentle ways were admired widely, for their simple life reminded those who knew them of the poverty of Jesus Christ Himself and his Apostles. And those of us who were their neighbors, even those who kept true to the Catholic faith, had no complaints about them, for they were good and honest folk.

In 1145, the renowned Cistercian Abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, visited the Languedoc. He was greatly disturbed at the extent to which this new heresy had taken hold. He was horrified that the heretics did not even attempt to hide their practices or beliefs; they were revered by even the Catholics in the towns, and supported by the local nobility. But in the shadows of twilight, the Cistercian discovered an even more insidious horror, a vile and demonic cancer that was eating away the souls and draining the blood of the people of the Languedoc, using the gentle poverty of the heretics as cover for their abominations.

Initial Skirmishes

Authorities on the subject of demons and the Dark Arts list Satan and the fallen angels as the highest order of demons; beneath them are those the pagans call gods, and the old creatures of legend — kobolds, faeries, dwarves, and the like — as the lowest order of all. All have heard of strigae, nightriding hags that drink blood, succubi and incubi who lustfully seduce mortals in the Devil's cause, and the bonae mulieres, the women who sneak out at night through closed doors and ride the land with Diana on a wild hunt. Stories of witches who practice vile acts and adore the Devil, or fools tricked into selling

their souls to the Devil, are too prevalent not to have some truth behind them. Even priests use such stories in their sermons to illustrate God's power or the consequences of sin and immorality. More often,

THE CAINITE HERESY

oly father, I tremble to report on what I have seen, for the cure of souls given to our care by our most Blessed Savior. For we are besieged by more than just the wicked deceits of mortal men, and I have seen with my own eyes the hand of Satan the Adversary at work among the heretics in this pleasant land. Demons in the guise of angels teach obscene blasphemies to the unsuspecting, and pervert the Holy Eucharist, befouling it with their own noxious blood. They glorify the name of Cain, the first murderer, and proclaim salvation through the drinking of the "shining blood," which they say flows from the very veins of the one that God Himself cursed. They claim freedom from the chains of the material world, and likewise deny the just and righteous commandments of our Lord and Holy Mother Church, indulging in all manner of grievous sins, lust, incest, fornication, unnatural acts, murder, adoration of the Devil, and obscene demonic rites. And in these practices they are led by demons, blooddrinking lemure in human guise, who encourage them to even greater depravity, even to feasting on the flesh and blood of the innocent.

I myself encountered one of these creatures, which had the appearance of a pale, beautiful young man, perfect in body, in the likeness of an angel, who was wont to appear on occasion to the monks of a certain cloister near Toulouse, and so inspire their passions to sin, both with it and with each other. Yet when I spoke to it in the name of the Lord, the radiance of its countenance failed, and it revealed its true demonic nature, snarling and showing sharp teeth like a wolf. I then commanded it to depart in the name of Our Lord, and it fled, fearful of the wrath of God.

The brothers of that cloister were amazed, and then driven to anger, at the flight of that which they had so recently worshiped. To my sorrow, their wrath then fell upon me, the servant of God, and I and my companions were forced to flee, for they would not hear the word of God, nor recognize the evil in their midst.

— Excerpt of a letter from Bernard de Clairvaux, Abbot of Cluny, to Pope Eugenius III and to the Bishop of Toulouse

THE UNFORTUNATE MATTER OF BROTHER EVERARD DE GASCONY

he Theodosians have never been known for their conservatism — particularly when it comes to the preservation of knowledge, even knowledge proscribed in Church canon. In their libraries are said to be locked away many a banned text, and rumors of sexual licentiousness and dabbling in forbidden mysteries now taint their formerly quiet reputation —all due to one notorious incident nearly a century ago. In the mid-1100s, Brother Everard de Gascony and a small group of his brethren apparently attempted a highly dangerous and suspect ritual in a remote abbey in the Pyrenees. The Red Order managed to suppress the details, but not the results — the abbey itself was totally destroyed, and none of the brethren survived. As a result of Brother Everard's terrible actions, the order found itself under extreme scrutiny by the Church, and it was very nearly disbanded as an order.

Fortunately, the order had an able champion, in the person of Abbot Gualhard de Mozencs, of the Abbey de Laurendine near Toulouse. His approach to preserving the order was twofold: First, he immediately proscribed all research and experimentation outside of abbey walls, and he ordered access to any suspect books be strictly limited to senior members of the order. Such books as could be spared were immediately and very publicly burnt, so as to assure locals that no such incident could ever happen again. He then spent the better part of the next three years politicking in Rome, demonstrating the piety and dedication of the order and the value of its scholarship to the Church. It is possible there was more to the negotiations with Pope Alexander III than is commonly known, but the Papal Bull of 1173 formally affirmed the order's existence and mission of Christian scholarship. However, among the suspicious, the order's reputation would be forever tainted.

however, tales are told in whispers at the fireside, tales that are too horrifying for children's ears, of what awaits the unwary or unlucky in the darkness outside the cottage door or castle wall.

For some, those tales are not mere fantasy, but have been proven all too real.

906 Crusaders

Gauthier de Dampiere willingly accepted his commission from God to be His sword against the true Adversary, Satan himself, and all the foul creatures that served him. Born the third son of a French count, he took up the sword and calling of knighthood, and proved himself not only an able warrior but a devout Christian. So it came as no surprise that he also willingly answered the call to Crusade though he surprised his family by declaring he would go as a poor knight, renouncing all the possessions and status to which his rank entitled him. Gauthier joined the forces of King Philip Augustus of France and traveled to Outremer, expecting to fight Saracens. Instead, God revealed to him in a dream that his quest would be even greater and more perilous — to fight not mere men, but the "true enemy" - night-

Cardinal Battista Marzone, Inquisitor-General

orn the son of a noble family in Ostia in 1172, he received his education at the universities of Paris and Bologna, and was appointed canon at the Church of St. Maria Scala Coeli. Celestine III elevated him to Cardinal-Deacon of Sts. Giovanni e Paolo in 1196. In 1208, Innocent III appointed him Inquisitor-General contra Diabolum enim et alii daemones. Honorius raised him to Cardinal-Priest of St. Maria della Vittoria in 1217. He declines further elevation from Gregory in 1230, saying that the responsibilities of his position with the Inquisition left no time to properly attend to a bishopric.

Marzone is a shrewd and perceptive man, whose devotion to the Church and to God is unquestionable, and whose orthodoxy is beyond reproach. In a world where nepotism is the rule and family connections can make or break a man's career, Marzone earned promotion in the Church through dedicated service, administrative competence, and a reputation for balancing personal honor and political pragmatism. In Marzone, Innocent III found a man whose political talents and dedication to the Church could create an organization capable of ferreting out corruption and the agents of the Devil even from the ranks of the clergy, and to do so without regard to family, rank, or political agendas.

hunting devils that preyed on men like cattle, and used ungodly powers to pervert their souls.

Horrified, but trusting in God's strength, he confronted first one demon, then another, and learned how they might be recognized, thwarted, and destroyed. Nor did he fight alone, but inspired many good Christian knights to follow him in his holy quest, and so he continues to this very day.

The Call to Crusade

Pope Celestine III died in 1198, at well over ninety years of age. I am told that on his deathbed, the pontiff recommended to the College of Cardinals that they elect Giovanni di Colonna as his successor. However, to the greater glory of God, some among the College of Cardinals arranged instead for the election of Lotario dei Conti Segni, Cardinal-Priest of St. Prudentia, on the very day of Celestine's death. The noble Cardinal had spent the years of Celestine's reign in political retirement, devoting himself chiefly to meditation and literary pursuits, for Celestine had been of the House of Orsini, enemies to the dei Conti Segni. Yet he was known in Rome and among members of the College as a brilliant theologian, a master of canon law, and a man of great political acumen. He reluctantly agreed to return to Rome and accept the papal tiara, and took the name of Innocent III.

Among the authors of Innocent's ascension was Cardinal-Deacon Battista Marzone.

The Pope's Inquisitor

Responding to the reports of heresy in Languedoc, Lombardy and other parts of the Empire, Innocent commissioned a number of Cistercian monks as papal legates to go to Languedoc and persuade the heretics back into the arms of the Church. But the legates met with little success in their mission, for they were proud and arrogant men, and seemed far less representative of Christ than the heretics themselves, who lived simple and blameless lives.

Dominic Guzman, a canon of Osma whom the Pope had also commissioned to preach to the heretics, quickly realized this, though they paid little heed to his wise advice. He himself lived in blameless poverty as he traveled and preached, and indeed, did so for all his natural life. And while his converts among the heretics were few, he gained much respect among the people. But Dominic was also a man of faith and keen observation, and he discovered far worse things than heretics lurking in the shadows of Toulouse and Carcassonne. Like Bernard of

Clairvaux, he also wrote to the Pope, setting forth his fears and suspicions.

The Pope was greatly troubled by Dominic's letter and similar reports received from other sources and discovered in the papal archives. He appointed Cardinal Marzone to the office of Special Papal Legate and Inquisitor, charging him to investigate and determine the truth of these reports, and recommend an expedient and practical remedy. Though obedient as always to the Pope's wishes, the good Cardinal was not at first convinced of the need for such an investigation — heretics there were in

RODRIGUE DE NAVARREAND THE SWORD OF ST. JAMES

odrigue de Navarre, an Iberian noble man with familial ties in Toulouse, first became aware of the "night-demons" and the Cainite Heresy when he obtained a portion of the Book of Shining Blood from the ruins of a heretical monastery in his wife's lands. Realizing the enormity of the horror the book represented, he knew he could do no less than to fight it. But being by nature a cautious man, and not a warrior by training, he concentrated more on gathering information than acting immediately against the enemy. To this end, he and two close companions participated in the Fourth Crusade, though accounts of his experiences there vary wildly. Upon his return home, he formed the Sword of St. James, a small select order sworn to hunt the night-demons in Iberia.

Though dedicated to their holy mission, their first real encounter with the enemy found them tragically unprepared. Rodrigue and his followers became the unwitting objects of a cruel and deadly mind game, engineered by the Cainite Xalbador. Playing on the ignorance of his enemies and his own mind-twisting powers, Xalbador created the illusion of an ancient and omnipotent Cainite conspiracy dominating the mortal world, to whom mortal men were merely pawns and cattle, deserted centuries ago by an uncaring God. Even though the Cainite was finally destroyed, the Sword was badly shaken, having lost a third of its membership. Rodrigue's natural caution now deepened into a pervading paranoia that would affect the Sword for decades to come, and it led to the creation of the Oculi Dei, a clandestine network of spies and informants whose reports did nothing to slow their founder's growing dementia.

Languedoc, certainly, but perhaps Dominic's zeal for his mission was leading him awry, for the Cistercians had not reported such things. His mission was kept secret at first more to prevent ruin of his reputation as a career churchman than from any sense of personal peril. That the Church itself had been compromised by demonic influences had not yet been imagined even by Dominic.

By fire and Sword: The Albigensian Crusade

In 1209, one of the most offensive of the papal legates in the Languedoc was murdered. Pope Innocent then declared a crusade, calling on Christian noblemen and knights to depose the rightful lords of the Languedoc by force of arms, and to replace them with good Catholics who would do their duty to stamp out heresy among the people. Led by the landless younger sons of French noblemen, with a host of thousands of knights, men-at-arms, and adventurers, the crusaders marched on Languedoc.

The crusaders first destroyed the town of Béziers, and massacred all its citizens — approximately 20,000 men, women and children, Catholic and heretic alike — in the name of God.

As the victorious army marched on to besiege the heavily fortified city of Carcassonne, Cardinal Marzone arrived in the region to begin his investigations. By the grace of God, among the crusaders he first encountered was Gauthier de Dampiere, whose battle lay not with the people of Carcassonne, but with the demons who hid behind the city's walls.

When the city surrendered after a bitter siege, all its inhabitants, whether Catholic, heretic or Jew, were forced to abandon Carcassonne with nothing more than the clothes on their backs, leaving all their possessions and material wealth for their conquerors.

But Gauthier knew the city was not nearly as empty as it seemed.

When nightfall came, a small band of armored knights led by Gauthier de Dampiere prepared to face the real evil in Carcassonne — Gauthier made certain Cardinal Marzone would never forget that night. The Cardinal's first encounter with an actual demon might well have been his last, had Gauthier not been at his side. The creature first appeared as a young girl, anxious to convince them of her adherence to the Catholic faith. But when Gauthier bade her swear on his sword in the name of Christ, her human form melted away to reveal a nightmarish hag, dressed in fur-trimmed rags, with a mouthful of



sharp teeth and claws like a lion's. Despite her withered frame, she was strong enough to hurl one of Gauthier's companions the width of the street; only when Gauthier managed to split her skull in two did she die, her body immediately decaying until nothing remained but her rags and a pile of fine gray ash. She was but one of three Gauthier and his companions slew that night, though at least one managed to escape them, flickering out of sight before any of them could land a blow.

Cardinal Marzone needed no more convincing that this was indeed an evil the Church could not fail to stand against, for the good of all Christian souls. And if Carcassonne had been so infected, it was fearful indeed to imagine how many more such creatures there might be, haunting the dark streets of all the cities and towns of Christendom. He returned to Rome a man committed to fighting a war, God's General against all the forces of Hell.

The Pilgrimage

Now set in his holy purpose and determined to succeed, Cardinal Marzone was nevertheless greatly troubled over the enormity of the task set before him. Unsure of how far the horror had spread throughout Christendom, Cardinal Marzone set forth on an unusual pilgrimage — to investigate first-hand some of the reports he had heard. Carcassonne was but the first stop in a long journey, not only across the length and breadth of Europe, but in understanding the nature of the Adversary God called on him to fight. What follows herein is but a shortening of the tale as he and his companions told it to me, for the full length of it would be far too great for this missive.

Realizing that his rank, his distinctive vestments and regalia, and the necessary entourage that accompanied a prince of the Church (and the constant stream of petitioners and sycophants who sought his favor or support) would prevent him from seeing the truth he sought, Marzone took upon himself the role and garb of a simple priest. His entourage was limited to a mere dozen scribes, translators, clerical assistants, local guides, plus two knights, one of whom was Gauthier himself. Thus, they traveled as a small band of humble pilgrims, even as Our Savior had once traveled across Palestine with his disciples.

It was a sobering experience, for as he learned to recognize the signs of the enemy, he became ever more aware of how insidious and deeply rooted the night-devils had become. In city, town and rural hamlet, the Cardinal-turned-priest heard confessions, questioned witnesses, observed the fiery

execution of heretics, and examined the bodies of victims. He listened to local folktales and legends, and the moral fables used by village priests to illustrate their sermons. He talked to pilgrims about shrines they had visited and what they had seen, and to traveling merchants about the safety of the roads after dark. As he traveled, he gathered pieces of a vast, complicated puzzle: the moral laxity of the secular clergy in Marseilles, the prevalence of heretics in Lombardy, tournaments in Burgundy held only at night by torchlight, rumors of unhallowed dead that inhabited the Catacombs outside of Rome, a pack of demonic wolves that haunted the Black Forest of Bavaria.

On a misty ridge in Wales, he examined the scorched and crumbled ruins of a monastery that had been rumored to be the site of a school of dark sorcerers less than a year before, but whose destruction had come in the form of a fiery ball delivered from the heavens, clearly a sign of God's righteous judgment. On the plain of Glastonbury, he was shown the great circle of stones, said to have been placed there by the enchanter Merlin as a tomb for an ancient king.

During the course of his pilgrimage, Marzone had a number of close brushes with the minions of the Adversary, and several times it was only by God's grace that he escaped with his life. In a remote monastery in the Pyrenees, the Cardinal and his companions were roused from their beds by its aging abbot and urged to take cover in an empty cellar when a troop of hostile knights attacked the monastery by night. Spending the night in earnest prayer, while their knight-protectors stood anxious guard over the cellar's single door, they emerged the next morning to discover the monastery ransacked, its library and altar trappings stolen, and the brothers slain — some without a mark on their bodies. And of the old abbot who had awakened them and led them to their refuge, there was no sign.

In Avignon, a priest sought them in secret and whispered fearfully of a ghost that stalked the streets and called its victims to it by name before devouring their souls. The following morning the priest did not meet them as promised, and later his body was discovered in a bathhouse, where he had apparently drowned.

Yet amidst all the tales of horror and despair, Marzone and his companions also discovered beacons of hope, a devout and faithful few who fought their own battles with the demons of the night and, with God's help, prevailed. In particular, several of these individuals proved useful companions, as had Gauthier de Dampiere, and were taken into the Cardinal's confidence as fellow soldiers in the cause of Our Lord.

The abbot of St. Denis

At the shrine of St. Martin in Tours, the Cardinal and his party encountered Brother Isidro de Compostela, a monk of the Order of St. Theodosius. Isidro was a scholar and theologian, and had made a particular study of demonology and rites of exorcism. He was also an accomplished demon hunter; he had for a time even possessed a demonic reliquary, a jar with cryptic picture markings and a crowned serpent's head for a lid, that had contained a shriveled human heart. Unfortunately, it must have been of great value, for the fiends stole it back before he could adequately study it.

From Isidro, the Cardinal learned not only of the classification of demons and the exorcisms for each, but of the Red Order, its philosophy, history, and current afflictions. Their abbey near Toulouse had been ransacked by the French Crusaders, and many of their precious books burned. Their brotherhood was now scattered, though some, including Isidro, had found refuge in their order's Abbey de St. Denis, near Paris. But St. Denis was more than merely a sanctuary for scholars; it had become a fortress of God's might, home of a band of stout-hearted monks who waged an ongoing battle against the forces of the Adversary. Hearing of this, the Cardinal eagerly accepted Isidro's invitation to visit St. Denis and witness the order's efforts for himself.

At the Abbey de St. Denis, the Cardinal made the acquaintance of Abbot Gervèse le Fèvre, a man of common birth but uncommon faith and talent, and dedicated to the eradication of what he called "the Cainite curse" from his native city. To this end, he had all but created his own private Inquisition, monks and lay informants within the city to gain what information could be found, in order to hunt down and destroy as many of the foul creatures as possible.

Cardinal Marzone could not help but be impressed by the Abbot's courage and sheer determination, and by his success. Besides the creature that Isidro had slain, at least three others had been destroyed in the past year alone. Though the Abbot was clearly proud of their success thus far, he also warned the fight would not be easy, for their enemy did not lack courage or strength. Yet he was certain that with God's help, they would prevail.

Cardinal Marzone left Paris greatly encouraged. For if God had such stalwart and stubborn souls as

Abbot Gervèse le Fèvre on His side, perhaps the battle set before them might yet be won.

The Cardinal then returned to Rome to take up additional responsibilities on the behalf of the Papacy. Innocent had called for a great ecumenical council to be held at the Lateran Palace, to codify doctrinal issues that had been neglected by the Holy See, and to also proclaim a new Crusade to the Holy Land. Papal invitations were sent to all the bishops, abbots, priors, and chapters of churches and religious orders, as well as to kings and civil authorities throughout Europe.

The Devilin Gos House

While traveling in Tuscany to promote the Pope's council, the Cardinal met a weary, footsore monk praying at the side of the road. When the Cardinal revealed his identity and rank, Brother Leopold von Murnau spoke in whispers about visiting a particular abbey in Mainz on an errand for the Archbishop. The monks there appeared pious enough during the day, but after nightfall indulged in demonic rituals, until their whole chapel stank as much of blood as incense. He had found evidence of the same corrupt taint in major churches in Mainz, Magdeburg and Cologne. But no one he spoke to, not even the Archbishop, would believe his tale, and all called him mad. Having no other choice, he had then embarked on foot to Rome, praying desperately to Our Lord that someone there might heed his warning.

This was troubling news indeed. For while Marzone had for the most part concealed his identity and purpose while on his pilgrimage, he had hardly thought it necessary to conceal his mission from bishops, archbishops, or his peers in the Curia. Yet Leopold clearly believed it possible that even high-ranking princes of the Church might be tainted with the devil's mark. Only in private would he confess how he was certain; Leopold claimed to be able to actually *smell* the devil's corruption, as it clung to places, things, or even people who had been tainted by the devil's wiles. It was easy to see why some had thought him mad.

And yet, the other evidence Marzone had seen all bore witness to the same terrible truth. Pope Innocent had passed on to him a letter received from a monk named Brother Bruno of Anweiler who wrote of demons he called *vampyr*, who claimed descent from Cain, rather than Abel, and sustained their own unnatural lives by feeding on human blood. The monk warned that these *vampyr* were founding blood-cults throughout Europe, using guile

LEOPOLD OF MURNAU

hough actually born the eldest son of the Count of Murnau in Bavaria, Leopold was slightly built and sickly as a child, and willingly waived his rights as heir to go into the Church. Studious and analytical, he studied canon law and theology in Bologna before becoming a canon at the Cathedral in Mainz. There he proved so gifted at administration and study that he became a personal assistant to the Archbishop. Leopold was keenly inquisitive, as well as dedicated to God, but the unpleasant manifestation of his family's "legacy" gave him many sleepless nights, fearful as he was of discovery either by Church authorities, who might see his sensitivity as a sign of demonic possession, or by those who would see him as a threat to their unholy schemes. The meeting with Cardinal Marzone was the answer to a desperate prayer, to find someone, anyone in the Church hierarchy who would listen to his warning without thinking him possessed or mad. Leopold willingly joined the Cardinal's cause, though not without a sense of irony that the legacy he'd fled to the Church to avoid had ended up claiming him anyway. Despite his admiration and respect for Cardinal Marzone and his dedication to their holy crusade, it was years before he finally confessed the truth about the Murnau "legacy" to the Pope's Inquisitor-General.

and unholy powers to tempt men and women into sin, demonic rituals and unnatural lusts. And worst of all, he believed — or so the demons had told him — that they had once been mortal men. What vile pact they must have sworn to so transform themselves from men to monsters, not even the Cardinal dared imagine.

Nor was this the only such warning the Pope had received. For Dominic Guzman had written much the same, and even Abbot Gervèse had said that the demons could cloak themselves in the guise of holy men. If this evil could corrupt the very body of Christ like a foul and wasting disease... then it was almost past time for remedy. The rotting flesh had to be excised, and that which remained healthy protected against further injury.

Cardinal Marzone began to gather a trusted circle of associates, men of strong faith, and all sworn

to God's service in at least some degree. Among those were Brother Etienne de Narbonne, a devout Cistercian monk who had joined Marzone's pilgrimage; Brother Thibaut, a shrewd old Benedictine who had been on Crusade in his more martial youth; the German canon Leopold von Murnau, and Andrea Pitti, a sharp-faced Florentine priest with a talent for understanding political intrigue. Marzone also included Abbot Gervèse and Brother Isidro of the Theodosians, Dominic Guzman and his followers, and the faithful knight Gauthier de Dampiere and his companions, though none of these worthies was resident in Rome.

There was also one in the Curia whose judgment he was certain of, and to Cardinal Ugolino dei Conti Segni, kinsman of the Pope, he spoke at great length. Cardinal Ugolino was an experienced papal legate and diplomat, and a champion of papal privilege and the Church. With Cardinal Ugolino's help, and that of a select handful of others whom both Cardinals and Leopold von Murnau's peculiar talent had approved, they prepared to do what they could to secure the Lateran for the coming conclave.

The Seer of Madrid

A few weeks prior to the conference, Cardinal Marzone was in Piacenza, and as had become his favored custom when traveling on matters relating to his holy commission, he wore only the garb of a common priest, and traveled but with a few loyal attendants.

At the gates of the city, he witnessed a nun in the habit of the Benedictines standing over a wretched girl in a ragged tunic, who by her actions was clearly possessed. The Holy Sister raised her arms and commanded the demon possessing the girl to depart at once, in the holy name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Marzone had rarely heard such a ringing invocation of the rites of exorcism, and never by a woman. The girl screamed, begging for mercy, but the Holy Sister did not relent. By the time the Cardinal and his entourage finally made it through the crowd, they found the girl weeping piteously as the Holy Sister held her close and spoke soothingly to her.

Some there were in the crowd who muttered of sorcery, but a young German nobleman with redblond hair stepped forward and passionately proclaimed the Sister's innocence in any witchery. For surely all present could attest the girl had been possessed, and so pity, if not faith, demanded that something be done to relieve her suffering. And did not Christ himself proclaim that those who believed in Him should have the authority cast out devils in

His name? Even Brother Leopold, speaking low in the Cardinal's ear, concurred with the young German's testimony.

And so the Cardinal met the Iberian seer, Teresa of St. John. Sister Teresa was the leader of a small order of sisters who had sent her to petition the Pope to recognize their order, and permit them to establish an abbey in the Holy Land.

She also told him of her visions, and had one for him: "This you need, a head, a heart, a sword, eyes to see, and a lamp to pierce the darkness. And with the eyes you will not only see but perceive; with the sword you shall defend and conquer; with the heart you shall know compassion and God's truth; with the head you shall understand your enemy, and with the lamp you shall seek him out and he shall not be able to hide from its light. And you shall loose the hounds of the Lord, and the servants of darkness will flee before you, fearing God's holy wrath and purifying fire. For those who revel in darkness fear the light, for it shows them for what they are. They mask themselves in shadows and illusion, deception is their truth, and they feast even on their own offspring. There will be war in the courts of the night, and the fall of the wicked shall bring fear to all who witness it. And you will bring the lamp to the rock and cleanse it of unclean blood, the blood of the murderer, and those who stand strong against the night shall be feared by those that love it, for generation upon generation yet to come."

Politics and Procedure

"... to eradicate vices and to plant virtues, to correct faults and to reform morals, to remove heresies and to strengthen faith, to settle discords and to establish peace, to get rid of oppression and to foster liberty, to induce princes and Christian people to come to the aid and succor of the Holy Land...."

—Pope Innocent III, describing the intended purpose of the ecumenical council set for November, 1215

The fourth Lateran Council of 1215

Innocent's Council was the largest gathering of Church leaders in a millennium, and one of the highest achievements of his papal reign. The conclave went on for a month, and a flurry of decrees — 70 in all — were made into canon. In particular, heresy and heretics were strongly condemned, and a crusade against heretics authorized. The Council also produced a long declaration of a new Crusade to free the Holy Land from the Saracens.

Sister Teresa the Seer and her companions were at first disappointed by a ruling of the Council forbidding the founding of new orders, but being



Leopold's Confession: The Legacy of Murnau

eopold von Murnau did not immediately recognize his nephew Otto — hardly surprising, as he hadn't seen the boy since he was a small child — but he did recognize the Murnau legacy in action. Upon verifying the young man's identity, and realizing that it was only a matter of time before Cardinal Marzone figured out the relationship, and the source of Otto's gift that was so much like his own, Leopold went to the Cardinal and told him the whole story. However, so as to protect both himself, and to keep the family's dark secret, Leopold did so as part of a formal confession, which the Cardinal was then obligated by his vows as a priest to keep confidential.

Leopold rose from that confessional half-expecting to be dismissed from the Cardinal's service, but Marzone merely assigned him the usual penances for a lie of omission, and left the matter there. Unfortunately for Leopold's peace of mind, Otto himself was less recalcitrant, and upon learning of the Cardinal's interests, volunteered not only himself, but all members of the Murnau family and those in their service to the Inquisition's holy cause.

That Otto did not actually have the authority to do so, being neither the head of the family nor even the heir, was a minor sticking point. Upon the request of the Holy See when the Inquisition was formally organized, and with some negotiation as to how nonclerical members of the House were to serve under the command of the Church, Count Frederick von Murnau gave his leave for members of the family and their retainers to participate in the Inquisition as their hearts and consciences bade them do so. Otto von Murnau was appointed the family's official liaison with the Inquisition, and was also given the less welcome task of ensuring that those of the House of Murnau who did so participate were worthy of the trust placed in them — and the responsibility of dealing with those who proved otherwise.

strong in their faith as to God's will, they submitted their petition to the Pope anyway. And in this matter, God provided them an advocate with somewhat more standing and eloquence than Otto von Murnau. For Cardinal Ugolino dei Conti Segni himself had for some time been interested in establishing houses of religion for women, and he found the wishes of the Sisters of St. John to be in accord with his own. With the support of Cardinal Ugolino, the petition for recognition of the order was approved, and the Sisters of St. John were granted an abbey in the Holy Land, in Tyre, where they were charged to build a hospital in preparation for the coming Crusade.

Pope Bonorius 333

In 1216, while on a visit to Perugia to proclaim the upcoming Crusade, Pope Innocent died.

In order to hasten the choice of successor in troubled times, the College of Cardinals empowered Cardinals Ugolino dei Conti di Segni of Ostia and Guido of Preneste to appoint the new pope. Their choice was Cencio Savelli, who took the name of Honorius III.

They could hardly have chosen a better man to continue the good work that Innocent had begun, for among his first acts as pontiff, Honorius recognized the new Order of Friars Preachers, led by Dominic Guzman, and bestowed upon the order the church of Saint Sixtus in Rome. Dominic came to Rome and bent his efforts to establishing order among the many houses of religion for women in the city, as well as sending his followers out across Europe to preach and found convents for the order's growth.

In Italy, Dominic also worked closely with Cardinal Marzone, passing on reports from his friars of Cainites, *vampyr*, or other demonic activities they encountered. In this endeavor he made the close acquaintance of Leopold von Murnau, who had taken upon himself the task of organizing such reports in a useful archive. Leopold was greatly impressed with the Castilian friar, and within a year, with the Cardinal's permission, had taken the habit of Dominic's order, willingly embracing poverty and obedience to Dominic's Rule, which he wears to this day.

The Knights of the Broken Cross

In 1217, the faithful knight Gauthier de Dampiere once again answered the call to Crusade and returned to the Holy Land. In the city of Acre, he learned of a great and powerful relic — a piece of Christ's true cross — in danger from the profaning hands of demonic knights. Acting swiftly and boldly, he and a handful of his companions managed to rescue the relic and brought it to Cyprus. By now, his words as well as his deeds were bearing fruit, for

others had joined him in his fight. A company of like-minded knights, who willingly took holy vows as warriors of God to seek out and destroy evil wherever it was found, followed his shining example.

In recognition of Gauthier's courage, dedication and faith in doing the Lord's work, Cardinal Marzone became a patron to this fledgling brotherhood, and finally in 1219 he persuaded Pope Honorius to recognize and support the new Order of the Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre. In honor of the relic that now became the precious charge of their order, the Knights took the device of a broken red cross as their badge.

The Sisters of St. John

In 1222, the Saracens attacked and burned the Abbey of the Sisters of St. John in Tyre. Yet, due to the persuasiveness of Sister Teresa, and their respect for the holy women who dwelt there, the Saracens permitted the Sisters to depart unmolested. Sister Teresa brought the majority of them to her native land of Castile, where through the influence of her family and the generosity of the King, they were granted an abbey in the hills near Madrid. That structure, dedicated to the blessed St. John the Evangelist, became the primary chapter-house of their order.

The Matter of the Ked Order

Ever pursuing the holy commission given him by Pope Innocent, Cardinal Marzone now marshaled his forces and sent messages to those whose support he had learned to rely on in the past. With the blessing of Pope Honorius, he began to forge an organization which would become the chief defender of Rome and provide the inquisitors to investigate and vanquish the minions of the Adversary throughout Christendom. Among those entire orders that he recommended be incorporated were the Poor Knights of the Cross of the Passion of Acre; the Sisters of St. John; the brothers of the Order of St. Theodosius of the Abbey of St. Denis; and certain members of the House of Murnau who had agreed to take a vow of obedience to their cause. He also presented a list with certain individuals in whom he had great trust, such as Brother Leopold von Murnau, Etienne de Narbonne, and Andrea Pitti.

The fledgling Inquisition was dealt an early setback, this time by the Pope himself, in the matter of the brothers of the Order of St. Theodosius. For unbeknownst to Abbot Gervèse, his brother Abbot Ramon de Layour had submitted a petition seeking

to re-establish their Abbey at Laurendine, near Toulouse, on the basis of their order's historic charter. In having the charter itself researched, the matter of the order's shadowed past was also brought to light, which aroused the Pope's suspicion as to the order's orthodoxy. Nor did Abbot Ramon seem to have the least interest in the "reckless endeavors" being undertaken by his brother Abbot Gervèse, which he believed detracted from the order's original purpose of research and study.

Pope Honorius not only refused the petition, he was then hesitant about the order's suitability as members of the Inquisition at all. Cardinal Marzone sent a letter to Abbot Gervèse to request he send a trusted representative to Rome to plead the order's cause, perhaps Brother Isidro, who Marzone remembered as being especially articulate about his faith and mission. As it happened, Abbot Gervèse himself came — a sober, determined Gervèse who spoke tearfully of Brother Isidro's recent death at the hands of a particularly powerful *vampyr*, and who promised the order would take appropriate vengeance. He also brought along another representative — of the Order of Red Sisters, Sister Vittoria di Parma of St. Clothilde's.

Marked by God?

Ithough it does not appear in the history of the Inquisition, nor indeed in any known written records thereof (except possibly the secret files of the Oculi Dei), the Red Order had another strong reason for inclusion in the fledgling Inquisition. Many, though by no means all, of its numbers are afflicted with the stigmata. Most simply suffer the pain of the lash on their backs or the crown of thorns on their heads, but some bleed from the other wounds of Christ — the wrists, feet, and even the side.

Some within the Inquisition who know of this phenomenon, however, point out that just as many Red Brothers and Sisters suffer from odd, spontaneous wounds that have nothing to do with Christ's suffering. Some manifest boils and other sores, and many do not develop any wounds at all. The Red Order's detractors point out that a wound in one's wrist does not Stigmata make. Whatever the truth, the Red Order's inclusion in the Inquisition, while certainly not based *entirely* on its members' odd propensity towards the stigmata, certainly wasn't hurt by that phenomenon.

Though hardly as polished a speaker as Isidro had been, Abbot Gervèse made up for it by his ardent faith and commitment to the fight against the Devil. Sister Vittoria was soft-spoken and her behavior modest, but she was surprisingly no less determined and steel-willed when it came to opposing the Adversary. Faced with such admirable and devout examples of the best the Theodosians had to offer, Pope Honorius approved the Red Order — provisionally — members of the secret Inquisition.

The Council of faith

The first Council of Faith — so named because of Sister Teresa's admonition to hold to faith above all — was held in 1223. Representatives from all the orders attended: Sister Teresa sent Sister Maria Immaculata, as well as a lengthy letter detailing her latest visions; Abbot Gervèse was there from Paris with two of his Brothers, and the Red Sisters were represented by Sister Vittoria di Parma; Sir Gauthier de Dampiere and Sir Fatino di Milano were there for the Poor Knights of Acre; and Otto von Murnau represented his family (Brother Leopold being one of the Cardinal's personal staff, he did not feel it appropriate that he should be the family representative as well). Cardinal Marzone presided over the meeting, and several of his long-time trusted associates, such as Brother Leopold and Father Andrea Pitti, were also in attendance.

Much was discussed. The safety and sanctity of Rome and of the person of the Pope were debated; as was the division of responsibility for investigating rumors and reports of vampyr, Cainites, witches, or other such demonic creatures in different jurisdictions of Christendom. For cities or counties that already had an abbey or house holding a particular order, the division seemed simple enough; what became difficult was determining how far the responsibility of a given abbey, house or commandery might be extended, so as to account for towns or regions with no such house present within them. There was also the matter of how to handle a large city, such as Rome, Paris or Magdeburg, where more than one order (the Murnau family holdings being classed roughly equivalent to a small abbey, though their numbers were decidedly fewer) existed. And of course, it was out of the question to ask the cloistered sisters of either the Order of St. John or St. Theodosius to leave their abbeys in pursuit of demons, although it was clear that Sister Vittoria did not agree with her brothers on this issue.

But after two months of discussion, arguments, and sharing experiences and information, a strategy for action was agreed upon. And in a formal, but privately held, Mass, the Pope himself commissioned the inquisitores contra Diabolum enim et alii daemones.

The Secret Inquisition

With the Pope's blessing, and trusting in God's grace, the newly formed Inquisition set to work. In Paris, Abbot Gervèse continued his campaign against the Cainite infestation. In Magdeburg, the Knights embarked on a mission to investigate the rumors of Cainites amid their brother order, the Teutonic Knights. The Murnau were as active as ever in the court of the Emperor, though what they were doing there was not always clear. There were successes, and there were some disastrous failures, particularly from lack of shared counsel or planning between orders, or even between inquisitors nominally of the same order who did not take each other's intentions into account. In one case, two Knights were ambushed and slain when a letter to their Commander was intercepted; in another, the carefully planned investigation of a trio of Red Brothers in Lombardy was thrown into confusion when an enthusiastic Murnau knight and his men-at-arms pursued a Pavian nobleman, who vanished mysteriously from the city thereafter. Even more worrisome were reports of false identification of those who were the natural targets of the crusade — some who were mortal men, who might have been blameless, or unaware that the lord they followed was not as he appeared. There was no standard for judging, no procedure for determining level of guilt, or innocence — and no method for the Cardinal and his advisors to account for the deeds of the different orders acting independently of one another.

The Papacy in Peril

In 1227, Pope Honorius died. And as before, the Cardinals met to select a new Pope; this time, the choice was unanimous, and Cardinal Ugolino dei Conti Segni became Pope Gregory IX.

But shortly after Gregory was crowned, an urgent message came from Sister Teresa. Her message featured a transcription of a vision wherein she saw a shadow of a knife-bearing man moving along a wall, an open book that was held by a cloaked man without a face, and the Papal vestments drenched in tainted blood that spread throughout all the land. Clearly a warning — but how to interpret it?

Cardinal Marzone urged all inquisitors to increase their vigilance, and also he warned the Pope, though Gregory stubbornly refused to remain in the safety of the Lateran. One evening in the street, Otto von Murnau was given a book by a cloaked man whose face was obscured by a mask. Within the book's pages was a short note written in Latin. It was a warning, one that came just in time; between Otto's sense for creatures of darkness, the efforts of several inquisitors of different orders working together, and by the grace of God, the would-be assassin was captured, but the dark spirit that was guiding him fled from their torches, swiftly flowing up a wall and out of a high window into the night.

In recognition of the extraordinary effort by the different orders of the Inquisition, Pope Gregory lifted the provisional status of the Order of Theodosius, and reaffirmed the order's charter to their traditional abbey at Laurendine. Of the masked man in the cloak, they did not know more for several years.

The Eyes of Rodrigue de Mavarre

With the aid of the different orders, Cardinal Marzone began the difficult task of saving Christendom from the Devil. Yet throughout Europe, the demonic taint was deeply rooted, and the Adversary's minions ruthless in hunting down those who opposed them. The Inquisition simply lacked the numbers and strength to adequately oppose those of the enemy; also they lacked familiarity with the cities where the demons themselves had networks of informants. As the invaders in the domains the demons had claimed for their own, they faced far worse disadvantages than merely being outnumbered by the minions of their Adversary.

Without the help that only we, the Eyes of God, could provide, the Inquisition had no hope of securing Rome, much less gaining ground anywhere else. They were ready to act, but had little information on which to plan their attack; we had information or access to sources that they did not, but we were incapable (even had Rodrigue permitted it) of mounting the effort necessary to make use of what we knew.

One evening I, Aignen le Libraire, presented myself to Cardinal Marzone, and voluntarily offered to him the eyes, ears and clandestine labors of the Oculi Dei, a loosely organized network of agents throughout Europe, from the city of Rome to the farthest reaches of Christendom. I did so freely, and without the permission or blessing of my kinsman, Rodrigue de Navarre, who had first formed the order in the aftermath of our disastrous encounter with the Cainite Xalbador. As proof of the resourcefulness of

our agents, I also provided a list of all of Cardinal Marzone's closest associates in Rome and the names of some of those he had met with over the past four years — and confessed that I was the one who had given Otto von Murnau the warning of the attack against the Pope, based on reports I had received from agents in Castile. I promised him we would watch, and report what we could — but only on the condition that we could for own protection maintain absolute anonymity for the bulk of our members. I, and a small handful of others, were willing to act as the liaisons between our hidden agents and his inquisitors; otherwise, those who risked their lives in pursuit of the information the Inquisition sought must be permitted to remain anonymous.

It was no easy demand to meet but I could not in good conscience offer anything less. Some of his advisors were clearly suspicious of me, and I could hardly blame them; suspicion is necessary for survival when one must face the worst the Adversary has to throw against us. And these were men of the church, for the most part; it was not easy for them to rely upon laymen whose orthodoxy might be suspect, whose actions were not bound to them by monastic vows. Yet in the end, the Cardinal agreed; for indeed he did need what we could offer, and understood all too well the conditions under which I could offer it. He then requested I speak to him at greater length about improving the level of secrecy for his own organization, for if we could determine so much about him so easily, it was certain that others could as well.

The Second Council of faith

Cardinal Marzone and the leaders of the various orders soon realized that the current structure of the Inquisition, dividing up areas of responsibility by diocese and territory, was not an effective use of our resources. Yet they were unsure of what to propose to replace it. Clearly, the Inquisition needed a hierarchy of responsibility, so that inquisitors did not waste their efforts on fruitless quests, nor make false accusations, nor bring harm to the innocent. Procedures and records needed to be established in keeping with canon law, and inquisitors needed to be held accountable for those they investigated, accused, judged, or punished. And the strengths and talents of the various orders needed to be shared on a broader level than the current division of responsibility permitted.

It took us nearly two years to come up with the procedures and hierarchy of responsibility we now use. The Councils of Faith became our courts and administrators; the small cells of inquisitors became the scouts, soldiers, and investigators in the vanguard; and the Supreme Council — and Cardinal Marzone — oversee the entire brotherhood. The Oculi Dei provided the source of the codes, and often the means by which our messages are delivered.

The Boly Office of the Inquisition

Pope Gregory has recently declared Dominic Guzman a Saint and has commissioned the Order of Friars Preachers, as the Holy Office of the Inquisition, to seek out and convert—or punish—heretics and heresy where ever they find it. In that task, I have every confidence they will be most dedicated and thorough.

Our own commission, however, remains the same — and unlike the Holy Office, will remain a carefully guarded secret, for the security of the Church and the safety of us all.

May God grant us wisdom in our judgments, courage in the face of the Adversary, and continued faith in the strength of His Truth.

In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

- Aignen le Libraire, Eye of God

Current activities of the Shadow Inquisition

Each of the orders of the shadow Inquisition, lay and clerical, occupies its own special niche within the structure's hierarchy, possessing unique skills and talents that blend into a single, not entirely harmonious whole.

The Moor Knights of the Massion of the Cross of Acre

I write these words behind the thick walls and stout doors of a convent near Magdeburg, where my wounds are being capably tended by the Holy Sisters who tenant this place. It is not, normally, I who would be turning my hand to the scribing of my cell's history, but I am now the last one capable of doing so. And I do so only to honor those who have fallen.

We were sent from the Jägerhalle by Knight Commander Gustav von Meistreich to investigate a report that had come to us concerning a strange spate of occurrences near the Hungarian estates of the Murnau. Few specifics attached. We believed ourselves prepared. There were four Knights and our squires who set out to Castle Murnau to meet with the cell that would join us,

a smaller band to be sure. A Murnau cousin, who was to act as our "bloodhound," a Red Sister tall and rangy enough to be a boy herself. I can close my eyes and still see them all that day as we set out, not lighthearted, nor fearless, but not yet the hunted animals that we became.

I am not certain what it was that hunted us. I am certain that our Livonian brothers have a name for it, but I do not know what it is. We pursued it for days, spiraling outwards from the estate of Franziska von Murnau and deeper into the mountains and forest, tracking it toward what we thought was its lair. Sometime during the pursuit, we realized that it had flanked us, and we were no longer chasing it — it was chasing us, farther from any source of help or protection. I will remember forever the night it chose to end the game it was playing with us. It towered above the trees, stinking, hideous, a pulsating mass of flesh and bone, inhuman in its strength and speed. The blood, the screams, the wet tearing sounds as it —

The Holy Sisters have come, saying that I need my rest, and that I should trouble myself no more today. I shall write more later.

-From the journal of Sir Emil of Augsberg

The Knights are, more than anything else, the sword of the shadow Inquisition. They represent to their fellows the true flower of chivalry, shorn of its libertine thorns; they are honorable, bound by a spiritually vigorous Rule, and zealous in their defense of both God and man.

The Poor Knights of the Cross recruit their members in much the same way as the other military orders, with some slight modifications. In 1230, prospective recruits into a standard military order are expected to meet certain criteria. Men of servile status are generally excluded from membership, as are, for the most part, men of illegitimate birth. Men of knightly descent are generally preferred, as are unmarried men; married men are permitted to join military orders, but are also required to abandon their wives, and this necessitates the wife's consent, her mutual agreement to some profession of faith, as well as provision for her material survival. The physically and spiritually robust are naturally preferred, as the orders have no intention of becoming the dumping ground of the handicapped younger offspring Christendom. Debtors are also typically denied entry to prevent the order from assuming responsibility for a new postulant's financial misadventures. No order admits the excommunicate, or apostates from other religious foundations. Most postulants are required to be at least fourteen years of age before taking vows.

KNIGHTS OF CHRIST

here are as many reasons to join military orders as to join a more contemplative religious order. Many who join the military orders are younger sons, excluded from the easy inheritance of wealth and power by the traditions of primogeniture and virtually required to become a knight anyway, they choose a path that will also allow them to focus their ambitions and energy to a holy cause. Others are already deeply devout and moved to defend Christendom with sword and prayer. Most Poor Knights are pious to begin with, and rapidly become more so as their duties strip away any lingering doubts they might have had about the righteousness of their enterprise.

Gauthier de Dampiere: In his seventies now, still Grand Master of the Order, and still tireless in his pursuit of the enemy, though the fight has cost him dearly. His hair went stark white when he was still a young man, he is missing two fingers from his left hand, and he walks with a severe limp, the result of a savage bite from a vampire that tore through the leather of his boot and into his flesh, a few seconds before he removed its head. Though his body has finally begun to fail him, his soul is pure, and his mind remains sharp; he spends most of his time now in prayer, or tending to the affairs of the order, arranging matters to ease the transition for whomever succeeds him.

Sir Baudioun le Breton: One of the most accomplished Knight Commanders of the Poor Knights, a battle-seasoned veteran of nocturnal conflicts across the face of Christendom. He began his career with the Knights as one of Gauthier de Dampiere's hand-picked companions. Sickened by the butchery of Béziers, his faith wavered, and was rekindled on the streets of Carcassonne, hunting the night-fiends that haunted the city and preyed on

Catholic, Cathar, and Crusader alike. Now, 20 years later, he is firmly devout, solidly competent, and engaged in training the next generation of Knights when not accompanying the mendicant Brother Leopold von Murnau and the rest of their inquisitorial cell on its investigations.

Sir Fantino di Milano: A recruit from the Knights Hospitaler, Sir Fantino is of somewhat milder temperament than the average Poor Knight, being a physician more than a warrior. Compassionate by nature, he is often regarded as the conscience of the Poor Knights in Compostela, where he oversees the pilgrim's hostel and one of the order's largest orphans' asylums. His greatest weaknesses are both his personal curiosity, as he possesses a questing intellectual nature that might have found a more comfortable home in one of the contemplative orders, and his private belief that there is no such thing as an unredeemable soul, a belief he shares with his close friend Red Brother Giordano Nicola d'Arzenta.

Sir Jehan: Most members of the Poor Knights have never met Sir Jehan face-to-face as he is stationed at the Fortress of the Cross, the Order's Cypriot mother-house, where he serves as Grand Master Gauthier de Dampiere's left hand. Coolheaded, sharp-tongued, and constitutionally incapable of suffering fools gladly, this Knight is the closest the order has to a genuine strategos strategist, tactician, logistical expert, and intelligence consolidation officer. He does everything except command troops in the field, and this is more a concession to the prejudices of the age than any defect of his own. Were the Order to realize that the Grand Master's left hand is an extraordinarily capable woman instead of an extraordinarily capable man, all Hell would no doubt break loose.

The Poor Knights differ from these criteria in three major ways. By this time, the practice of child oblation among the rest of the military orders has been more or less abandoned; children raised within the houses of the Templars or the Hospitalers, for example, are neither required nor expected to become professed brethren. Among the Poor Knights, the fastest way to gain admission to the Order is be the son of a prominent Knight who was married and sired children prior to taking Holy Orders, or be at least nominally "raised" within the order, generally as a foundling, refugee, or

orphan of the conflicts the Poor Knights find themselves involved in. Second, the Poor Knights draw a significant number of postulants from the bodies of other military orders, a practice that has generated a certain amount of friction. Poor Knights recruited in this fashion are invariably treated as pariahs by their former brethren, as choosing to forsake one's vows, even to join another order, is regarded as perilously close to apostasy. Third, not only do the Poor Knights explicitly believe that the body of Christendom is under attack by unholy forces, a great number of them

have had some sort of direct, personally scarring contact that have led them to join the shadow Inquisition.

When it comes to engaging in their inquisitorial duties, the Poor Knights enjoy a significant advantage over some of the other orders. Their public reason for existence, the protection of pilgrimage routes throughout Europe and the Holy Land, permits them to act somewhat more openly, particularly against immediate threats. They roam the length of the pilgrimage roads, seeking out and dealing with the fiends that prey on these vulnerable, vital arteries of both faith and com-

merce. When the Poor Knights are deployed in the field in this capacity, they tend to travel in cells of no fewer than four, under the command of a senior sergeant-at-arms. Rare is the band of knights permitted out of the commandery without someone older and allegedly wiser on hand to keep them from rampantly giving vent to their most chivalrous and pious instincts. Often, they are joined by a member of the Red Order, generally a Red Brother who will attract less attention by traveling with a group of knights, or by an itinerant male Eye of God, who usually acts as both a moderating influence

THE MILITARY ORDERS

he Poor Knights draw the bulk of their talent from a diverse pool of human resources, widely dispersed both geographically and culturally. The Grand Master, Gauthier de Dampiere, may be of French extraction, but those who serve under him derive from the four corners of Christendom.

- The Knights Templar: The first military order, founded in the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1118, as a more martial complement to the thenmonastic Hospitalers, and officially granted Papal recognition in 1129. Granted extraordinary powers by three separate Papal Bulls, by 1230 the Templars are the wealthiest and most powerful of the military orders, with a vast material power base in the form of independent land holdings, a private shipping enterprise, and some of the best communications to be had anywhere in Europe or the Holy Land. The Templars have provided the Poor Knights some of their strongest swords and their ablest minds.
- The Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem: The Hospital of St. John, the Knights Hospitaler, have been in existence since the First Crusade, originally serving as a solely monastic order devoted to the care of pilgrims in the Holy Land. Exactly when and how the Hospitalers became a recognized military order is not entirely clear, but they were in arms by the 1160s when they took part in expeditions into Egypt, and had a force annihilated alongside their Templar brothers at the battle of Hattin in 1187. Whereas the Templars have evolved into the sort of financially independent power that makes both secular and sacred authorities gnash their teeth in impotent envy, the Hospitalers have never quite recovered the prestige they lost after Hattin, and labor resentfully in the shadow of their "older

brother." The Poor Knights draw both skilled soldiers and physicians from the ranks of the Hospitalers.

- The Hospital of St. Mary of the Germans of Jerusalem: Better known as the Teutonic Order, these Knights of Christ were originally associated with the Hospitalers, founded as a hospital to care for German-speaking pilgrims in the Holy Land. It was founded as a recognized military order in 1198, as a rare synthesis. The Teutonic Order is enjoined to care for the sick according to the Hospitalers' Rule, and attend its other business according to the Templar Rule. The Teutonic Order has, as of yet, provided few recruits to the Poor Knights, but those it has provided offer access to the upper echelons of the Holy Roman Emperor's court, as the order accepts few postulants not of German noble birth.
- The Swordbrothers of Livonia: Founded in 1202 as the first standing Christian army in the Baltics, the Swordbrothers of Livonia (better known as the Livonian Order) are, despite their name, entirely of German extraction. They are dedicated to the conversion of pagan Baltic tribes and to the protection of German Christians in Baltic lands and Christian Balts from the aggressive tendencies of their pagan neighbors. As such, they have been embroiled in near constant warfare; they are currently engaged in the pacification of Estonia, whose pagan majority is aggressive in defending its land and in its refusal to accept sword-point conversion. The few Livonians recruited by the Poor Knights tell horror stories of the unholy doings east of the Danube, and regularly agitate for a greater presence there, not only in the pagan lands of Livonia, but in nominally Christian Hungary and Transylvania, as well.

and as a contact with other orders in their stopover points along the road. Knightly cells of this type are more likely than any other group of shadow inquisitors to dispense with the proprieties and go straight for the skull-breaking. They tend to bring back corpses, parts of corpses and the occasional sack of ashes for posthumous trial by the local Council of Faith.

When not in the field, that is on patrol or on assignment to a multi-order cell, the Poor Knights tend to be either in active cloister or taking their turns staffing the hospices operated for the care and comfort of pilgrims. These hospices are often the order's best source of intelligence on the whereabouts and activities of the enemy; pilgrims can usually be counted on to have at least one or two rumors worth following up, and volumes of generally useful information besides. Moreover, the hospice is the one source of information more or less exclusively within the control of the Knights. This advantage helps reduce friction with the more intellectually inclined — particularly the Oculi Dei, on whose intelligence-developing talents the Knights are often dependent, to their considerable chagrin and distaste.

The hospices, of course, are not solely maintained for the purpose of gathering information, but also to assist the Poor Knights in remembering why they have chosen to take on this fight in the first place, while performing good works that can only redound to the credit of their souls. Laundering their spirits in activities both humble and humane — preparing meals and beds, tending travelers' wounds, often caring for children orphaned on the road or in battles with the enemy — helps stave off the souldeadening, heart-hardening awareness of the evil in the world. A knight also always has the option of withdrawing into the strict cloister of the order's commanderies to seek spiritual solace. In this silent, exclusive community of fellow soldiers of Christ, a Knight can lay down the burdens of the unending struggle for a time, seek spiritual counsel with his Brothers, and meditate peacefully on his relationship with the divine. If these approaches are insufficient to soothe a spiritually afflicted Knight, the Sisters of St. John operate eremitic ("desert") convents, which function as both cloisters and hospitals in which the Sisters work their healing arts on both the Flock and on the souls of their fellow inquisitors.



CHAPTER-HOUSES

s befits their more public, overtly mar tial nature, the chapter-houses of the Poor Knights tend to be modeled after the commanderies of the other military orders, which serve as part defensible strong point, part arsenal, part cloister, and part hospital.

• The Fortress of the Cross: The Order's mother-house, a heavily fortified military stronghold on Cyprus, outside Nicosia. In addition to housing the fragment of the True Cross, taken from Acre by Gauthier de Dampiere and his original band of followers, the Fortress of the Cross also contains a virtual arsenal of other holy relics. These items get parceled out to chapter-houses across Christendom as the need arises. Being assigned a duty post at the Fortress is a heady thing even for experienced Knights, as it is a tacit indication that great things are expected. This is, naturally, often a self-fulfilling prophecy.

• The Jägerhalle: The German tongue of the Poor Knights has a slightly better sense of humor than their French brethren; they named their primary chapter-house after a pagan myth, one they often found being applied to themselves. The Jägerhalle (the "Hunters' Hall," home of the Wild Hunt of popular lore) is located in Bavaria, close to the estates of the Murnau Knight that donated the land for its construction, and houses most of the Order's Livonian and Teutonic brethren. It also houses a fairly substantial collection of artifacts and reliquaries acquired through both Murnau donations and raids into the pagan and Christian lands of the East.

• The Hospice of St. James the Elder: In addition to a sizeable chapter-house/commandery, the order also operates a hospice in the city of Compostela, a combination travelers' hospital and orphanage. Many of the children adopted/oblated into service often find themselves in Compostela, being raised within the walls of the commandery and taught the arts that will stand them in good stead once they become full Brothers.

Sisters of St. John

It was late in the night. I admit, I had drifted off some hours before. Sister Teresa herself had fallen into a true and deep sleep, instead of the half-aware state of dreams and visions she had been in, her breath barely enough to

lift the blankets. I watched her sleeping peacefully for some time, taking the opportunity to polish the rough notes I had made of her earlier words, before weariness overcame me as well. I do not know, precisely, what woke me. One moment I was dreaming a strangely formless dream, gliding low over dark mountains wreathed in mist, and the next I was sharply awake, as though someone had snapped her fingers next to my ear to rouse me. The cell was empty but for Sister Teresa, who yet slept, and myself.

The candle was guttering, so I replaced it with another, then fed the braziers a bit more charcoal for the chamber was growing cold again. Sister Teresa's cheeks were pale and cool, and so I drew another blanket over her, tucking its folds

around her head. I went back to my notes.

I worked for some minutes in silence, my quill scratching rhythmically on the parchment, before even that sound began to make me nervous. I felt that the Sister and I were not alone in the cell, and I sat listening, tensely, for the slightest of sounds. The silence was of no comfort to me, nor were the strange, flickering shadows that the candlelight cast upon the walls. I moved my stool closer to the Sister's cot, my book of notes across my knees and my back against the cold wall. I wished, absurdly, that she would wake and tell me all was well.

She did wake, close to dawn, stirring within the cocoon of blankets in which she was wrapped, opening her eyes and taking a deeper, more painful breath. She began whispering things, the broken fragments of sentences, even less coherent than she had been before her sleep. I recorded them as best I could. Then, she suddenly became completely clear.

She whispered, "He is not a light, shining in the darkness, no lantern of hope. He is a beacon of evil... he calls all things dark and foul to him and they will do his bidding for he is one of their own... He will try... he will try... to quench our lantern... to put out our eyes... to break our sword... to still our heart...."

She wept then, and called out the name of one of her former companions; I put my book aside and offered her what comfort I could, as her fever rose again.

 From the journal of Sister Bernadetta of Madrid

Blessed Sister Teresa of Madrid was a young woman born with a personal calling. Deeply devout from childhood, she entered Holy Orders in the expectation of pursuing a life of good works and the contemplation of divine grace. What she received, while on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, was a gift both great and terrible — the vision of a holy prophet, the Sight that allowed her to strip away the barriers of time and space, the illusions of flesh and sorcery, and

perceive the rot that ate away at the heart of humanity. The onslaught of visions she suffered during the awakening of her gift instilled in her the conviction that the Church to which she had given her life and the people to whom she had devoted the kindness of her spirit were under attack by unholy adversaries. Galvanized by the horror of what she had experienced. Teresa became the motivating force behind the organization of the Order of the Holy Sisters of St. John, named for the blessed apostle St. John the Divine, whose vision the vast majority of its members shared. The order finally won Papal recognition for both its uncanny visionary gifts and humanitarian efforts in 1215. The order migrated west in 1222 after the destruction of its primary convent and established itself in Sister Teresa's native Castile as well as France, Italy, and Germany.

Sister Teresa herself established the order's European mother-house, an eremitic convent/hospital located some 20 miles outside Madrid in an isolated valley. There, she established the daily rituals and structures that give the order its internal resilience, as it deals both with a gift and duty that demands nothing less than absolute commitment. There also she died. Physically frail since the onset of her gift, she weathered poorly the bitter winters to which Madrid is prone and was often ill. During her final illness she lived wholly within her visions, only barely aware of the world around her, and speaking words of prophecy that the Sisters attending her dutifully recorded. Even respected as Sister Teresa was, most of her Sisters believed these words to be little more than fever-dreams — until they began coming true. Now, the Sisters devote a great deal of time to decoding these visions and attempting to focus their own Holy Sight in an effort to replicate Sister Teresa's final vision, perceive it for themselves, and guide the Inquisition more effectively.

Membership in the order is obtained in much the same way as for every other religious foundation. A postulant undergoes a screening process that determines the suitability of the girl's background, as well as her willingness to enter Holy Orders, an issue of paramount importance to the Sisters of St. John. A dowry or gift is made, and the girl enters the convent as a novice. This is where becoming a Sister of St. John parts sharply with becoming a sister of any other foundation. Not only do novices structure their lives according to the Rule of St. Augustine, in which they engage in daily periods of prayer and meditation, good works and care of the sick, moderation, self-denial, and the preservation of chastity,

THE LIVING HEART OF THE SISTERS

ven living saints cannot live forever, and the loss of Sister Teresa could easily have crippled the fledgling order — had not good administrative sense prevailed at the early stages of its foundation. Sister Teresa chose as her assistants two women of great personal talents, and since her death those women have served as the Order's bedrock foundation and its guiding hands.

Mother Maria-Immaculada is the current Holy Mother of the Sisters of St. John, elected after the death of Sister Teresa to head the order. Mother Maria-Immaculada is one of Sister Teresa's original followers, who accompanied her to the Holy Land on the pilgrimage during which she was blessed with the Holy Sight, and who nursed her through the physical and mental torments that accompanied the onset of that gift. The Holy Mother herself is one of the women of the order who possesses not a whit of the Sight; her talents are the practical ones that allow her to effectively administrate the order's public front, its inquisitorial duties, and the lives of nearly everyone who crosses her path. To call her personally formidable is to suggest that the Pope is only a little bit holy. The Mother is also the spearhead of the effort to achieve canonization for the Blessed Sister Teresa, taking it upon herself to compile the required documentation of miracles.

Sister Johanna Magdalena is the most renowned of the order's mystics and visionaries, second only to Sister Teresa in her talents as a Holy Seer. The Sister's visions came upon her at an early age, striking her at random and leaving her physically weakened and emotionally shattered after each experience; her family, in despair, approached the local convent for assistance, thinking her mad. Fortunately, the Sisters of St. John knew better, and aided her in achieving both inner peace and some measure of control over her gifts. The Sister currently dwells in a convent in Germany, deeply engaged in refining the meditation techniques that allow the Sisters to focus the Sight when it comes upon them, and puzzling out the last series of visions that struck Sister Teresa as she lay dying.

but the vast bulk of novices are also tested for the gift of Holy Sight. Many novices come to the order with this gift already apparent upon them; many develop it after exposure to gifted Sisters, or to relics of Saints gifted with visionary abilities, including the body of the order's founder, blessed Sister Teresa. Many others never evidence any such gift.

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Novices found to be gifted with the Holy Sight are separated from the rest of the novices and enter into the rigorous training required to focus their talent, or, at the very least, deal successfully with its onset. The prayers of the Divine Office, the prayer cycles developed by the Sisters themselves, religious chants, and ascetic meditation practices are all employed to assist a visionary Sister. When used correctly, these techniques can gentle the Sight into providing controlled visions that slip easily into a Sister's awareness, allow her to contemplate them intelligently and act on what is shown to her. More often than not, the Sight *cannot* be successfully

focused, even by the most mentally disciplined of the elder Sisters, and the visions pour through the Sisters like rain through a cathedral's waterspouts, washing away all vestiges of external awareness or self-control. At times like these, the Sisters are prone to seizures, convulsions and fits of speaking in tongues that, to an untrained observer, all resemble madness - and, to many trained observers, can resemble the throes of demonic possession. To avoid many of the more common triggers for the most violent sorts of visions, most of the affected Sisters remain completely covered at all times, even to the point of wearing gloves and sandals, and avoid any unnecessary physical contact with one another or their fellow inquisitors. In their case, the vows of chastity they take are both self-enforced and self-defensive.

CHAPTER-HOUSES

ext to the Oculi Dei, the Sisters of St. John tend to be the most isolated (some would say secretive) of all the orders. In keeping with their role as seers, scholars and caretakers of the physically and mentally infirm, the vast majority of the Sisters spend most of their time in cloister, except when assigned to generally singlegender inquisitorial cells, often with Red Sisters, female Eyes of God, or women of the Murnau. Within the cloister, however, they attend patients of all genders and stations equally.

- The Convent of the Holy Mother: Located in Aix-la-Chapelle, the Convent of the Holy Mother is the largest and most important of the Sisterhood's desert convents. More school than hospital, it is a place of pure respite from the struggles of the fight, a garden of tranquility, a place to study, reflect, and meditate upon the divine. Holy Mother Maria-Immaculada directs the activities of the order from this place of serenity, using it both for its intended purpose as well as an administrative hub, as many seeking relief come here, including fellow inquisitors, secular heads of state, and, occasionally, even Cardinal Marzone himself.
- The Convent of St. John the Divine at Madrid: The European mother-house of the Holy Sisters was established on land given by royal grant, and it remains one of their most important possessions despite being eclipsed somewhat in political influence. It is the single largest "teaching" convent, where sisters of all levels of ability

are sent for advanced instruction in both mystic and mundane arts, producing teachers, physicians, and administrators for dispersal across Christendom. There, also, lies the body of blessed Sister Teresa. Rumors already swirl that touching the blessed Sister's tomb, the blankets that she lay upon during her last illness, and other relics of her life can cure even the most terrible of evil-inflicted wounds, grant temporary glimpses into the future, or even instill the Holy Sight itself. Documentation of these miracles continues apace, and the Convent of St. John has become something of a minor pilgrimage site for severely wounded inquisitors seeking aid to cure their afflictions.

• The Hospital of St. Dymphna: Often referred to as "the Holy Madhouse" by other inquisitors, this hospital, located just outside of Ravensburg in Germany, is the repository of many of the most hopeless cases that the shadow Inquisition comes across. Contained within its walls are the unfortunates whose minds, as well as lives, have been shattered by exposure to the fiends and their sorceries; whose bodies have been reduced to so much useless wreckage. It is, uniquely, staffed by a combination of Sisters of St. John and Red Sisters, who petitioned to share the facility in order to study the effects of the enemy's magics more closely. The Sisters of St. John reluctantly agreed, and ever since the partnership has prospered more than anyone could have imagined. Volumes of useful information and the occasional near-miraculous recovery have resulted here.

THE HOLY RITE OF EXORCISM

spart of their devotion to good works, the Sisters of St. John have taken upon themselves the duty of caring for much of the human wreckage left behind by the fight against the shadow Inquisition's unholy enemies. From the hospitals administrated by the order's active, mendicant Sisters and the eremitic monasteries devoted to spiritual cleansing and healing, they spread a soothing balm across Christendom. They may not be able to restore the broken lives of the enemy's victims, but they do their best to make certain that the scars left behind do not disfigure, that the wounds do not fester.

One of the Sisters' most important duties is the care of their fellow inquisitors, not only in body, but in soul as well. Constant contact with supernatural forces takes an enormous physical, mental and spiritual toll, even on those trained to endure the rigors of the fight; it also inflicts a dreadful vulnerability, nearly a spiritual taint. As the scent of blood draws predators, so contact with unclean forces attracts the attention of things even less wholesome. Inquisitors already spiritually and physically weakened from one conflict may find themselves caught up in another, subjugated and possessed by genuinely demonic entities attracted to their vulnerability.

As a consequence, the Sisters of St. John ungifted with the Holy Sight are among the chosen few who are specifically trained in the Holy Rite of Exorcism, the means of diagnosing the symptoms of demonic possession and of cleansing the infestation.

The ungifted novices also have their place within the Sisterhood, despite the its emphasis on visionary talent — in fact, they provide the bulk of the order's membership, and conduct most of the activities that allow it to continue functioning. For every one Sister granted the Sight, five who are not serve the order. Those five are trained in a variety of tasks equally indispensable to the Sisterhood. The nonvisionary Sisters are the order's public face, the administrators of its human and material assets, the teachers of its members, the chaperones who accompany the gifted Sisters outside the cloister walls, the clerks who record visions and assist in their analysis, and the

physicians who attend the sick and wounded who come to its hospitals.

Naturally, some friction exists between the Sisters as to whose efforts are the most important. The visionary Sisters, it can be said, are the heart of the secret Inquisition. Every day and every night, they are assailed by the awareness that, if those of good faith and courage do nothing, the soul of humanity will be torn to shreds and sucked dry. Occasionally, this either pushes a visionary Sister to heights of zealotry that few other inquisitors ever reach, or it drives her utterly mad. In either case, the courage of conviction can turn quite ugly to a Sister not so talented or so divinely driven. Ungifted Sisters are not immune to jealousy or the sting of a perceived slight. Some feel, however unjustly, that their efforts are less important in the scheme of things because they perform tasks anyone can do.

Two factors prevent these tensions from building to a critical mass of bitter recrimination and possible betrayal. First, all of the Holy Sisters, gifted and otherwise, are deeply committed to the struggle against the unholy enemies of Christendom. When other inquisitors are injured, spiritually and physically, they come to the Holy Sisters for healing, and none can dwell within the convent-hospital walls who do not see their wounds. They see the pain and blood, the fear and loss, the shattered minds and broken bodies, and they understand to their core that the struggle is just, a war that must be fought. The ungifted Sisters see, also, that there is little joy in a gift that one often cannot control and which extracts such a heavy price. That does tend to temper the hard, hurt feelings somewhat. Second, ungifted Sisters are not required to remain within the order if they feel they cannot; they are permitted to transfer to other religious foundations via special agreements negotiated through Cardinal Marzone. Many ungifted Sisters become Carmelite or Benedictine nuns, or leave strict Holy Orders entirely to join lay religious foundations. There, they also do the work of the Inquisition, recruiting likely prospects from among their new colleagues, increasing the number of eyes, ears, and hands available.

The Ked Order

Scotland is a much cooler country than England, though no more dry — it has rained at least once on more than half the days since we crossed the border and began climbing into the high country. Our escorts, a band of King Alexander's household knights, lost no time teasing Brother Serafin, who made mention that had never seen

much snow before. They told him wild tales of winters so cold that even the wolves and the people would lie down together, to say nothing of the wolves and the sheep. From the road, we can in fact see in the distance mountains still capped in snow despite the spring warmth; in truth, it reminds me of Milan, where one can see the snow on the mountaintops from the walls of a city on a clear day. It seems unlikely, nearly impossible, that such a fair land could harbor an evil such as we have been sent to investigate, even with the proof sitting before me as I write these words. Letters. Journals. The information released to us by the Cistercian archives is nearly incontrovertible by itself, without any observations of our own. The details contained within them are repulsive and unholy, and they haunt my dreams when I think on them too long.

The land is much changed, the closer we come to the site of Damburrow. Not twenty miles away, all is a riot of greenery and fast-running water, streams swollen with snowmelt and spring rain, flowers blooming on their banks and the trees not in bud already in leaf. Here, it is as though winter has not released its grip yet — has not, in fact, done so in ages. Pale dead trees are more common than live ones, and those that live are twisted and stunted, bending over the road like rheumatic hands trying to wipe it off the face of the mountain. The streams are slow and, upon experimentation, we discovered why our escorts advised us to collect water for our skins down below, for it carries with it an unpleasant tang, a trace of salty bitterness that none can identify. There is no birdsong; I am beginning to suspect that there are no birds, and other beasts have been equally scarce, absent completely or thin and malnourished when we see them at all. I have attempted to speak with Sir Briceus, the youngest and most talkative of our escorts, about this and even he looks uncomfortable and says little. When I pressed him, he told me that there was a tale that his grandmother had, of the valley of Damburrow being a place accursed, forsaken by God, but he would speak no more of it beyond that. Given the information we already have regarding Damburrow's misfortunes, such legends do not seem out of blace.

The cloister is a good ten miles from the hamlet of Damburrow itself and resembles more a fortress than a house of God, even for a monastery. It is built atop a spit of stone that juts like a lopsided fang from the side of a steep incline, its own approaches equally steep, nearly sheer on three sides — it can only be entered via a narrow trail of steps which have been cut into the side of the hill itself. Laboriously carved standing cruciform figures guard it at regular intervals, marked with strange patterns of interlocking beasts, long and sinuous, which Sir Briceus told me were supposed to be wolves. Within, it is



Spartan and functional, though with a disconcertingly complete lack of windows on all but the highest levels, and those being arrow-slits. In fact, gazing down upon the climb it took to reach this place and across the sere expanse of Damburrow valley, it struck me as being a perfect platform for plunging fire. From the heights, the hamlet of Damburrow itself is visible. That collection of hovels huddled together around the Pit itself, which even at a distance, beneath a heavily overcast sky, seemed to have an unhealthy oily sheen about its surface. Looking upon it, I felt a knot tighten in my belly, and as the wind blowing down the valley toward us brushed over my face, I thought I caught a whisper on it, a voice speaking familiar Latin words.

 From the journal of Red Brother Giordano Nicola d'Arzenta

The Red Order of St. Theodosius has been something of an odd duck virtually since its inception. Its founder, Theodosius, was an insatiably curious intellectual; the Rule that he formulated

Double Monasteries

phenomenon dating from the time of the earliest Eastern monastic communities, the double monastery was once known throughout much of Europe. Consisting of enclosed communities of monks and nuns sharing facilities such as worship space, operating under the same Rule and governed by an Abbess, the double monastery was the ideal method of coexistence for the all-inclusive Red Order. At the height of the enclosure method's popularity, double monasteries were scattered across Ireland, England, Gaul, Belgium, Germany, and Iberia, functioning under a variety of Rules, but with very little in the way of Papal support. Perpetually sensitive to the perception of impropriety, the ecclesiastical authorities laid heavy regulations on double monasteries, strictly limiting communications between monks and nuns, legislating the proximity of buildings and opportunities for communal interaction. These restrictions, and continued Papal disapproval, finally led to the virtual abandonment of the practice, despite attempts to revive it; most of the double monasteries of the tenth century were, by the thirteenth, reinvented as singlegender cloisters. Only the Red Order put up a serious fight when it came to maintaining their accustomed monastic way of life — a way of life that has undergone recent, drastic changes.

emphasized thought, research, and experimentation even above the pursuit of divine love and was equally accepting of either gender. When most of the monastic orders were operating as strictly enclosed communities devoted to the contemplation of their holy navels, the Red Order roamed the world, sifting through the wisdom of the ages, writing it down, and returning it to the great libraries it maintained. When the phenomenon of the double monastery was dying out all over Europe as a result of martial depredations and the foul odor of sexual scandal, the Red Order struggled to maintain their joint communities, unwilling to lose the invaluable insights and assistance of the Red Sisters.

Everything changes, and sometimes not for the better. The misadventures of Red Brother Everard de Gascony and his unfortunate colleagues coupled with the fairly accurate perception of the order's intellectually and spiritually liberal tendencies have cast a heavy shadow. As a result of the "unfortunate incident," as it is euphemistically described, the order has come under intense official scrutiny at the highest levels of the Church, and its structure has been altered to further deflect the criticisms of more strictly orthodox foundations.

The order continues to accept both male and female postulants, provided that they meet the entrance requirements. The applicant must be of good family, be capable of paying a "dowry" or have their family make a "gift" to the order once accepted, have no debts for which the order might become responsible, and be willing to swear adherence to the Theodosian Rule. Whereas new postulants once were enclosed in their signature conjoined communities, the order is now partitioned—Red Brothers are now sent to strictly male monasteries and Red Sisters are now sent to strictly female nunneries, and the twain do not meet except in the performance of their duties as inquisitors. The Red Order was accepted en masse into the shadow Inquisition rather than being disbanded thanks to its considerable intellectual accomplishments, uniquely irreplaceable talents, and a good deal of pious groveling (although rumors about stigmata persist). All members of the Red Order are expected to serve, and serve gladly, for the sake of their order's continued survival.

This situation is significantly less than ideal, for all concerned. The Red Order is commonly perceived by its orthodox detractors as unacceptably liberal, impious, proud and borderline heretical. Even the order's red robes — to its members, a sign of their devotion to Christ and his Church — are looked at askance, in a time when monks and nuns

CHAPTER-HOUSES

he Red Order has suffered considerable misfortunes at all levels, including with its chapter-houses. The Order's largest double monastery and original mother-house was the Monastery of Laurendine in Toulouse, which was an unfortunate place to live during the Albigensian Crusade. The Monastery of Laurendine was attacked, sacked, and partially destroyed during the Crusade, much of its library dispersed in an effort to save it, and part of that library, including many of its more "forbidden" volumes, burned in an effort to prove the Order's piety. Laurendine remains the spiritual heart of the Red Order but, with only one of its great towers still standing and nearly half its residents dispersed, it is also a sad reminder of how far the Order has fallen.

 The Convent of St. Scholastica: The Red Order's official patron saint is, of course, the Order's founder, Theodosius. The Red Sisters, however, have adopted another—St. Scholastica, twin sister of St. Benedict — and founded a convent in her name outside of Rome. This convent is the primary holding of the Red Sisters and contains their largest library, a substantial collection of experimental materials and artifacts, and the body and relics of the order's sainted founder. It also houses one of the Red Sisters' most important sources of income, a scriptorium, in which scholarly Sisters copy and illuminate manuscripts, books, and documents of all varieties both for sale and for the reference shelves of their fellow inquisitors.

• The Monastery of St. Andrew at Damburrow: Damburrow is not a place that has

been historically kind to the Church. In fact, it can be said quite literally to eat priests alive, having swallowed the first Christian church built within its precincts into a watery sinkhole known locally as "the Damburrow Pit." Since then, countless men of the cloth here have succumbed to madness and suicide. The Red Order, having been given the task of investigating these decidedly malevolent phenomena, petitioned King Alexander II of Scotland for land on which to construct a monastery near Damburrow. As it happened, there was already a facility available: the abandoned shell of an older Cistercian cloister that required mere refurbishing to be made useful. A cell of Red Brothers has since been dispatched to Scotland to take possession of their new holding and to perform preliminary investigations, preparatory to establishing a solid population.

• The Abbey of St. Denis at Paris: The Red Order's most important possession in the royal domains of France, and the dwelling place of one of the most aggressive of the shadow Inquisition's cells. Publicly, the Abbey of St. Denis serves as a teaching monastery for the Red Order, where its members go to study not only in the Abbey's impressive library, but also to absorb the learning being offered at the University of Paris. By night. the cell stationed there — consisting predominantly of Red Brothers, Poor Knights, and at least one itinerant Oculus - actively hunts the demons of Paris with fire and sword under the leadership of Abbot Gervèse le Fèvre, a ferociously devout Red Brother who believes that "our enemies have already been defeated by God, we need only to bring that fact to their attention."

are forbidden by Papal decree to wear any colors other than somber shades of brown, gray, black, and unbleached white. Rumors of sexual licentiousness and moral deviance swirl about them like clouds of stinging flies; there is very little the order can do to silence the rumormongers and critics besides put their heads down, grit their teeth and work harder to prove their devotion.

Within the order itself, internal conflicts ebb and flow with depressing regularity. When the order was partitioned, controversy immediately arose over who owned what of the joint property within double monasteries, among both material and intellectual resources. More often than not, the Red Sisters perceived themselves as receiving the short end of the ecclesiastical stick. Not only did the Church tend to relocate them to decidedly inferior facilities — often former Benedictine nunneries — but they found that their Red Brothers invariably maintained control of the bulk of any jointly compiled libraries, as well as the fruits of jointly conducted researches and experiments. The Red Sisters appealed repeatedly to Rome for redress of this injustice, only to be repeatedly ignored. The issue remains a point of bitter contention between the male and female halves the order.



n an era when the vast bulk of the female population of Europe is considered chattel, the Red Order represents a radical departure from the norm. The Theodosian Rule laid down by the Order's sainted founder was centuries ahead of its time, advocating the intellectual and moral equality of women and exhorting all of its members to glorify the divine in all that they do. Female members of the Red Order, as a result, are educated as extensively and completely as their male counterparts, and are encouraged to experiment, research, teach and write.

When the order was partitioned, many things changed, not the least of which was the status of the Red Sisters. They have found, to their dismay, their prestige within their own order declining precipitously with every passing year. Where once their opinions and expertise were sought after, they find themselves and their efforts marginalized; where once they received respect from their Brothers, both respect and support have evaporated in the face of political maneuverings that have left the Sisters dangling in the very cold wind of orthodox disapproval.

Needless to say, the Sisters have not taken this situation lying down, but neither can they act too rashly and alienate those whose support and assistance they most desperately require. Instead, they maneuver carefully and field champions who best exemplify their unique gifts. It doesn't hurt their position that the individual who best exemplifies nearly all that is good within the order is Red Sister Vittoria Santini di Parma, a woman of keen intellect, outstanding personal piety and relentlessness in the hunt, a combination of qualities that has earned the personal approbation of Cardinal Marzone himself.

The Red Brothers, for their part, do not like the situation any better. They perceive that everyone has lost a great deal and have little patience with complaints from within their own order. They feel, perhaps even more keenly than the Red Sisters, how precarious the order's position is, both within the regular monastic community and the more secretive alliance of the Inquisition. As a result, their efforts are geared toward putting the best face and effort forward, and less toward maintaining good relations

Warriors of the Mind

he Red Order is often held in con tempt by the more martial elements within the shadow Inquisition. While their arcane researches and practice of the Holy Arts has made them one of the more dangerous foes a unholy creature might face, it has earned them few friends and even less trust.

Sister Vittoria Santini di Parma is perhaps the best known member of the Red Order, and she has arguably the best reputation among her peers. A woman of towering intellectual talents, she has not permitted the strength of her mind to overpower either her common sense, or her love of God. Sister Vittoria is best known for possessing a wisdom that transcends her relative youth, coupled with an unerring sense of when to bend the rules and when to play precisely by the Orthodox letter. Stricken with a wasting curse that is prematurely aging her body, she hunts both the witch that cast this *maleficium* upon her as well as a cure for it.

Abbot Gervèse le Fèvre, head of the Abbey of St. Denis outside of Paris, enjoys a reputation only slightly less luminous than Sister Vittoria's. Fiercely devoted to God and Church, the good Abbot is a holy terror to the creatures that haunt the Parisian night, a man authentically deadly with the Holy Art and renowned for his cutting remarks. His aggressiveness in the pursuit of the Inquisition's goals has earned what support the Red Order enjoys from the Poor Knights, with whom he shares a tendency to strike first and ask questions later.

Brother Giordano Nicola d'Arzenta cannot be accused, for all his faults, of any really soul-blasting impiety. In fact, it can most accurately be said that he takes the principle of loving one's neighbor a trifle too far for the taste of most of his brethren. Compassionate to a fault, Brother Giordano believes that there is no such thing as an unsalvageable soul — including the souls of the night-things that the inquisitors hunt and destroy. Repeated attempts to teach him the errors in his thinking have not exactly moved him; it has not escaped him that all of the Brothers currently assigned to the Damburrow expedition have somehow fallen short of the Red Order's current passion for Orthodox approval.

with the Red Sisters. In a time when monasteries have almost entirely withdrawn their support from their companion nunneries, it seems prudent to toe the line if that approach earns one ounce of approval for the order as a whole.

The house of Murnau

1222 September 13

It had been, from its start, a very long day. There is nothing, in all the world, worse for my head and my stomach than a roomful of prelates. Gerhard would laugh to read this, but it's true — give me a roomful of Aschenbach s and Landwerlens over a roomful of grasping churchmen, any day. At least with the Aschenbachs, you know they're measuring your shoulder blades for the knife, and you can take that as a given before you even pour the wine and start talking.

I was seated behind a carved and painted wooden screen, further sealed off on the sides by heavy drapes, with a roll of parchment and a quill, noting down anyone brought before Marzone who smelled even slightly suspect. Uncle Leopold, of course, stood at his shoulder, eyeing everyone down that nose of his and being as intimidating as possible, though he couldn't take notes. This was not anywhere near as easy as I thought it might be. The stink of piety was rather thick, and can be functionally indistinguishable from other, fouler odors; only with concentration could I tell them apart. About midday, after tasting nearly every flavor from "righteously not bathed yet this year" to "bathed in every form of sweet oil known to man just for this audience," I began to heartily miss Sister Teresa. She always smelled of roses, not strongly enough to choke or sicken, but gently. Especially after an amazingly fat bishop wandered right past my hiding place, I would have given my life to breathe the air she walked through.

My eyes were watering and my nose was running by the time the last one left, and Uncle Leopold let me out from behind the screen. He gave me a little square of linen to mop my face with and took the roll of parchment from me, then suggested that we retire to his chambers to talk. I'm certain that he had some ideas he wanted to exchange; in fact, there were some things I wished to discuss with him, as well. I was troubled in more than just body, by that time, and I admit having a certain desire to be comforted. The list I had compiled bore nearly ten names and even I was shaken by some of them.

Uncle Leopold opened the door to his chamber and the stench that rolled out to meet us was beyond anything I had ever smelled before. For an instant, I thought that a midden had flooded and overflowed into his rooms, the odor was so horrible and so unmistakable. I staggered

back, tears flooding my eyes, and I heard Uncle Leopold choke as it caught him unawares. Then his hand found the rosary hanging from his belt, and closed around the crucifix attached to it. He spoke words in Latin, and the stench thinned; he spoke them again, more angrily, and it dispersed entirely. I made him let me go first into his room, my sword drawn, not that there was anything for me to use it on. I lit the candles, and then one of the lamps; not even a ghost of the stench remained, only a simple cot, a worktable with books on it, and a chair. Uncle Leopold entered and looked about, frowning at his worktable.

Sitting in its center was a small book, bound in leather stained a peculiar shade of reddish-brown, its cover handsomely tooled in a pattern of vines and leaves, highlighted here and there in gold. Embossed amid the vines were the words Libellus Secretum Sartaelis, likewise highlighted in gold. Next to it was a note, folded neatly and sealed with wax, labeled "Leopold" in a neat, careful hand. Uncle Leopold paled to see it and snatched it up before I could see whether the wax was stamped. He broke the seal with shaking hands. The note consisted of a single phrase: "Happy Birthday, my brother," and was signed, very simply, "Wilhelm." Uncle Leopold went utterly white and, even as I watched, seemed to age a dozen years in a heartbeat; he ordered me out of his chamber, his voice shaking, and I went, feeling suddenly very empty and alone. I had never before seen my Uncle Leopold afraid, and this man had faced my father, my aunt, Marzone, and probably a demon or two with equal courage. Altogether a day of exceedingly poor omens.

— From the journal of Otto von Murnau

The Oculi Dei have a distinctly unflattering code name for the Bavarian nobles of Murnau: "the coursing hounds of Hell." If the Murnau knew of this they would, no doubt, be enormously offended, no matter how well the name might fit. No one knows, precisely, how the Murnau came to suffer the affliction they labor under. Legends within the family are numerous, suggesting everything from a baneful curse hurled at the founder of the house by a defeated witch, to that same respected ancestor's wife accidentally slipping between the sheets with a demon lover englamoured to resemble her lord, and all of the possible permutations in between.

The Murnau first came to the attention of the Inquisition through one of their own, Leopold of Murnau, who serves as one of the Inquisition's most thorough and capable agents from within the Dominican Order. Leopold went to Rome seeking assistance in ferreting out the source of a deep taint he sensed within the Church itself. En route he met Cardinal Battista Marzone, then only beginning the

titanic effort of organizing the shadow Inquisition and being struck by the realization of how wide a scope that organization would require to have any effect at all. Leopold originally offered only his personal assistance to the fledgling effort. It took the impetuousness of his nephew, Otto von Murnau, in defense of Sister Teresa of the Sisters of St. John, to involve the family in the enterprise. Cardinal Marzone was perhaps justifiably surprised to discover that an entire family possessed exactly the same sort of sensitivity to diabolic forces; if so, he didn't fail to appreciate all the implications of having their assistance at his disposal. After extensive negotiations with Frederick von Murnau, Leopold's vounger brother and current head of the House, the family entered into the fight as the first of the shadow Inquisition's "lay orders."

Since then, the Murnau have provided extensive assistance to the fledgling Inquisition, supporting it both personally and materially. Murnau family members serve in several different capacities, both clerical and lay. Unlike the members of the Inquisition's clerical orders, the Murnau can be many things at once — a scion of Murnau, a Dominican preacher, a Benedictine nun, a Teutonic Knight, or a member of any of the lay religious foundations. In a nonclerical capacity, the Murnau provide a valuable support network for the shadow Inquisition, providing a web of contacts among their family allies and distant relations in various cities, safe houses from among their numerous properties, and financial support. Most importantly, however, the Murnau brought themselves and the sensitivity to the occult that drove so many of its members either to the heights of personal piety or the depths of personal depravity.

Publicly, the Murnau are a well-respected noble family of the Holy Roman Empire — not its largest, its most powerful or its most wealthy. The entire family numbers somewhat fewer than two hundred, scattered across the empire either by marriage or by vocation. Vassals to the Duke of Bavaria, they have maintained their position amid the vicissitudes of the empire's politics through shrewd diplomacy, strategic alliance marriages, and a highly refined sixth sense when it comes to the incipient moral lapses of their fellow nobles. Thus far, no one suspects that this "sixth sense" is anything more than a talent for reading the direction of the political winds. Leopold the Bear (Leopold and Frederick's father) had a mind like a well-honed knife, loyal enough to his feudal superiors to be relied upon, and smart enough to know when to cut his losses. He THE COURSING HOUNDS OF HELL

he Murnau have provided much in the way of flexible human resources for the Inquisition. Besides offering eyes, ears, hands and recruiting agents in the mendicant, monastic and lay religious orders, numerous members of the family have dedicated themselves to the fight.

Otto von Murnau is the current Murnau liaison with the shadow Inquisition. He is the second-eldest son of Frederick von Murnau, current head of the family. Otto, until taking on his duties as inquisitorial liaison, suffered from a problem common in all ages — invisible middle child syndrome, neither as important as the heir, nor as explosively noticeable as his hotheaded younger sibling, Gerhard. He is not particularly graced with personal piety but instead possesses a level head and a rather desperately earnest desire to do his family honor. Often, he tries just a little too hard to accomplish that task....

Franziska von Murnau is Frederick von Murnau's twin sister and the uncontested ruler of the Murnau family roost when her brother is not in residence. Franziska is iron-willed, completely devoid of nonsense, and frequently widowed — her husbands invariably suffer the worst sort of luck with horses, great heights and sharp objects. She is also tragically childless, enormously personally wealthy, possessed of estates in both Hungary and Burgundy, and willing to dole out both copious amounts of mentoring and material support to any hapless young inquisitors who happen to strike her fancy, as she has an abundance of parental instincts to vent.

Raganhard von Aschenbach had little idea what was happening to him when the Murnau curse first overtook him — he was, in fact, only vaguely aware that he was a Murnau relation, though his maternal great-grandmother. No other members of his family had ever evidenced any trace of the curse; the Murnau themselves had, in fact, almost forgotten that the Aschenbach relation existed. Raganhard's realization of the curse came at a personally terrible cost: He discovered that his much-loved elder brother had been seduced by diabolic forces, and he has been griefstricken and bitter ever since, even as he pursues the hunt for the creatures that consumed his brother's soul.

guided the family ably through the conflicts between Henry the Lion, at the time Duke of Bavaria, and Frederick Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor, without reducing the family either to bankruptcy or outlawry (no small feat). His acumen placed the family in good stead before he passed on, and his younger son Frederick has proved to be a more than capable successor to the Murnau family tradition of political survival.

The Murnau are, of course, also the heirs to a darker legacy, one that goads them more cruelly than the most outrageous political or financial exigency. It is true that no one knows where the Murnau family legacy comes from any longer; if anyone ever did know, it was either not recorded or it was deliberately forgotten, a fact that aggravates many younger Murnau. It runs in their blood like a quiescent poison, waiting for exposure to its completing element to trigger. When it meets that trigger, the senses of the Murnau sharpen, and they become preternaturally aware of the presence of the diabolically tainted, the supernatural, the un-human. That these accursed creatures become aware of them, as well, is one of the unpleasant prices they pay for their heightened sensitivity. Another is the physiological

effect. To the Murnau, the reek of evil is not merely a poetic metaphor. Diabolism stinks of the midden that hasn't been cleaned in years, the uniquely vile odor of rotting flesh and diseased blood; evil attempting to conceal itself can smell of sweet flowers unable to mask the underlying stench of spiritual defilement. Especially strong reactions can make the Murnau physically ill, as their bodies react with nausea to the evil they can sense. Such sweating and uncontrollable, shuddering chills are in no way ignorable.

The curse has driven the Murnau for more years than the Inquisition has existed. Before its advent, numerous Murnau relations entered Holy Orders in the desperate effort to escape the torment running in their blood, finding peace only behind the walls of the monastery or the convent. Nothing is more maddening than sensing deceit and corruption at every turn; than being unable to trust due to the niggling suspicion that something, somewhere is not right; than feeling the siren call of darkness — and not being able to decide if that call should be repulsive or seductive. Self-defense as much as piety has been their motive for pursuing any religious avoca-



From Generation to Generation

he passage of the Murnau curse is, of Scourse, a family affair — to them, much like the propensity for red hair and blue eyes, or for twins every other generation, which are quirks they also possess. Children of the women who marry "out" of the Murnau family have the best chance of avoiding the curse; for them transmission is rather hit and miss. Some married-out Murnau girls have children who never evidence the curse; with others, all of their children bear it. In some cases, the curse skips generations, turning up in grandchildren or cousins whose closest Murnau relation may be a maternal grandparent. Thus, not everyone who bears the Murnau curse necessarily carries the Murnau family name, and so the Murnau keep close track of their descendants and monitor them as closely as they practically can for signs of the curse. When such a child is found, the Murnau usually spare no effort to gain possession, often fostering their own distant relations, teaching them about the curse and how to go about concealing it from others.

Descendants of the direct Murnau male line invariably carry the curse, both male and female, including the line's bastard offspring. Pressure is often applied to Murnau children to marry early and remain faithful within their marriages; Murnau elders often point out, quite bluntly, that that's what your wife or husband is there for. The family does not smile kindly on curse-bearing extramarital mistakes. Frederick von Murnau, the patriarch of the family, is an exemplar of serial monogamy — marrying three times and producing from his various wives six sons and two daughters, with another child on the way by his current wife (a daughter of the Wittelsbach rulers of Bavaria who is younger than half of his children). Younger Murnau often mutter rebelliously about being used as "brood mares and stud bulls for the curse," an accusation with a certain amount of merit. Their elders reply that every generation must do its duty to continue the family line, especially one with a responsibility as important as theirs. No one knows how, when, or by whom the curse may finally be cleansed from the blood, but most accept that serving Holy Mother Church from within the Inquisition will certainly aid that effort.

tion. Günter von Murnau had a particularly refined case of violent piety, not only pursuing rumors of demons in the dark Bavarian forests but nearly bankrupting the family by founding a number of monasteries and convents across Christendom and offering generous boons to many more. His passion for the pursuit of good works inspired a whole generation of Murnau to take up arms in both public and private crusades, to commit themselves to the military orders, or to become the supporters and benefactors of the various monastic orders. The House's involvement in the Inquisition has further refined their focus, and finally exposed them to the assistance that may permit them to unravel the threads of the curse that binds them.

Murnau bloodhounds often find themselves the point men and women of the inquisitorial cells to which they've been assigned. They are typically first in, leading their fellows into danger, and last out, ferreting out the last scraps of spiritual rot. They are, even more than the Poor Knights, the *hunters* of the Inquisition, guided by beyond-normal senses to pursue leads that few others would consider worth the effort. Once engaged, the curse is not easily turned off, and it can also goad a Murnau inquisitor as well as guide him, forcing him to extremes in order to subdue it again. When this happens, the Murnau must often rely upon their cell-mates to help them remember what it is to be human and not the instrument of a decidedly dubious legacy.

Of course, not all Murnau prove equal to the price that their curse extracts from them, or capable of mastering all the weaknesses of the human spirit. The Murnau curse enhances their awareness of the supernatural. Some members of the family, for whatever reasons, allow their fine sense of sin to lead them down paths best left unexplored. Once a Murnau falls into darkness willingly, he rarely ever bestirs himself to climb back out again.

Christof von Murnau himself, founder of the House, fell from grace toward the end of his life. The curse overcame him, reduced him to madness and a husk of perverse self-abuse in an effort to still the sensitivity that plucked at his nerves with fingers of fire; by the time death took him, it came as a mercy. More recently, Wilhelm von Murnau, youngest sibling of Leopold, Frederick, and Franziska, lost—or never truly began—his struggle with personal darkness. Only a handful of people within the family remember that he didn't die in infancy, as is indicated in the family Bible. His siblings refer to him only as "our brother" and *never* speak of the things they found when they investigated the small

estate that Frederick had given him to administer. Occasionally, for his part, he remembers his siblings' birthdays.

It is the blackest fear of every Murnau parent that his child will become the next to fail the test and to fall into darkness. Such dread has fueled occasionally serious intergenerational conflicts within the family and resulted in severe discipline, a great deal of pressure to conform, and more than a few cases of flat-out rebellion. Frederick's youngest daughter, Matilde, rejected suitor after suitor until he finally broke down and permitted her to take Holy Orders. She has served the Inquisition as a Red Sister for six years, a happier ending than some, and contrasted sharply with her younger brother Gerhard, who took his horse and his armor and disappeared for more

CHAPTER-HOUSES

ike the Oculi Dei, the Murnau do not → have chapter-houses, per se. The House is a county of Bavaria; in practical terms, this means they are considerably land-rich. The family possesses at least a dozen castles or manor houses within their domains, at least three or four of which are in the personal possession and use of the family, others of which belong to vassals or stewards appointed to care for them. Similarly, the Murnau have married across the breadth of Christendom; many a Murnau inquisitor has found shelter in the household of a distant cousin or an in-law, or within the various monastic houses either founded or supported by Murnau endowments. Additionally, numerous Murnau servants and retainers also serve the Inquisition. Though lacking their masters' refined senses, these individuals nonetheless make valuable contributions to the cause.

The most important of the Murnau possessions is Castle Murnau, the family seat. Originally a simple tower keep, it has been expanded upon by successive generations to the sprawling monstrosity that it is today. The entire family may not be able to house themselves within its walls, but it's a near thing, especially if they were to put all the younger children in the attic. Of secondary importance are the Hungarian and Burgundian estates of Franziska von Murnau. As a loyal servant of the shadow Inquisition, Franziska's possessions often become the safe houses of itinerant inquisitorial cells looking for both help and safety.

than two years. He finally turned up again, penniless and with a collection of new scars, at the Burgundian estates of their aunt Franziska, having apparently spent those years on the tourney circuit in France. He has thus far steadfastly refused to do anything that resembles conformity to his father's wishes. He refuses to marry, or to at least take Holy Orders for the sake of his soul, and flatly refuses to lend either his extremely refined senses or his arm to the cause of the Inquisition.

That is, of course, the ultimate strength and weakness of the Murnau, all supernatural considerations aside. They are a family — the ties that bind are also the ties that strangle.

Oculi Dei

Credite nemini.

— Found scrawled on a scrap of paper, folded and left in the jaws of a lion statue on the grounds of the Vatican

If the Poor Knights are the shadow Inquisition's sword, the Holy Sisters its heart, and the Red Order its mind, then the Oculi Dei are, as their name implies, most certainly its eyes. Secretive to the point of invisibility, they lurk in nearly every major town and city across Christendom, from England to Hungary — ubiquitous and, they hope, almost all-seeing, all-hearing, and all-knowing.

The Eyes of God originated as an extrusion of a Spanish military order, the Sword of St. James. Formed in blatant reaction to one Iberian nobleman's perception of the supernatural threat to the heart of Christendom, the Sword of St. James was a walking accident waiting to happen. None of its members, save their founder, had any direct knowledge of or contact with supernatural forces beyond a vague awareness that all was not right with the world and their founder's vigorous insistence that it was all the fault of night-walking fiends. In 1209, the Sword met its first genuinely unholy challenge and shattered, scattering to the four winds, shaken and nearly unmanned by their encounter with an actual vampire. The order's founder, Rodrigue de Navarre, was the most deeply shaken and scarred of all, but took one defining lesson from the disastrous collision with Xalbador.

One cannot expect to act openly and achieve anything when the enemy stands in the shadows and twists the world to suit his own ends. One must play the game better than one's enemy — and *never* act until that game is already won.

TRIUMVIRATE OF PUPPET-MASTERS

Rodrigue de Navarre has been less than totally pleased with the Inquisition from its inception. In his opinion, it still operates far too openly for the safety of any of its members; the Poor Knights of the Cross are a particularly enormous security risk. The suggestion has been made, more than once, that in them he simply sees a more heavily armed version of the Sword of St. James, which can accurately be defined as a complete failure on de Navarre's part. That this suggestion was made by Aignen le Libraire, de Navarre's longtime friend and brother-in-law, split the close alliance that had existed between them, and Aignen compounded the sin by volunteering the services of the Oculi Dei to the shadow Inquisition.

Rodrigue de Navarre still chooses, or at least approves the choice of, the majority of the Eyes of God operating in Iberia. From the center of his web in Pamplona, he tugs strands and pulls information to him, and then passes it on or withholds it as the situation seems to require. He also refers to Aignen le Libraire as "that damned traitor," among other unflattering things, and privately he hopes to see his former best friend receive a generous comeuppance when the entire holy enterprise blows up in his face.

Aignen le Libraire, for his part, mourns the circumstances that forced him to break ranks with de Navarre, but he still thinks his actions were for the best. The Oculi Dei represent a resource that cannot rest solely in the hands of a single man, particularly not a man as deeply emotionally broken as de Navarre has become. Deeply devout, Aignen realized at an early stage that the Inquisition would require better eyes than the ones they already had, and he set about making the Eyes of God indispensable to Cardinal Marzone. Le Libraire commands his Oculi from the city of Toulouse, the great Occitan hub of travel and commerce, where he owns a bookseller's shop that doubles as the Languedocien contact point for itinerant Oculi.

Lizia Montesi di Roma, the only daughter of a Roman merchant and his wife, was among the first women recruited by the Eyes. Recruited for her fine eye for detail and hard-minded practicality, Lizia has climbed to the top of the Italian Oculi hierarchy, a position acknowledged by both Aignen le Libraire and Rodrigue de Navarre. She runs arguably the tightest ship among the order, not only due to the supernatural menaces rife on the Italian peninsula but because they operate under the very nose of the Holy Office, an organization notably unfriendly to those they believe have something to hide.

Rodrigue de Navarre painstakingly put the pieces of the Sword of St. James back together again, and they achieved several minor victories of arms against the night-walkers and their minions. He has also, for the last twenty-odd years, used the group as an expendable blind for his more ambitious undertaking — the formation of the Oculi Dei, a lay confraternity of men and women devoted to identifying and rooting out the blood-drinking monstrosities that batten on the soul of Christendom. All of the most senior members of the order were originally members of the Sword of St. James, chosen for their personal loyalty to and belief in de Navarre's vision. He dispersed them to the farthest reaches of Christendom to begin the task of educating and recruiting others to the cause.

Thus the Oculi Dei have become, rather than fearless vampire hunters in shining armor, the common man. Whereas the Sword of St. James draws the eyes of the night-walkers with their obvious attempts at secrecy, the Eyes of God slip beneath the notice of all but the most discerning. The powerful, after all, rarely give much attention to the meek, who enter the halls of power through the servants' postern and launder the bloody sheets left after a night of indulgence. They scribe the letters dictated to them by fiends wearing the shapes of men. They measure, cut and embroider the clothing that covers pale flesh nothing will ever keep warm again.

For the most part, Eves of God come in two stripes. The vast bulk of the order consists of stationary agents, men and women anchored to the cities, towns and estates in which they live. These individuals are the lifeblood of the order. They are the stall holders and cookshop owners in the great fair towns, the apprentice silversmiths and the minor clerks, the maidservants of good households and the tavern prostitutes, the ladies of landholding knights and the consorts of highborn women. There may be as many as five to a town or as few as one. Few of them know one another by face or by name; their security precautions are elaborate, as befits both the secretive nature of their duties and the rampant personal paranoia those duties invariably engender. Those duties are simple. Watch. Compile your findings. Never act precipitately. Trust no one. Contact the Inquisition only when you feel that complete success is possible.

It was the stationary Oculi who developed the shadow Inquisition's method of coded communications, as well as the habit of using pictorial signs for the illiterate. They have also championed the use of verbal

FREEDOM AND NECESSITY

he original membership of the Oculi Dei consisted of Rodrigue de Navarre's most trusted inner circle of lieutenants, and their most highly favored underlings. Thus, like the Poor Knights, the Oculi Dei were initially almost entirely male. The decision to recruit women into the order was made after much internal debate and moral agonizing. On the one hand, some early members regarded women as being innately less security conscious, more prone to gossip, less liable to think clearly and more vulnerable to the unholy temptations that the night-walkers could bring to bear, should they be discovered or captured. On the other were the practical observations that not all night-walkers were male themselves, that some women arguably had brains beneath their hair, and that they could go places no male Eye should want to attempt (such as another man's bedchamber). The first female Eye of God was recruited, as an experiment, by one of de Navarre's Italian agents and acquitted herself so ably in her duties that the practice was officially adopted, to the disgruntlement of the more traditional members of the order.

and visual recognition codes when the members of two different inquisitorial cells meet. Contact with the Inquisition is often arranged obliquely; the stationary Oculi cell must usually make contact with an itinerant Eye, through a coded message left at a designated site for the exchange of anonymous communications, with the itinerant Eye doing most of the legwork to arrange the meeting. Even then, the Oculi cell usually only designates a representative to deal with their fellow inquisitors, in order to maintain maximum secrecy for the bulk of the cell. Most stationary Oculi do not know each others' names, referring to members of their own cell and to other inquisitors known to them by code names, often with obscure allusions and personal jokes worked into them. This gallows humor allows them to deal somewhat with the other terrible pressure of the order's position: frustration. It is no easy task that the Oculi Dei have undertaken. They are enjoined upon pain of expulsion from the order to take no action whatsoever, no matter what horrors they bear witness to, no matter what tragedies arise from their inability to act immediately. How well they deal with the moral agony this position imposes is what defines their longevity, both as individuals and as an order.

The other sort of Eye is, of course, the itinerant one. Less common than the members of a stationary cell, the itinerant Eye is also most likely to be the lone agent, the courier carrying inquisitorial correspondence between far-flung locales, the contact between inquisitorial cells, the teacher who shows up to instruct other inquisitors on new techniques to locate and deal with their foes. He (less often she) often follows a profession that permits him to travel without appearing overly suspicious — a merchant, a caravan guard, a professional courier, a condotierre — or claims to be on pilgrimage. In fact, one recognition code makes use of the major European

CREDITE NEMINI

odrigue de Navarre, now well past middle age, is possibly the most paranoid man in all of Christendom, a characteristic he has bestowed like a patrimony to nearly everyone who serves under him. The Eyes of God are not supposed to know anything about one another, that they may never betray their fellows should they be captured or questioned. Members of the order are supposed to be prepared to die rather than allow any secrets floating about in their heads to fall into the hands of the nightwalkers. They are supposed to be almost superhumanly capable of functioning over long years of thankless toil that exposes to them the worst excesses of the human and inhuman spirit, friendless, virtually alone.

The Eyes of God, however, are human and have the tendency to fall short of the ideal in any number of ways. Groups of stationary Oculi on guard over a large town or a city tend to be the most likely to break with strict inter-order secrecy, for practical reasons of intelligence compilation as well as for their own sanity. Not all Oculi are equally literate, but the unlettered pot girl at the local tavern is just as likely to turn up important evidence as the clerk skulking around the cathedral in hopes someone will dictate an incriminating letter to him. There must be at least one wholly literate member of any stationary cell to take depositions from his fellows, read and write coded correspondence, and compile the assembled information into coherent reports. And for this to happen, there must be at least nominal trust within the cell itself, even if all the members hide their faces behind veils, masks, and hoods when they meet.

pilgrimage sites, named in a certain order, to verify the identities of traveling Oculi acting as liaisons between inquisitorial cells. Mobile Eyes tend to make even others of their order acutely uncomfortable. Many of them have been extensively trained in genuine infiltration techniques that they practice even on their fellows; no small number of them have some sort of diplomatic experience in their pasts that grants them an even more jaundiced opinion of the human condition than average. Often, if a senior Eye wishes to test the functionality of a given inquisitorial cell, Oculi or otherwise, an itinerant Eye will be dispatched to insert himself into that cell's jurisdiction. This is done not only to observe their methods of operation, but to see if they are apt enough to catch him at it. If not, someone will almost invariably want to know why.

Itinerant Eyes are among the most secretive and paranoid of the shadow inquisitors, as well as those most deeply committed, for reasons likely to be both painful and personal. They *know* that should they be

CHAPTER-HOUSES

he Oculi Dei do not have "chapterhouses" in the same fashion as the clerical orders; in fact, the more paranoid among the Eyes look upon these places with a rather horrified fascination, waiting for something awful to happen to them. The fact that anyplace one returns to habitually is a place where one can be traced to, spied upon, ambushed, or captured is one of the first lessons ground into Oculi recruits. As a result, Oculi Dei "chapterhouses" tend to be mobile, randomly selected, and the location disseminated to the members of the stationary cell at designated information drop points — via coded messages left in the bases of statues or pictorial graffiti created in the marketplace — usually only a short time before any meeting occurs. Itinerant Eyes make use of these same drop points, the locations of which they are hopefully informed of before being dispatched to a given town or city, to arrange for contact with its stationary Oculi cell, and to leave correspondence, and to collect any that is outgoing. These drop points can be anything from the aforementioned hollowed-out statue bases, to market stalls, to the boles of trees on forested estates, to the haylofts of stables, and often they constitute the closest thing to an Oculi Dei chapter-house.

captured, the best they can hope for is a messy and painful period of torture, followed by an equally unpleasant death. Almost no one knows who they are. Until they are deployed in the field, they are also kept deliberately ignorant, or else are carefully fed a diet of misinformation that will harm no one, should it be pried from them. Should they fall, only Aignen le Libraire will mourn them, and even that isn't entirely certain. If being a stationary Eye is often an exercise in applied frustration and fear, being a mobile Eye is an exercise in loneliness, with few resources to fall back on other than what they carry within themselves.

The Oculi Dei are among the inquisitors most likely to burn themselves out in pursuit of their duty, no matter how close or loose the bonds between stationary Eyes, or how great the well of self-reliance possessed by the itinerant Eye. The things they witness cause them to sink into depression and despair. Many turn to drink to deaden their emotions, or to perverse behaviors of all varieties to release the pain that builds within them. The Oculi Dei code of silence is one of the hardest crosses to bear, as it relies heavily on the judgment of individuals and cells to decide when, and when not, to take action. One mistake in judgment can cost not only lives but souls, and these mistakes - the bad judgment calls, the blood that falls on their hands either way — haunt the Eyes in the small hours of the night. Of all the inquisitors, only the Eyes of God suffer genuine attrition due to deliberate suicide, as opposed to death from recklessness. The weight of their burden grinds down their will to live, and many perceive the only unforgivable sin as a lesser error than keeping silent for too long.

Problems

After years of thankless political labor on the part of its leaders, the Inquisition has finally reached the point where it can act as a more-or-less integrated force. It does so by officially ignoring the many remaining areas of disagreement among the five orders. After all, the reasons that originally prompted them to unify are still fresh and persuasive enough in the minds of most inquisitors to smooth over the worst strife. Still, cracks become visible from time to time, particularly when a new issue confronts the Inquisition as a whole.

The Blessed Teresa

Shortly after Sister Teresa's death in 1227, her order began mounting the inevitable canonization campaign. To most who actually knew Teresa, the

canonization seems inevitable as well. Although her visions were often highly disturbing and thus subject to the charge of being demonically inspired, she was without question an obedient daughter of the Church, traveling all the way to Rome especially to receive Papal blessing and approval; and she reportedly performed several miraculous healings over the course of her blameless life.

Politically, however, things are never so simple. For one thing, Teresa's canonization would make her the first inquisitor saint, which would greatly redound to the honor of the Sisters.

By this point, every order has its

own list of the fallen, martyred in the struggle, who they certainly feel merit some official recognition. Only a few could be considered nearly as qualified for sainthood as Teresa, but several may well prove worthy of the distinction of Blessed (a sort of intermediate degree). Whose requests are granted and whose rebuffed or shelved carries repercussions far beyond the actual question of canonization; such decisions are also considered a sign of which order most enjoys

Teresa was elevated to Blessed in 1228, possibly because of her rumored involvement in saving Pope Gregory's life, but the next step seems rather slower in coming. Marzone (who personally supports the Sisters' campaign but is leery of showing too much favor-

Marzone's favor... as

well that of the pope

himself.

itism) is currently gathering testimonials from important inquisitors throughout Europe both for and against the canonization. Gauthier de Dampiere has already submitted a deposition heartily in her favor, as has Otto von Murnau, but the recommendation the Sisters eagerly await from Brother Leopold has yet to arrive. He pleads a lack of time; in truth, he fears to write a testimonial when he knows his own impression of Teresa's sanctity is based more on instinct than on any specific incident he personally witnessed — a predicament that offends his keen sense of reason.

observed Teresa as they observe everyone else, no Eye of note has yet stepped forward to speak on her behalf. Indeed, some mutter darkly whenever the subject is brought up. The Eyes' easily stoked suspicions were aroused the moment they came across a copy of Teresa's final vision and discovered, buried within it, allusions to many a dark secret they themselves have been laboring — the hard way — for years to

Although the Oculi Dei must surely have

uncover. The debate surrounding Blessed Teresa has also become a touchstone for the somewhat larger argument about the proper role of the Sisters in the life of the Inquisition. To many, supporting Teresa's canonization amounts to an endorsement of those practices of her order particularly their use of the rite of exorcism and their scandalously frequent trips out of cloister -which seem most out of keeping with the modesty befitting a nun. Others insist

that it amounts to exactly the opposite, since, after all, with the notable exception of her pilgrimage to Rome, Teresa mostly kept to her eremitic convent, having her visions and communicating with the outside world largely through letters; a far more acceptable female lifestyle, so long as the visions don't turn heretical.

The Enes of God Open

The Oculi Dei are the Inquisition's newest recruits, but one would never guess it from the depth and breadth of their current involvement. After all, a crusade contra Diabolum enim et alii daemones necessarily consists of three parts: Detection, examination, and destruction... and the second and third hinge upon the successful completion of the first. Very quickly, the Inquisition went from having no idea the Eyes of God even existed to being unable to imagine doing the job without them.

Nonetheless, the integration of the order into the Inquisition's labors has been far from easy. The Eves themselves remain deeply reticent. Many let their fellow crusaders know from the start that no one, not even another inquisitor, is immune to the order's dispassionate scrutiny. Inquisitors used to freer cooperation with sibling orders have been greatly annoved and even disturbed by the Eyes' rigid insistence on anonymity, disguise, inscrutable ciphers and riddles and countersigns. Still more are torn between awe at the vast store of information the Oculi place at their fingertips and resentment at their newfound dependence on such information. Even months after an Eve has begun to work closely with a cell, she is still something of an outsider by definition. Slowly, gradually, here and there, as individuals prove their worth to each other in the thick of battle, some barriers dissolve — but there is a final line of trust many Oculi never allow themselves to cross.

The Eyes of God also have a far greater proportion of commoners among them than any other order, and they often end up unintentionally reenacting the class struggles of all medieval society with their clerical and lordly brethren. Indeed, many Oculi seem to hail from distinctly unsavory quarters, or so their detailed reports of sinful and diabolical activity suggest. Oculi disappear at a rate alarmingly quicker than most inquisitors. Are they dying — or going over to the other side? Scattered talk even circulates of Rodrigue de Navarre himself going mad. What happens if a man privy to almost all the organization's secrets enters a delirium? Whom might his loosened tongue betray?

Councilmen and procurators bridle at such rumors. Nonsense, they say; if the Oculi Dei were succumbing to temptation in such numbers, the whole Inquisition would have been crushed almost at birth. That it has not fallen yet thus testifies to the order's good faith... at least for the present.

The Holy Land

The bulk of the Inquisition feels that the Holy Land is lost to Christendom, at least temporarily. And though this is a fate any good Christian bitterly laments, far more urgent matters demand the Inquisition's attention. Demons stalk all the great capitals of the Western world, worming into kingly courts, tempting bishops into the vilest betrayals of vow and cure. Let what lies across the Bosporus take care of itself for the moment.

Many of the Poor Knights disagree. They want another Crusade now.

To some extent, this is perfectly understandable. The Order of the Poor Knights was fired in the hell-forge of the Crusades. Many of them bled their last to protect the holy places from defamation by Saracens and other even more terrifying creatures. Nor is it heresy to reason that a demonic rot at the heart of Palestine, which tradition places at the center of medieval world maps, will inevitably infect all of humanity if left untended. Many in the five orders feel obliged to support the Knights' desire for a Crusade even if it would deplete their own fighting forces. There is, after all, only one Jerusalem.

Still, most inquisitors find it exasperating, particularly those who prefer the organization avoid as much outside attention as possible. To their way of thinking, the Knights signed on and swore a holy oath to be the chivalrous protectors of the Inquisition, and then turned right around and stated their firm intent to gallivant around areas where the Inquisition doesn't even really operate. The pope, unfortunately, is of no help whatever on this issue; no pope will gainsay a call to Crusade, although he might refrain from pushing one if circumstances in Europe seem unpropitious.

Those Knights who have firmly attached themselves to a cell of inquisitors say they have no plans to abandon their comrades to the local devilry — much to their comrades' relief. And many inquisitors comfort themselves that however badly the Knights might want another Crusade, there's a sizable gap between wanting and having that it takes a mountain of gold to fill. But every time a rumor filters down that the Knights have been talking to

the Venetian bankers, or that ships are being chartered and provisioned, or that some king, prince or duke has made noise about a possible Crusade, folk get nervous all over again.

The Cainite Beresn

Although the Holy Office is clearly not prepared to accept this as fact, the Church has already all but killed the heresy in the Languedoc. True, Catharism persists for another century yet, but the movement's once considerable potential is sapped forever. Fire, sword and looting have accomplished what preaching did not.

This leaves the Cainite Heresy perilously exposed and bereft. In the days when Albigenses were tolerated, servants of the Heresy could recruit from a mass of people already committed to dualism and to rebellion against the Church, albeit in far more benevolent form. Although the Heretics' own rites are anything but benevolent, their secretive comings and goings were not in themselves viewed as cause for alarm by the feudal authorities, many of whom belonged to the Cathar church themselves.

The Inquisition professes itself delighted by this state of affairs — how could it do otherwise? But the Church's triumph also brings new troubles. The responsibility for inquisition is moving out of the hands of the bishops who, historically, addressed it sporadically at best, and into those of the Holy Office, which is quickly proving itself not only a powerful body but a frighteningly well-organized one as well. The chances of the Church at large stumbling onto the truth of the Cainite Heresy have never been greater. The Inquisition can no more allow this than can the Heretics themselves.

Controversy over how best to pursue the Heresy in the aftermath of the Albigensian Crusade has nearly splintered more than one cell. Those inquisitors who also have influence in the Holy Office or the secular clergy insist that they should direct further purges, as they can best determine how to move without endangering the public face of the Church. Other inquisitors insist with equal vehemence that it is precisely those who have ties to Holy Office and the secular clergy who should be keeping their noses clean and staying away from the fight. In either case, a new way of covering up group executions must be found, since the raging warfare that once made it easy to lose a few bodies here and there without notice largely ended with the Peace of Paris. There is talk of letting the blame fall on the petty lords of the area, or Albigensian holdouts from the mountains, or even Crusaders who came to do the pope's will and stayed around to loot.

The Inquisition also realizes that the Heresy has a reach far beyond the Languedoc. There may be a fair number of adherents in Lombardy, and in certain parts of the Holy Roman Empire. There are even whispers of corruption further south, deep within the Papal States. In any case, one can hardly doubt that as the foul Cainites are driven forth from the Languedoc those that survive will flee and attempt their blasphemies in neighboring lands.

Many of the inquisitor cells in the areas deemed most at risk, however, are loath to drop their current pursuits to pick up a new thread entirely. The Black Forest inquisitors see no reason to worry about some pale priest who *might* be arriving sometime soon when only last week a whole band of woodsmen and their families were savaged to pieces by demon wolves. Such folk generally greet bundles of helpful documents and advisory letters from their brethren in the Midi with something less than enthusiasm.

An even cooler reception awaits those fervent inquisitors who are presently leaving their accustomed haunts to follow the Heresy in its exodus across Europe. Although some actually manage to befriend the local cells — and none are denied the hospitality inquisitors feel obliged to show each other regardless of circumstance — all too often they make themselves obnoxious not only with their assumption that they know exactly what is behind the local atrocities, but also with their unintentional interference in ongoing investigations.

The Enemy Within

The most holy secret Inquisition is an institution charged with the duty of protecting the faithful from demonic influence, whenever or wherever it might appear. But what happens when demonic influence penetrates the very Church from which the Inquisition derives its power to judge?

For some, the answer is simple enough, and any attempt to complicate it represents in itself a particularly virulent and Hell-born heresy. If there is evil within the Church, it must be rooted out with even greater vigor than usual. To hesitate is to play into the Devil's hands.

It is because of these people (who are rarely simple-minded despite the simplicity of their opinion on this point, and may indeed represent the very beating heart of the Inquisition) that Marzone and the Supreme Council have not more widely shared all they know of the terrible depravities to be found

in the highest echelons of the Church. Marzone swore decades ago to defend Christianity with all his might, but as a cardinal and as a believer he recognizes that if his efforts knock out too many of the papacy's vital supports at once he will be responsible for destroying the one glimmer of light left to the world. The Church's credibility is at an all-time low (or seems to be; it actually has yet to reach its nadir), and credibility is exactly what it must have in order to hold the ailing body of Christendom together. The rudest prayers of a grubby but devout peasant's wife are heard by God; her voice weaves seamlessly into the general cry to Heaven. The community of the faithful cannot afford to lose even her, and so she must be able to believe in her Church.

As the Oculi Dei have an official policy of inaction and secrecy that is nicely in line with Marzone's current policy on this matter, he and the Supreme Council make extensive use of the order's talents to gather what information they can about those prominent churchmen suspected of demonic dabblings. The Eyes of God involved are enjoined by their solemn vow of obedience to the papacy not to reveal what they learn to anyone without permission of the Supreme Council.

Select inquisitors of other orders are being brought into the investigation as well, little by little. These men and women do their work devotedly, although the revelations they encounter may shock them to the core, but they do not yet realize the price of the trust being placed in them. In years to come, they find their freedom constricted by official meddling: Their attempts to move to other dioceses and work with fresh companions may be frustrated, or they may even be promoted out of active duty, or, conversely, sent into ever more hazardous assignments.

Though the Inquisition manages to pick off suborned bishops here and there as opportunity permits—as well as some wealthy abbots, Templars, and Hospitalers, even a lesser cardinal or two—many years will pass before the leadership feels ready to strike at the deepest roots of the corruption. Yes, the present pope can be trusted implicitly, but he might die at any time and be replaced by an antipope, or even a legitimate pope who simply hates the Inquisition for whatever reason. Thus, Marzone and the Council believe that any plan that ultimately depends on his cooperation for its success is too risky to pursue.



Unknown to Marzone and the Council, however, a number of underlings not privy to their secrets already guess the worst. Visionary Sisters have had peculiar experiences while hearing Mass said in Rome. The Red Order has rebuffed friendly approaches by any number of suspect characters hoping for access to forbidden lore, then, out of curiosity, poked around to see who actually ordered the overture. More often than the Order cares to admit, the trail leads back to some great man of the cloth. The Knights discovered some time ago that not every legate who hires one of their number out for protection is free of odd political entanglements. And as for the Murnau, they can bloody well *smell* that something is deeply wrong in the Lateran.

To those who truly believe they serve the one incorrupt and inviolate arm of the Church, the Inquisition's continuing reluctance to squarely confront the terrible truth that so many now suspect is a source of great anguish. They may come to regret their order's vow of obedience to the Inquisitor-General. They may raise their voices in loud dissent. They may even break off from the larger body completely and begin their own private campaigns of justice. Alas, in trying to protect the Church which it views as the very font and shield of hope, the Inquisition may well end up splintering under the weight of its own self-contradiction someday.

Mired Cells

In the early days, while the Inquisition was undergoing its process of accretion, most inquisitor cells were made up of members of one, at most two orders. Although the five orders frequently consulted each other for information and special assistance, by correspondence and in person, their members did not come together on the front lines. The Inquisition operated as more of a confederacy than anything else, sharing resources as necessary—and only as necessary.

This has been changing. Marzone realizes that the Inquisition will never perform up to its potential so long as the orders misunderstand and even mistrust one another. He also realizes nothing can substitute for face-to-face contact, and that lifelong friendships can be sealed during one dire battle. As a result, he has sent out several mandates both encouraging inquisitors of various orders to join forces and praising successful examples of such collaboration. His shining example is the partnership of Leopold von Murnau and Sir Baudioun le Breton (a more disparate pair can hardly be imagined, yet

somehow they move as one and no demon can stand against them).

In some quarters, his persuasion is hardly needed. Where the forces of night are at their strongest, where the ranks of the Inquisition are thinnest, multi-order cells have formed out of sheer necessity. In other places, local Councils have put such cells together as test cases and claim to be greatly pleased with the outcome. However, resentments are inevitable even under the best circumstances. There are veteran single-order cells of fierce loyalties who don't particularly want to break up or take in strangers just to satisfy some kind of organizational experiment. A Red Sister famed in her own order as a skilled spy cannot be expected to greet joyfully the insertion of an Eye of God into her cell. A Murnau who takes pleasure in being the noble rescuer of other inquisitors in his area will view a Knight's arrival as a veritable challenge d'honneur, a tacit insult to his prowess. And so forth. So far, the most harmonious mixed cells are still those who have found personal incentive to stick together and personal experience on which to base their mutual trust.

Mixed cells also run into unexpected conflicts over procedure. Although the steps of a proper inquisition have been set down clearly and formally, many order-specific assumptions still lurk, particularly in the details. This is especially so in areas where one order dominates the local Council of Faith. A Knight may set a fiend's library ablaze as a matter of course, thinking he's doing the world a great favor, only to be astounded by the fury of his Red Order colleague. Doesn't he know always to look at the creature's books first, to see if they hold any important clues about other infestations? Of course, the Knight has the excuse to fall into a fury of his own when the Brother sees no compelling reason to wait for some moldy old finger-bone to be brought in from dozens of miles away just because the fetishistic Knight doesn't want to wade into battle without it.

The Martyrdom of aignen

An even sorer point is the matter of Aignen le Libraire, second-in-command of the Oculi Dei, who — irony of ironies — becomes one of the Holy Office's first official victims in 1231. After days of torture, he confesses to being an Albigensian *perfectus* and leading a number of Christian lambs into error, although the Holy Office is unable to track down most of the names he gives under the question. Those they do track down largely turn out to be dead already (never ones to be dissuaded by earthly finalities, the Holy Office has the bones dug



THE FUTURE

he martyrdom of Aignen le Libraire is included here as a story seed and as part of the "official" future of the shadow Inquisition. Individual troupes, however, should consider this event to be as inviolate and unchangeable as any other metaplot event — that is to say, not at all. If your chronicles require that Aignen le Libraire dies sooner, later or not at all, feel free.

up and burned regardless). At least a dozen of Aignen's faithful Eyes of God from throughout the Languedoc risk their own cover to be present in the crowd at his execution — showing their faces so that he may be comforted in his last moments by their silent witness.

To the Inquisition, this comes as a thunderbolt blow. Aignen's death leaves an enormous void in the crusade's leadership, as Rodrigue is practically a hermit these days — and yet that isn't the worst of it. Most inquisitors accept without question that they may die any night at the talons of the demons and those who serve them. But that Aignen should be struck down by the Church itself, and more horrifyingly, by their sibling organization within the Church, reveals to many just how alone the secret Inquisition truly is, papal decrees to the contrary notwithstanding.

Of course, few give the slightest credence to the charges against Aignen, particularly among those Eyes of God for whom he was father, protector and unofficial confessor all in one. It must have been a tragic error. He was austere and thin like many perfecti, the scion of an old family of Toulouse, and he must surely have seemed to the Holy Office to be hiding something — indeed, the story goes that he was caught burning a book in cipher, which he politely refused to turn over when the Holy Office broke in upon him. As for his "confession," clearly he simply folded under torture, or perhaps even deliberately held out for a plausible period, then gave a false confession so as to protect his real secrets. Even Rodrigue de Navarre, who called Aignen a traitor for years for revealing the Oculi Dei's existence to the papacy, insists upon the man's innocence.

Much as it pains Marzone, who agrees with de Navarre, he does not feel he can afford to step forward and officially petition for Aignen's posthumous rehabilitation. The secrecy of the shadow Inquisition is far more important than the fate of one inquisitor's life, or even of one inquisitor's soul. Naturally, the Eyes of God resent this as one more slight against them as an order and as "mere" laity... even though they understand better than anyone else how right Marzone is. After all, they fervently believe that Aignen died to protect their identities. Much as they would like to trust the Holy Office, there's no way to know it has escaped corruption. Indeed, some of the more paranoid Oculi view Aignen's martyrdom as proof positive of a sinister hand.

Marzone has spoken informally to the pope, who is sympathetic, but counsels waiting some years before taking action. For the pope to reverse the Holy Office's verdicts so soon would undermine the authority of the newborn institution just when it most needs his support, and it's simply not worth it. God knows the truth of Aignen's soul, he assures Marzone. Let it wait just a few years. Once the heresy is dead in the Languedoc, much that is wrong now can be set right.

The Oculi Dei, used to forming their own conclusions, have made a far bolder move. One of their own with ties to the Holy Office has arranged to get hold of Aignen's remains, which are to be transferred to a family estate just outside Toulouse and buried in consecrated ground next to the bones of his ancestors. In years to come, the site becomes an unofficial Oculi Dei shrine: the ultimate monument to the lonely and unsung, but (hopefully) holy fate which any Eye of God, great or small, might meet.

Philosophy's Consolation

He turned to me and asked whether, if my own eye offended me, I would pluck it out. I said so our Lord had commanded. He asked me was it not true that God had also commanded Abraham himself to kill his son Isaac on the mountaintop. I agreed it was so, but hastened to add that God in His mercy had provided a substitute sacrifice at the last moment. He glanced once more at the babe in his arms and asked mockingly of it why God did not do the same now, and before I could move he had tossed it into the canal. I did not know then that his wife was already dead. I beg mercy for my brother inquisitor; if he is mad then perhaps we are all mad from our grief and burden, and my nights are spent praying, wondering if perhaps I too have shed innocent blood in a delirium I likewise took for ardor....

— from the deposition of Zanino Turri, Poor Knight of Acre, to the Venice Council of Faith

To the modern mind, the historical Inquisition stands as the archetypal example of oppression and

murder cloaked in a guise of piety. The idea that a person can be "saved" by torture or burning is now almost universally rejected; that inquisitors could and did perform such deeds can only mean that they were bloodthirsty, superstitious, maddened by repressed lusts or simply out-and-out evil.

Inquisitors would beg to differ. From their perspective, they are holy warriors selflessly devoting their careers and lives to the protection of Christian souls. The inquisitors of the crusade *contra Diabolum enim et alii daemones* feel even more strongly about the righteousness of their endeavor. This section is intended to help explain how rational, moral human beings can believe the things that inquisitors believe, as well as the implications — both benign and dangerous — of those beliefs.

The Park Ages?

A common misconception holds that reason more or less vanished from the Western world with the fall of the Roman Empire and didn't reappear until the Renaissance; the Middle Ages was nothing more than a doldrums in the evolution of human ideas. In fact, medieval Christian thought is as much the child of classical philosophy as of mystic revelation. The medieval Church produced many brilliant minds whose powers of logic were as formidable as anyone's in any historical period: Aquinas, Boethius, etc.

It is true that the basic tenets of Christianity were held to have been divinely revealed. Therefore, a direct statement from Scripture itself (or, tellingly, from a Church council) was not subject to refutation by logic. "Natural reason" was, however, considered an admirable tool for exploring and applying the essential truths. Much of the Greek philosophers' work had been lost to the West since the fall of the old Empire; precious few folk could even read the language anymore. Still, what was known of neo-Platonic thought was reverently imitated by Western scholars, and the Crusaders rediscovered a great deal of scholarship that the Islamic tradition had preserved. The 12th century in particular enjoyed a great intellectual flowering, accompanied by restless spiritual inquiry at all levels of society. Heresy was simply the most threatening incarnation of the questing spirit of the age.

Medieval thinkers also had a remarkable ability to pursue a line of reasoning all the way to its logical end, even if that end seemed extreme, inhumane or simply unworkable. It was partly this ability that made the worst horrors of the historical Inquisition possible: The stake was, for far too many, the logical end.

Mother Church

In the Dark Medieval, faith alone saves. Good works, while they serve as important proof of inner conviction, are not the basis on which souls are judged. All men sin and fall short of the glory of God, it is written; but God, in His infinite forgiveness, has provided the sacraments of communion, confession and extreme unction, which — when performed by one of the anointed — assist a man back to reconciliation after his inevitable stumbles. This benefit, however, is extended to the faithful only. A man without faith is a man without shelter from God's just wrath. Even the smallest sin imperils his immortal soul.

The question then becomes: What is the faith, exactly? Who are the faithful? To the devout men and women of the Church, this is not mere academics. They truly believe that on the day of reckoning, they will be called before the very throne of God to answer for the fate of all the human souls that their vows charge them to shepherd. They will personally be held culpable for those lost to mercy. Therefore, from their point of view, it is impossible to give too much attention to the debate over what is Christian belief and what is not — or to what goes on in the minds of their flock.

It's likewise important to remember that being a Latin Christian is not simply an individual bond with one's Creator. It also confers membership in a globe-spanning community of the faithful — the spiritual heirs of the old martyrs and saints. The Roman Church makes particular note of Jesus' words to Simon Peter: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven."

As the Latinization of Peter, Petrus, means "rock," clearly Jesus meant Peter to become the very anchor of all the faithful, His earthly vicar. As Peter was bishop in Rome and met his martyrdom there, it then follows that all subsequent bishops of Rome — that is to say, the popes — must claim his mantle. It is this apostolic authority that gives the pope and his clergy the right to settle questions of the faith, the right to ordain the only true priesthood. (It is worth noting, however, that at this date the infallibility of the pope on doctrinal matters has not yet become an explicit and official pillar

of Church belief. The Sacred College still likes to claim it can countermand him.)

To be orthodox, then, is to enjoy the protection of Christ's own successors, who alone hold the keys to the sacraments by which salvation is attained. It is only within the community that Grace can be found. This partially explains why such fear and revulsion greet a sentence of excommunication.

Moreover, the sacraments, Masses, holidays, pilgrimage sites, relics and rituals bring Catholics together in an entirely practical sense. They constitute in themselves a kind of mother tongue which all Latin Christianity shares. Indeed, Mother Church likes to view Herself as the one power holding the world itself together, and with good reason. When the Roman Empire collapsed and its territories were plunged into war and chaos, who held back the warlords from their worst excesses? Who reminded them that even kings must one day answer to a higher power? Who taught the gentle virtues to the barbarian invaders? Who preserved the precious old books behind monastery walls against fire and sword, who established the universities? Who built hospitals to tend the sick and cathedrals to bring communities together, safe way stations for travelers and pilgrims? Who provided useful occupation for the extra sons, daughters, and widows of the world? If Mother Church were to fall, who would take up these duties? Surely not the proud and rapacious nobility; surely not the ignorant and helpless peasantry! And if Mother Church seems at times to assume temporal powers not entirely befitting, one can hardly fault Her for it. She must be able to support and defend herself, or She would become beholden to earthly potentates. She would soon be reduced to a mere puppet, and could no longer stand with a free will against the world's evils.

Under such circumstances, it seems only sane to conclude that the fate of the world — material and spiritual — hangs on the fortunes of the Roman Church. A threat to the Church's stewardship of souls — whether it comes from a black-garbed perfectus in Toulouse or a blood-drenched creature of darkness in Manchester — is a threat to civilization itself. And what sacrifice too great to save civilization itself?

Trouble in Paradise

On the other hand, if this is all the case, then how is it that sane people could become heretics, or allow themselves to be influenced by heretical ideas? Why would an Inquisition ever be needed in the first place?

The answer lies in the fact that Christianity has never been the monolith the Church likes to envision. From its earliest days, different branches of the Church disagreed on seemingly vital points and took fundamentally different approaches to doctrine. Some revered theologians were declared heretical in retrospect, after long respectable careers; but even among those that escaped anathema, points of disharmony can be found. (indeed, the four Evangelists themselves give slightly different versions of the same events in the Gospels). The scholarship of medieval Europe venerates precedent and authority, but when the authorities themselves disagree, chaos ensues. Debates on any subject often take the form of adversarial quoting from opposing sources, and religious debates are notoriously bitter and tangled. In the ensuing confusion, even the devout might wander unawares into heterodoxy, or find themselves at the very least tongue-tied.

Consider, for instance, the problem of refuting Catharist doctrine. The Church condemns Catharism as a dualist heresy. "Dualism" refers to two basic, intertwined concepts: first, that the spiritual aspect of Creation is by nature good and the material, fleshly aspect by nature evil; second, that these separate aspects of Creation were brought into being by two opposed principles, one of which intended mankind to enjoy the divine joy of pure immortal spirit and the other of which thwarted that design by trapping mankind in base flesh. The latter belief is a clear affront to orthodox Christianity's monotheism, which insists that only the one true God can create. The former defies the orthodox notion that the one true God is by definition all-good and can only create good things; that evil comes about only when men or angels rebel against the will of God and pervert His good Creation to their own purposes.

(The Cainite Heresy is also a dualist faith, but it is not Catharism, although members of the Heresy who are caught either by the public or by the secret Inquisition often try to pass themselves off as Cathars once they have failed to pass as Catholics. The Heresy's genius lies in painting vampires, who after all do not breathe, eat food or reproduce, as beings of pure spirit; the representatives of the good Creator in fact, who can bring mortals into the light — in exchange for blood-offerings, of course. More attention is given to the Inquisition's views on the Heresy later in this section. For full coverage of the Heresy's tenets and practices, however, see Cainite Heresy.)

And yet, notions that come dangerously close to dualism are not foreign to the Roman Church either. Perhaps it was irreversibly "infected" with strains of Matters Transdanubian

Ithough it makes several value tempts, the shadow Inquisition tempts, the shadow far into never manages to penetrate very far into Eastern Europe. For the most part, inquisitors in those lands must operate almost entirely without support or protection; the Swordbrothers of Livonia and the Teutonic Knights, though charged by the papacy to serve the faith, are far too occupied with the bloody business of converting human beings to lend much aid to a crusade against the demonic in their nominally Catholic domains — even if the hair-raising stories they tell their guests and each other suggest that much remains to be done in that regard. Farther east, the Orthodox Church gains primacy. Orthodox clergy can be downright hostile to obnoxious missionaries from the barbarous West troubling their flocks (holy mission or no holy mission). Then there are corners of Eastern Europe where even the Orthodox Church has not yet triumphed, where ancient pagan faiths — some innocent, some infused with dark otherworldly strength — still cling tenaciously to life. Even among the Christian peoples of Eastern Europe, there is an unexpectedly tolerant attitude toward dualist heresies, perhaps because the old pre-Christian Slavic faith was rather dualistic itself. Some inquisitors fear for this very reason that the Cainite Heresy will easily spread in that direction, but there seems little to be done about it for now.

Zoroastrian, Manichaean, and Docetist thought long ago — before the searing Christological battles of the first several centuries AD brought about an insistence on absolute uniformity of doctrine and the Church became an overarching secular power. Christian legends abound of saints and martyrs who denied the flesh in various dramatic ways, from sitting atop pillars for years at a stretch to joking at their own torture sessions. Christ Himself seemed to exhort anyone that would follow Him to give up all worldly possessions and trust in God to provide the moment's needs; thus the mendicant orders, the Dominicans and Franciscans, in their disavowal of property and their itinerant preaching, are simply doing their best to imitate the Savior. (It's partly for this reason that they are chosen to lead the newly formed Holy Office. Unlike the luxurious Cistercians, who made a rather unappetizing impression when first sent to Languedoc to woo the heretics back to the fold, the mendicant friars can actually compete with the asceticism of the Cathar perfecti.)

An outsider could well argue that for a faith that insists that flesh is not inherently evil, the Church spends a great deal of time condemning some of its most enjoyable uses. If the flesh is not evil, Cathars might cry, why do the pope's own clergy say that they must be celibate in order to belong to the spiritually elect? True, the idea of a second, malevolent Creator might shock a potential heretic at first; but on the other hand, it provides an elegant answer to the question of why such cruel suffering is permitted to exist in a "fundamentally good" world — a point on which Catholic priests often cannot satisfy themselves, much less anyone else.

Such seeming problems mean that the Dominicans must exert their theological skill all the more to explain why, for instance, it is admirable for John the Baptist to live on berries and wild honey but silly for Cathars to be vegetarian. For many ordinary believers, the *perfecti* with their quiet manners and austere ways seem much closer to the apostles of old than the local bishop with his brocaded vestments, his hunting holidays and mistresses; often, the simple evidence of their eyes carries more weight for the Flock than the most delicate biblical exegesis.

Furthermore, this time in history is rife with soulful stirrings, particularly a yearning to return to the imagined purity of the primitive Church. Layfolk and clergy alike notice the growing odor of corruption rising from the monasteries and the prelates' palaces. Reformers like Francis, whose eccentric behavior and grass-roots agitating might easily have gotten him excommunicated rather than canonized had he not gone out of his way to place himself in the pope's good graces, to work from within the system. People like Peter Waldo may try to work from within at first as well, but when they find their disagreements with papal authority too severe, or when they take offense at hearing their strivings condemned, they rebel. The underlying need, however, is kindred, and it may be a fine line indeed that divides the saint from the heretic.

Many of the heresies of the period, Catharism included, promise to satisfy this widespread nostalgia for the simple faith of the martyrs. They also promise to fulfill a deeper craving, felt by many who are excluded from as deep a participation in religious life as they might wish. Women who can never hope to

say Mass can become *perfecti* and know themselves equal to the male clergy of their faith — or, at least, closer to equal than a Catholic nun or priest. Waldensians have the privilege, which the orthodox largely do not, of reading Scripture in their own tongue. Poor folk who cannot scrape together the traditional offering for taking holy orders can make heretical ascetics of themselves at no cost. Mother Church is certainly not blind to Her peril and convenes the Fourth Lateran Council in an effort to stamp out clerical abuses and reduce doctrinal confusions; but the lure of heresy still shines bright.

Definitions

Simple heresy is, of course, the province of the newborn Holy Office. Marzone's inquisitors frequently run across heretics while investigating far viler depravities. However, they rarely take it upon themselves to mete out judgment to Cathars and their ilk. For one thing, they have no wish to duplicate able efforts already being made in other quarters. For another, every off-thebooks condemnation is one more risk of exposure. Most, however much they might hate heresy, are not prepared to jeopardize their own cause in order to destroy it. Instead, they usually arrange for an anonymous denunciation to be made to the local Dominicans. And they may wait to do even that until they are sure the area has been cleared of all darker threats. Inquisitors greatly fear the possibility of their unwitting comrades-at-arms stumbling into trouble beyond their strength.

The Inquisition contra Diabolum enim et alii daemones has made some effort to clearly distinguish its jurisdiction from that of the Holy Office proper, although its admittedly incomplete understanding of the enemy makes this process difficult. To a certain extent, it's easier to define what the Inquisition is not; to that end, the major categories of offense against Holy Mother Church are listed below, along with the Inquisition's overall attitude toward each.

• Heresy: Refers to any self-identified Christian belief or doctrine that knowingly contradicts what is acceptable to the authority of Holy Mother Church. The beliefs of many night-creatures and their human followers certainly qualify as heresy, and could thus be prosecuted by the Holy Office. However, the Inquisition does its best to see that most such cases are brought to a satisfactory end long before the Holy Office or anyone else even less well-armed against the world's evils notices them.

Note that a person who has been taught a heretical belief and simply doesn't know any better is not a heretic technically, but an erring soul for whom Christian mercy prescribes education. It is only when a person has been shown the true doctrine and still refuses to believe that she enters the legal category of heresy — the word heresy refers to "choice," meaning that a heretic must have made an informed decision to rebel.

• Schism: A somewhat weaker pejorative than "heresy." It simply means any rancorous division between groups of the same Church, not necessarily doctrinal. When rival popes arise, for example, the obedience of each refers to the other's obedience as schismatic. The entire Eastern Church is still viewed by the Roman Church as schismatics, and regular formal pleas are made for them to reconcile with their true spiritual father, the pope. However, schismatics are still recognized as fellow Christians, who merit more compassion and respect than heathens or heretics. (After all, the Crusade itself is billed partly as an effort to save hapless Eastern Christians from the infidel's oppression; that Eastern Christians suffer as greatly from Crusader depredations as Muslims do is more the result of human greed and ignorance than of religious hatred.) Schism concerns the Inquisition not at all, except insofar as it hampers cooperation with the local faithful.

• Paganism: While paganism could be called an extreme form of heresy, it's not really thought of in the same way at all. When Churchmen condemn pagan practices, what they usually mean is holdovers from the pre-Christian religions of Western Europe, however innocent-seeming: Leaving milk out for the Good Folk, for example, or celebrating fertility rites for good crops, or telling stories about women who sneak out of their homes to ride with Diana under the cold moonlight. To the Church, these ancient beliefs are a disease that has nearly been stamped out, but vigilance must not lapse. The peasantry seems especially wont to hold on to heathen ways; in fact, the words "pagan" and "heathen" literally refer to people living out in the countryside. It is mostly up to local priests to convince their flocks to abandon these remnants and take up equivalent Christian customs, and neither the Holy Office nor the Inquisition really troubles itself with paganism per se in this period.



On the other hand, paganism can overlap with the supernatural and sometimes with *maleficium*. As a result, inquisitors — particularly those who specialize in dark cults and sorcerers — frequently take notice of anything going on around them that smacks of paganism, poking at it carefully to see if an inhuman hand might be moving just behind.

Pagan deities have been formally classed by some Church scholars as a second tier of demon, ranked below the mighty fallen angels that rebelled with Lucifer at the dawn of Creation. Fairies, goblins, kobolds and other "lesser" spirits of folklore form yet a third tier. Most Church officials treat this as an academic distinction: The Holy Office has its hands quite full enough dealing with "Christian" heresies, thank you. Cathars are far more immediately dangerous than some silly peasant's superstition. But inquisitors use this reasoning to justify pursuing any rumors of *strigae* or fairy magic that seem more than old wives' tales.

• Islam: "There shall be no compulsion in religion," decrees the Qur'an, and as a result, medieval Muslims are inclined to leave Jews and Christians alone. However, no Biblical scripture exhorts Christians to return the favor. Most Latin Christians consider Islam a heathen faith for all practical purposes; few take seriously the Muslim contention that the three religions of the Book all worship the same God. Islam has "earned" a special enmity among heathen faiths, moreover, by its long presence in the Holy Land and its bloody repulsion of the Franj invaders. Some inquisitors even suspect Muslim doctors and scientists, whose knowledge unquestionably outstrips that of the West, of harboring forbidden demonic secrets: Toledo, for example, still reportedly hosts a Muslim-founded university for warlocks (the Red Order, however, does not demonstrate the complete horror of Muslim occultism that its brethren seem to feel it should...).

By this point in history, any real hope of ultimately converting the Muslims has been abandoned by all but the most idealistic of missionaries — why, even St. Francis failed in the task. Total extermination is the new agenda, an agenda best left to secular men with literal swords. The Poor Knights hope to have recovered or at least safely hidden away the many important relics remaining in the Holy Land lest they be destroyed in the continuing carnage; but apart from that, they do not stand in the way of their fellow Crusaders and even join them when opportunity permits.

(Relations between Muslims and Christians are particularly complex in the Christian Spanish kingdoms as well as al-Andalus; Inquisition chronicles set in that area of the world are likely to be deeply affected by the interplay. Storytellers should consider consulting **Iberia by Night** or other appropriate resources in order to take advantage of the potential story hooks.)

• Judaism: Technically, it's not a crime to be a Jew in Western Europe. Jews are tolerated in the Catholic cities by long-standing tradition; indeed, they are even valued for their skills in such arts as medicine, gold-smithing, and money-lending (Christian bankers are still hampered by the anti-usury laws in this regard). However, harsh secular laws constrain their movements, their customs, their dress, and their speech. While Christians think of Jews as their spiritual ancestors — not heathens like the Muslims or the ancient Romans — most also consider Jewry collectively guilty of the Crucifixion. The hatred that seethes under the surface of normal relations erupts whenever a Crusade is called, or an epidemic breaks out, or a Christian child is found murdered.

Many inquisitors have dealt with the truly infernal long enough to take with a grain of salt the devilish myths circulating about Jews: that they have tails or horns, that they sacrifice Christian children in a parody of Calvary, that they poison Christians' wells. However, this is by no means universal. It's easy to believe outlandish things of a people whose ways seem swathed in secrecy, never mind that that perceived secrecy arises from an enforced separation supposedly instituted to protect both populations. At this date, mortal Christian occultists are only vaguely aware of Jewish mysticism, but enough information has leaked out to draw unpleasant attention of all sorts to those who practice it.

To make matters worse, evil creatures are often well aware of Christian suspicion and exploit it to throw investigators off their trail; operating out of a ghetto, for example, to frustrate and confuse an inquisitor's pursuit. So far, no one of importance in the Inquisition has thought to propose any sort of cooperation with either local rabbis or the Jewish laity. Most would look deeply askance at such an idea, despite its obvious merits.

• Maleficium: Refers to magic with harmful intent. The medieval attitude toward magic is more complex than it first seems, and it shifts over time. In imperial Roman times, witchcraft was classed as a secular offense — murdering someone with a wax effigy was qualitatively the same as doing it by any

other means. This attitude persists somewhat, even though many Churchmen believe that all magic ultimately comes from Hell. The Holy Office won't really consider *maleficium* its business until after the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, centuries hence; most witches and warlocks tried in this period are arrested by the secular authorities in response to complaints from neighbors.

The line between "magic" and "science" is nowhere near as clear as it will be in later ages, either. Some view astrology as a suspect art, but to many it's merely a matter of reading the correspondences God Himself set in the Heavens for all to see who can. Herbalism is likewise innocent of itself, although those with great skill may find themselves vulnerable to accusations of darker powers. This is why maleficium is such an important distinction. It can be relatively difficult to prove whether a tidbit of knowledge came from demonic sources, or not; it is far easier to judge the moral end to which that knowledge is used. Still, even benevolent arts are dangerous to practice too openly. People possessed of healing powers, for example, can claim that what they do is a God-given miracle. But should the Church choose for whatever reason to disavow them or should any suspicious misfortunes fall upon the community, those same miracles may come to be viewed in a very different light.

Most of the wise women, occultists, astrologers, alchemists and whatnot that the Holy Office ignores, the Inquisition leaves alone as well; however, they fall close enough to the inquisitors' area of concern to be worth keeping an eye on. Inquisitors know only too well that any of these people could be the dupe or stooge of something far darker. The more accusations of maleficium they hear from local folk, the more apt they are to pay attention. Often, such investigations result in a dead end: The miller's daughter died from complications of a hidden pregnancy, the cattle had an ordinary pox, the scribe's wife says he was always impotent anyway. But this hardly disproves the existence of real maleficium. Many inquisitors would rather chase any number of red herrings than risk the sin of ignoring a clear warning from God. Likewise, if innocents must suffer or die in pursuit of a threat to many Christian's souls, few inquisitors shy away from such unpleasantness.

• Demonolatry: "Supernatural" is a word with more meaning to modern ears than medieval, as the medieval world has a far less narrow idea of the "natural." If there were one term an inquisitor might actually use to describe the enemy, demonolatry —

literally meaning "the worship of demons" — might well be it.

It's worth noting here that there is a difference between the words devil and demon (in the technical usage, anyway). There is only one real "devil" (diabolus): Satan, the great Adversary, Lucifer, call him what you will, he certainly merits a category all his own. Daemon is from the Greek, where its original meaning was quite different. However, since orthodox Christianity recognizes only a few sorts of spirit-entity that aren't angels or evil — the Trinity, the Virgin, the saints, and the blessed dead — daemon makes a useful umbrella term for all the rest. Why Christianity and Judaism don't make more provision for spirits who serve neither God nor the Adversary is an excellent question.

The term "demon" has thus become confusingly (or conveniently, if you prefer) broad. The mightiest princes of Hell are fallen archangels, but the full spectrum covers everyone from Beelzebub down to Titivillus, patron demon of misspellings and mangled Latin. A demon has no body in the ordinary sense unless it steals one, but it can take seemingly tangible form whenever necessary — just because it seems to breathe, eat, and sleep doesn't mean it's not a demon. Lemures are the evil human dead, brought back to earth as minor demons to waylay the innocent; thus, nearly any creature who disappears or dies after leading an ordinary mortal life and then returns with strange powers is classed a lemure by Inquisition scholars.

If all these evil spirits would simply stay in Hell where they belong and never bother people, there would be no need for a secret Inquisition. But in order to defy God by destroying what He best loves, they have made it their raison d'être to drag humankind into damnation with them. Orthodox Christianity can conceive of no other reason for them to be skulking about the earth (rebelling against the Almighty is not a part-time occupation, after all). Their mere appearance is thus an attack against God and man that merits retaliation by any means necessary.

Consorting with demons or the Devil is not the same thing as heresy, even though it too represents a deliberate choice. One need not dispute that God is God, that Christ is the Savior or anything else essential to orthodox belief to truck with the other side. A mortal who has knowingly and deliberately done so is, in the eyes of the Inquisition, little better than a demon herself. Far more often, mortals are tricked into seeing the demon they serve as a god, an angel or a friend. In any such case, the Inquisition will not hesitate to do what it must.

Judgment Calls

Say what you will about my kind, little nun, but at least there is one moment where even I have no choice but to be absolutely honest with myself and my prey: When my serpent's teeth stretch toward the pulsing throat, when the blood trickles down my gullet with the warmth of spiced wine. When is your moment, little nun? Do you meet your prisoner's eyes as the pain begins? Do you inhale the ashes on the wind?

— from a letter signed *Daemona Alia*, sent to Sister Agnes of Kent

On the face of it, the Inquisition's duty is clear: To strive against the Devil, his demons and all those who serve them, whether wittingly or unwittingly. However, what ultimately qualifies as infernal is not universally agreed-upon. After all, in the largest sense, nearly everything that goes wrong in the world is the Devil's fault.

The Inquisition therefore tends to focus on a far more negotiable question when considering whether a particular evil falls under its purview:

Is there someone else who can, should and will deal with this problem?

The Inquisition rightly sees itself as an agency of last resort. It's not unknown for those inquisitors who also work for the Holy Office, the city guard, the bishop's court, etc., to use their connections in one organization to aid efforts in the other—although they must do so with the greatest caution. But aside from that, inquisitors try to avoid getting involved in anything that can reasonably be left to other authorities.

This means that sometimes they step out of the way even when something uncanny is definitely going on. A witch who uses *maleficium* to kill a rival is very probably in collusion with the forces of darkness, yes, but if prison holds her well enough, let the secular power have the pleasure of executing her. It's quite possible that faith healer in Rouen is actually some sort of heretic, but if initial inquiries suggest that his activities really are confined to healing, why interfere with the Church investigation already in progress?

This policy leaves inquisitors more free to act when they finally do encounter trouble that seems both infernally driven and beyond the power of others to defeat. However, even then the next step is not always clear.

Guilt

The Inquisition recognizes several darkening shades of involvement with the infernal: Human

dupes, willing human servants, humans who have actually received infernal powers or gifts, and demonic beings themselves. Differing degrees of guilt naturally require different handling. Many inquisitors prefer to haul in everyone even remotely implicated and let the Council of Faith make the tough decisions. Still, even the humblest and most unreflective of foot soldiers will one day have to wrestle these dilemmas.

 Can the accused be turned back to God? The answer to this question is paramount, and scholars hotly debate its niceties. Inquisitors tend to assume that any patently inhuman being is a demon and thus beyond the salvation of Mother Church. Granted, there is a school of thought placing lemures, who were once human and might theoretically possess human souls, in a sort of intermediate category. They may, if they sincerely repent, be permitted to make final confession — what can it hurt? — and there are even stories of certain inquisitor-priests attempting the rite of exorcism just to see if it does any good. However, there is not one verified account of a lemure being demonstrably redeemed by such efforts. In any case, the best possible fate for a lemure is to be transformed from the unhallowed dead into the hallowed dead, and most show no interest in that sort of improvement.

Beings that seem to be human but demonically possessed, or imbued with infernal powers such as shapeshifting, may also be subjected to exorcism particularly if they voice a desire to be cleansed and some inquisitors are willing to go to any length to extract such a request from the afflicted. After all, the Inquisition exists to rescue human souls in peril. It wouldn't do to abandon anyone to perdition without having made all reasonable effort first. (Besides, as the Inquisition, unlike the Holy Office, actually has to take the practical and spiritual burden of executions upon itself, it tends to be more concerned about the quantity of kills.) Inquisitors readily admit, however, that once a mortal has so succumbed to the infernal as to let it into his very flesh, it can be very hard indeed to loose the evil one's grip. An exorcism cannot be termed a success unless the demonic powers disappear forever. Alas, these cases usually end in flames.

Human beings with nothing particularly infernal in their form or abilities emphatically deserve a chance at reconciliation. Whether they were deceived or seduced into their present position hardly matters; while one might assume the former to be more open to correction than the latter, it's not

necessarily so. Demons are wily, and can wear the mask of benevolence so skillfully that their servants hold fast to that perception despite all evidence to the contrary. In either case, it is the inquisitor's duty to lead the accused to a free renunciation of her demon and all its works. Should she refuse, death is the regrettable necessity.

Should she agree, however, her soul (and possibly even her life) may be saved. But the penance assigned to a mortal corrupted by the touch of the infernal can never be light. Simpler punishments such as flogging, pilgrimage, or fines however large are meted out only to those whose taint is clearly minimal. More often, the prescribed task involves directly betraying the accused's monstrous beliefs and associations, traveling a great distance away — or both. It is specifically calculated to make backsliding a deadly risk, if not a flat impossibility. A mortal who has repented and received a sentence of penance but then falls into the Inquisition's hands a second time can hope for no mercy whatever.

- What is the danger of further infection? Inquisitors are just as concerned with all the souls yet to fall as with those that have already tasted forbidden fruit. The decision of whether to execute human convicts who have reconciled with the Church or let them off with a penance often comes down to the Council of Faith's judgment of the likelihood of relapse. Although a scientific understanding of addiction is far in the world's future, inquisitors certainly recognize that many former servants of the Devil emerge from their ordeals more, not less, spiritually vulnerable. Those who have held powers beyond mortal ken, those who have tasted inhuman pleasures, those who successfully escaped from a lowly, dreary life by selling their souls: These sinners are often consigned to the flames simply because the Inquisition dares not take the chance that they might run back to their old masters after all. Overall, the more contagious an inquisitor knows a menace to be, the more desperate the pursuit, the grimmer the final purging.
- What are the practical considerations? Even with the considerable latitude granted them by the pope, inquisitors cannot always dispense justice exactly as they think best. They know full well the Church isn't the world's only power, and they have no desire for a Pyrrhic victory. Sometimes, an investigation twines right into the deepest corridors of secular power; sometimes it dead-ends in lands beyond the Inquisition's effective reach. Supposing the king is deliberately protecting a powerful night-

creature — however much he might deserve it, killing him would surely cause more problems than it solves. If it seems more feasible to drive an order of troublesome Castilian sorcerers into neighboring Moorish lands than to exterminate them, so be it. Most inquisitors believe (or hope) that they would willingly give their own lives to the cause; but they will not endanger their Church, expose their brethren or knowingly sacrifice large numbers of innocent mortals simply to bring down the quarry. Better to step back and consider other paths. To do otherwise is to risk the sin of pride: Though inquisitors struggle against the very forces of the pit, they would do well to remember that they are mere mortals themselves, and that only God can choose the hour when a demon will at last be vanquished.

Getting Medieval

Murder is a sin. Torture is a sin. Clergy are prohibited by canon law from shedding blood. So how can it all happen anyway, and how do inquisitors live with themselves afterward?

Guilt Redur

A few important points to remember:

- Sin can be absolved. Although the Church certainly doesn't mean to promote a mercantile model of penitence, even priests often end up treating it that way. Recommended penance for mortal sins is stringent indeed, but just knowing in advance that the penance can be paid is enough to weaken the will of many a prospective sinner. Furthermore, penance might be lightened if the sin is committed for the sake of a greater good. In a bull of 1252, the pope officially sanctions torture in the interrogation of heretics (one gathers it was already going on regardless). After 1256, inquisitors of the Holy Office are even permitted to absolve each other of the "irregularity" of attending torture sessions, which is canonically forbidden to all clergy — any cleric who commits this irregularity is banned from all sacred functions until absolved. The bulls do not specifically mention the shadow Inquisition, but they're assumed to apply to it as well - or perhaps such exceptions were made for it from the start.
- Someone else can do the dirty work. In the Holy Office, inquisitors don't burn heretics they abandon them to the secular arm, which carries out the inquisitors' sentence of burning. In the Holy Office, inquisitors don't perform the actual torture either again, that's what the secular arm is for. In the shadow Inquisition, however, things are quite

THE CALLOUS HEART

s anyone who has ever read the Gospels is aware, mercy, forgiveness and love are the virtues Christ repeatedly champions. In Scripture, He flouts both religious authority and social custom to demonstrate compassion to adulterous women, lepers, Gentiles, tax collectors, the demonically possessed and other such hated and feared folk; His two "greatest commandments" are to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself (and clearly He has a fairly wide definition of "neighbor").

Yet, there are clearly numerous circumstances under which even devout Christians become capable of forgetting this. Inquisitors are particularly vulnerable: They have a hard and lonely struggle before them, and all too often love gradually vanishes altogether from their lives. Family and community ties are early casualties to the cause; most inquisitors travel a lot, and even the educated ones rarely enjoy the luxury of exchanging long and frequent letters with their intimates. They spend their days in the company of those who are just as battle-scarred and alienated as themselves. At night, the enemy emerges. Physically, spiritually, and morally exhausted, some inquisitors simply have no energy left to reach out even to their compatriots, much less to the ordinary folk for whose sakes they supposedly fight. They slowly forget how to function as anything but a determined adversary. Others have always been more ruled by their fears and jealousies than by love of their neighbor.

The end result of this is that numerous inquisitors — by no means most, but certainly far too many — are in as dire peril spiritually as some

of those they convict (that is, Callous in game terms). Unfortunately, this often doesn't become apparent until something drastic happens and they harm the indisputably innocent; hatred, revulsion, and violence are, after all, entirely proper when wielded against the demonic, and human servants of the infernal are largely to be shown spiritual, not physical, mercy. Even when other inquisitors realize that a brother or sister is succumbing to the deadly sin of wrath, it often seems imprudent to intervene, particularly in the heat of a prosecution against a decidedly more deadly foe.

Inquisition officials understand all too well the moral dangers facing their membership, and make some effort to administer preventative medicine. Above all, inquisitors are encouraged to make frequent and complete confession to a priest within the organization (Oculi Dei suffer more than most in this regard because of their self-imposed policy of keeping secrets within the order unless there's specific reason to share them; even the seal of the confessional isn't usually sufficient guarantee to trust an outsider, and the order has relatively few priests of its own). Confessors are exhorted in turn to train themselves in the art of seeing straight to the truth, of voicing the pain of a sinner who cannot voice it himself, of recommending wise penances that will soften the heart to God's love rather than hardening it further against the world.

The ultimate responsibility for such noble efforts to head off the Devil, however, rests on the shoulders of priests who are themselves human and fallible...

different. Many clerical inquisitors do try to leave as much of the flesh-roasting and rope-yanking as they can to their lay brethren (who don't necessarily feel any better about it), but because of the relative lack of manpower and the often exigent conditions, they can't *always* escape it. This is a grave problem to which no easy answer has presented itself. The Councils of Faith simply do their best to make sure confessors are available at all hours during a trial, and all strongly encourage that at least one ordained priest belong to each cell.

• The enemy isn't human. Well, actually much of the enemy is human, and that is when inquisitors

agonize most bitterly because a human suspect can be as much a danger to the faith as the demon who rules him. That doesn't make killing him any easier, though. Nevertheless, a little direct exposure to the demonic does wonders for flagging resolve. When gazing into the face of a condemned convict who looks rather like his nephew back home, an inquisitor can close his eyes and imagine instead the terrifying visage of the one who corrupted him.

(This is not to say inquisitors don't believe their inhuman enemies also possess souls. Of course they do; even Lucifer has a soul, or, more to the point, is a soul. It's even possible that Lucifer could seek and

win God's forgiveness if he forgot his infernal pride enough to do it. But this hardly signifies. The promise of Christ's sacred blood is extended only to humanity, to remit the sin of Adam and Eve; everyone else is on their own. Inquisitors have enough trouble just protecting the souls explicitly placed under the Church's care. Moreover, it's one thing to understand intellectually that the matted, scabbed thing that leaps snarling out of an opened tomb has a soul, and quite another to feel any actual pity for it.)

- Spirit, not skin. The Inquisition, as it must constantly remind itself, is in the business of saving souls, not bodies. To execute a transgressor who has properly made confession is actually to do her a favor, ensuring her a blessed afterlife; conversely, those who refuse to repent are doomed to an eternity of torment no matter what anyone does. Earthly life is a vale of tears even for the fortunate, and earthly joys, however powerful, evaporate forever at the touch of death. Surely a few fleeting years or decades are a small enough price to pay for salvation. For the most part, the Inquisition actually worries far more about the suffering of its own, who must bear a heavy burden of conscience and sometimes die without benefit of extreme unction.
- Misery loves company. The Church has always excelled at designing rituals of peace and comfort, ways of bringing weary souls together in the sight of God. Not only do individual priests among the inquisitors expend all their powers of reason, sympathy, and faith to comfort a doubting companion, but after particularly arduous campaigns, Councils often arrange for a special Mass for cells in the area. To be in a room with so many that share the same burden, the same secrets, the same hope for a world free of the Devil's grasp, can be a tremendously healing experience.

Torture

Torture has actually been a relatively rare practice throughout the Middle Ages up until now, but that's rapidly changing — especially since the trial by ordeal (in which God decides questions of guilt) has given way to the inquest trial (in which humans must do their poor best). Still, the justice of the era is harsh. Executions are largely carried out via hanging, burning, or beheading, and even more creative sentences are occasionally handed down. Inquisitors growing up anywhere but the quietest villages and the most orderly monastic houses have probably seen their share of state-inflicted gore.

It's important to understand that torture never serves as punishment, only as an investigatory tool.



The goal is not permanent injury (although that ends up happening frequently enough) but only causing sufficient pain for a confession. It is not even permitted to cause the victim to bleed. Strictly speaking, torture may be performed only once — one can get around this linguistically, however, by claiming to be "continuing" rather than "repeating" the torture. Likewise, as a confession made under torture is legally invalid, the victim's statement must be confirmed again afterward, without torture. (The threat of "continuing" the torture is, of course, most effective in persuading those who might otherwise recant to think better of it.)

Common medieval tortures include the following:

- The *strappado*, in which the victim's wrists are tied together and he is suspended in the air (sometimes with weights attached to the feet). Sometimes he is allowed to fall a short distance and then abruptly jerked to a halt, so that the arm and shoulder joints dislocate.
 - The rack, which also causes dislocation.
- The water torture, which consists of pouring great quantities of water down the victim's throat. In a more painful version, a strip of cloth is laid across the victim's open mouth first, so that with each involuntary swallow the cloth travels further down the esophagus.
- A "boot" made of wet parchment which is then set by a fire so that as it dries it constricts the leg and foot most painfully. A rarer torture consists of painting the soles of the feet with fat and setting them close enough to a fire to crackle.
- The peine forte et dure, which simply means imprisonment under especially harsh circumstances: no space to move, no light, no food, filthy conditions and so forth.

In addition to this, the Inquisition makes use of all sorts of psychological ploys. Good cop/bad cop is not a modern technique. Friends or suffering relatives of the prisoner might be brought in to plead with the prisoner to capitulate. Or the prisoner is randomly wakened throughout the night, so that sleep deprivation sets in. An Inquisition agent might pose as a prisoner in the next cell and try to trick the prisoner into an unofficial confession. The Inquisition is also speedily inventing tortures designed to take advantage of some of their prisoners' special sensitivities to light, to fire, to silver, to holy objects, and so forth.

In all torture, a skilled inquisitor presents herself as the victim's friend, indeed, the victim's best and only friend: She *cares* about the victim's pain with all her

Inquisitor Eschatology

hen one deals, night in and night out, with the most wicked and grue-some creatures known to humanity, it becomes possible to believe almost *any* bad news.

Although most inquisitors don't dare hold out much hope that Christ will return in the very near future to take the world firmly in hand, thus relieving them of their deeply unpleasant duties, there is a sizeable and clamorous minority who view the prevalence of demonic forces on earth today as a sure sign of impending apocalypse. Yes, this is partly selective perception at work: To the man with a hammer, everything is a nail, and once one realizes how skillfully the Devil's legions can penetrate any human institution, it is easy to see their plots behind even the smallest misfortunes.

Nevertheless, this view is increasingly bolstered by prophecy — largely from the Sisters of St. John, but some from mystics from outside the Inquisition as well — which point to some terrible disaster looming, a catastrophe capable of splintering the very Rock of Christendom, the Church itself. Millions will die, say the direr predictions. Could the end of the world possibly be far behind?

heart and wishes only to see it end. But she cannot allow it to end until the victim is truly ready to turn back to God. If she were to let up too early and thus lose her prisoner's soul to perdition, she could never forgive herself. Odd as it may seem, the one person most likely to believe this reasoning is a person who has just undergone unspeakable pain at the inquisitor's behest. Some deep instinct leads most people to cling to the one who has the power of life and death over them, no matter what the circumstance.

Of course, the act is even more convincing when it's *sincere....*

Of Diverskinds

Alas, there is no bestiary known to the Inquisition that accurately names and describes every creature its five orders have encountered in the course of their struggles — although one hears scattered talk of compiling such a manual someday. Expertise varies widely among the inquisitors themselves. Some have in-depth knowledge of the ways of one particular sort of demon, gained from years of single-minded pursuit and obsessive study of cap-

tured documents and confessional transcripts. Some can quote extensively from all the classical authors and the Church philosophers as well, but have never actually met a demon face-to-face. Some are walking tomes of peasant lore. Many, if not most, have but a smattering of book-learning or snatches of a grandmother's fireside tales, cobbled together with vague conjectures based on their experiences so far. Fierce arguments sometimes arise in the field between those who trust the folk wisdom and those who insist on scholarly authorities, all the worse as survival might very well hinge on whether or not a striga can really be thwarted by throwing a handful of mustard seed in her path.

Nonetheless, most inquisitors recognize several broad categories of the Dark Arts:

Witchern

Legends of evil, night-flying females abound throughout the known world. Sometimes they're thought of as human women, devotees of Diana who ride with her Wild Hunt and cast terrible spells on those who offend them (Such stories become increasingly confused with legends of devil-worship as the Middle Ages wear on, and the idea of the sabbat is born. Church authorities often insist that neither the Wild Hunt nor the sabbat exists in physical reality, but is merely an illusion inspired by the Devil — which is certainly bad enough, of course). Sometimes, as in the case of the cannibalistic, blood-drinking strigge and lamige and the seductive succubi, they are clearly demons who merely take on female shape — although it can be very difficult to tell the difference unless the creature actually does something to reveal its true nature.

Skin-Turning

Scholarly sorts claim that actual shapeshifting is no more real than the Wild Hunt. It is a demonic delusion, an insanity known to the learned as lycanthropia. In saying this, however, they refute some very ancient traditions. Stories relate that a man might be turned into a wolf as a divine curse for eating child-flesh or some other horrific crime. In other accounts, he can cast the spell of transformation himself by wearing a wolf pelt, swimming a cursed lake or even simply urinating in a circle around his clothes. Old pagan rites once honored demons who posed as wolf-gods and bear-gods, and sometimes they granted their worshipers the power of metamorphosis; perhaps fragments of these cults still skulk into the woods to hold their vile ceremonies.

The few inquisitors who have actually encountered skin-turners and lived to tell about it say that, in any case, it seems just as possible to die in the grasp of illusory teeth.

Most inquisitors operate under the assumption that a skin-turner has made some kind of evil pact, knowingly or not, to obtain his power. A handful who study the matter more thoroughly, however, believe that some skin-turners are cursed unjustly, and that perhaps the curse can be visited on the afflicted one's descendants as well, even unto the seventh generation. Unfortunately, the many legends of such curses being successfully broken so far remain just that — legendary — so this too seems an academic point.

It bears mentioning that in the Dark Medieval world, wolves are badly misunderstood animals (with the single exception of the wolf of Gubbio, which St. Francis miraculously tamed — an act that made him the informal patron of werewolf-hunters — but it's been dead for years now). Humans fear wolves not just for their livestock's sake but for their own. In many areas of Europe, wolves are hunted to near extinction, fleeing into the depths of the remaining forests, not to reemerge until the Black Death causes a drop-off in land-clearing and a resurgence of woodlands. Folklore burdens them with any number of evil associations, and even the ordinary creatures are often treated as half-demons. Reports of wolf attacks are not necessarily enough in themselves to merit the Inquisition's attention, but if there are any other elements, however subtle, that suggest an evil presence, an investigation may be called. There need not be any suspicion of skin-turning specifically.

Maleficium

As one can gather from the foregoing, maleficium is often tangled up with other dark practices. Inquisitors rarely wonder that someone under any kind of evil influence should display a talent for sorcery as well. A spell need not be an elaborate affair to qualify as such. Even an unspoken evil wish can be heard and granted by a demonic patron, after all. The inquisitors do recognize some practical differences between those sorcerers who spend hours chanting and drawing sigils, those who practice the heartharts, those who operate exclusively by blood-sacrifice, and so forth. That is, if they know that a particular sorceress must take time to cast her enchantments, then time is precisely what they won't allow her; if they find that a warlock's power lies mostly in his wand, then they will focus on ridding him of it. However, they make no moral or theological distinction whatever. *Maleficium* is *maleficium* whatever the method.

Human magicians are sometimes the most difficult quarry. For one thing, they blend into the crowd far better than some basilisk-thing with claws and wings. More importantly, they are human. They talk, they cry, they bleed; they have wives, husbands and children. Inquisitors with a background in the Holy Office tend to be more inured to causing human suffering—they know that a blessed eternity is well worth even great earthly torment—but those who first came into their orders because of terrifying experiences with demonic creatures are often thrown off guard. Luckily, the Inquisition is armed with more than sufficient theology to comfort and reassure them that putting aside their entirely laudable feelings of sympathy is the only right thing to do.

bauntings

Stories of ghosts who have legitimate reasons for haunting the living world — a wrong in need of righting — are common enough that when inquisitors come across evidence of the restless dead, they frequently make some effort to determine whether the ghost's presence points to some monstrous sin lying hidden in the community. If justice is done at last, hopefully the wraith will find peace: Two birds killed with one stone, so to speak.

THE LEGEND OF SCHOLOMANCE

S cholomance is a chimera that at least Oone famous inquisitor, a Norseman called Brother Jarl, has made it his life's work to track down. It is the quintessential school of sorcery where the Devil himself is headmaster. Only the wickedest and cleverest of would-be magicians are chosen to attend, but legend holds that those who study at Scholomance gain the very secret of earthly immortality. Unfortunately, Scholomance is located everywhere and nowhere: Once the Devil has granted a coveted invitation, the threshold might lie as close as one's own front door. Jarl insists that the school physically exists somewhere — perhaps the Carpathians — even so; but he has been unable to mount an expedition to find out for certain. At present he is reduced to pestering Cardinal Marzone to send him to Prussia to visit the Teutonic Knights, but so far Marzone has not even replied to his petitions.



Sometimes, however, it develops that the ghost is not merely vengeful after all but outright malevolent. In such a case, an exorcism is clearly called for, which even the parish priest can perform. Sometimes, inquisitors will avoid investigating a haunting fully until the local clergy has already failed to lay the ghost to rest.

The Inquisition's own exorcisms make use of proven relics whenever possible. If the local relics don't seem to do any good against the infestation, the inquisitors may well conclude them to be fakes and report them as such to the Council (the Inquisition makes rather a priority of knowing where the genuine relics are and aren't, since one never knows when they'll be needed). The inquisitors might then travel great distances to find a chapter-house where true relics may be found. Sometimes, even the Inquisition's exorcism fails, and the ghost returns after a brief period of quiet; there are, however, a few accounts of famous inquisitors successfully convincing a ghost to desist of its own accord by threatening it with repeated exorcism for the rest of the inquisitor's life.

Devil-Pacts

The demonic pact is by now a staple of Christian folklore. Not all accounts of such pacts are tragic. For instance, one story tells of a man in a tavern carelessly lamenting that he would sell his soul for one more ale. Right away, the Devil takes him up on the offer and snatches him off to Hell the moment his rather expensive mug is drained. Learned inquisitors scoff at this sort of fable. They claim that selling one's soul is necessarily a more deliberate business than that; a demon cannot ensnare you against your own free will. Others fear that one *can* be deceived into a demonic pact and held to its terms regardless. Most agree, however, that hope persists while life does, and that if the damned mortal truly repents, her soul may yet be redeemed.

It seems only wise to suspect a possible demonic pact anytime the quarry appears to be human, or more-or-less human, but exhibits powers beyond human ken. To kill a person bound by a demonic pact is to consign his soul irrevocably to the abyss — a highly undesirable outcome. On the other hand, if the quarry is actually a demon in human form, such concerns are not only misplaced but potentially disastrous. It's a very rare inquisitor who hasn't spent a sleepless night on her knees, begging God for the grace to judge rightly who has a human soul worthy of rescue and who doesn't.

Cainites

By no means do all inquisitors recognize the term "Cainite" — much to the chagrin of those who

labored to bring the orders together, since fighting the Cainite threat was much of the original reason for the alliance. Unfortunately, it's easy enough for the inexperienced to mistake a Cainite for any number of other things: A sorcerer, a skin-turner, a striga, a ghost, an incubus... or an angel (indeed, Cainites go out of their way to seem anything but what they are). Blood-drinking and cannibalism are lumped together in folklore, and few monsters of legend escape these charges.

Nevertheless, many inquisitors do realize that Cainites are a distinct menace. Scholars generally consider them a species of lemure, as it's evidently possible for mortals to die and come back as Cainites. Some, however, disagree vehemently: They say that Cainites merely take on the form of dead mortals in order to play upon human pity, and the original soul has long since fled to its eternal reward. A staunch minority believes that the demonic occupant holds the original soul prisoner; one can speak to the captive spirit of the peace its master denies it, encourage it to rebellion, but destroying the cursed corpse is the only way to free the lost soul to Heaven's Grace. Some inquisitors have never seen a Cainite they recognized as a former mortal, and so remain ignorant of the entire question.

It is true that inquisitors have been known to stumble in their pursuit of Cainites. At first glance, many Cainites are beautiful, even beatific in appearance. The bright eyes, alabaster skin, and silent footsteps that allow them to pose as angels and Muses to the unwary can entrance even those who understand what they're facing. Far too many have ungodly powers of seduction as well, such that even their victims go to death in their arms with lustful joy. Some even blaspheme so greatly as to talk in broken voices of their hope for redemption, shedding blood-tears, kneeling in the back of the nave at evening Mass and gazing at the elevated Host with fear and envy. Inquisitors who have spent decades hunting Cainites still confess themselves surprised on occasion by the wily creatures' behavior.

Most who know of the Cainites *qua* Cainites have the Cainite Heresy to thank for it. The Eyes of God and the Murnau had already stumbled across this anti-church even before the Inquisition formed. They know it as an especially virulent form of the dualist/Gnostic heresy by which demons in human guise have managed to enslave possibly thousands of mortals. They know that orgies of blood-sacrifice form the rotten center of the cult's liturgy — thus, the cult not only provides the demons with whatever unholy power they glean from such sacrifices, but also poses a terrifying danger to human lives and souls alike. They know the Heresy claims that Cain

was misrepresented in the scripture of the "Babylonian Church" (by which they mean both Western and Eastern Churches); that he was actually a being of pure spirit, a redeemer, a high priest, and that the Cainites are his heirs.

They know the Heresy has infiltrated the Bogomils as well as the Cathar church — mostly in the wilder corners of the heretical lands, although there were large communities in Foix and Toulouse until very recently. Many also know it has snaked at least a tendril or two into the Roman Church, although high officials are distressingly tight-lipped about the precise extent of the infection. They fear that if they expose the Heresy of important clergy to the Inquisition's local rank and file (however deservedly) and the rank and file react with the zeal and righteous anger one would certainly hope for, it could lead to a scandal so profound as to break the back of the papacy itself. Faith in the sanctity of the prelates, abbots and abbesses is already lacking enough throughout Latin Christendom.

For this reason, the Inquisition has focused on the Cathar end of things up until now. Once the Church exterminates both the Cathar cancer and the demonic forces hiding behind it, the enemy will be so much the weaker and the inquisitors so much better-informed; or so they reason. Those inquisitors with positions of influence in either the regular or secular clergy have been recruited to the strategy of containing the "Catholic" branch of the Heresy for now, rather than destroying it — throwing subtle obstacles before it whenever it attempts to expand, forcing it to move more cautiously and slowly. Meanwhile, the Eyes of God have taken it upon themselves to worm their way into the households of those most under suspicion. For the most part, they do not inform their siblings in the other orders of their efforts. The Oculi have always reserved the absolute right to reach their own private conclusions, after all.

Inquisitors are aware of some smaller blood-sacrifice cults that do not formally belong to the Cainite Heresy. By definition, that means that the demons or lemures heading such cults are not "Cainites" — for at the moment, the term has no meaning to most inquisitors outside the context of the Cainite Heresy. As the organization continues to cohere, to compile and exchange information, however, this picture may change.

The Orders

The above discusses the overall philosophy of the Church and the Inquisition, but the orders also have their own unique beliefs — particularly those orders that predate the Inquisition.

The Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre

The Knights are a military-religious order, which means that their outlook is an unusual combination of lay and religious ideals. They view themselves, correctly or not, as the fighting arm of the Inquisition, duty-bound to take as much of the burden of warfare off the hands of their strictly clerical brethren as possible. They also feel compelled to remind them that the dark forces pose a worldly threat in addition to a spiritual one, and that sometimes discretion really is the better part of cowardice. Many of them have been radicalized by their Crusade experiences, particularly the discovery that demonic rot has crept to within arrow-shot of the holiest places in Palestine. For them, every mission is a battle, every gain to be paid for in someone's blood — preferably the enemy's but also their own whenever necessary.

This is not to say that the Knights are stupid or unsubtle (far from it). But as military men, they don't hesitate to make decisions whose cost is measured in human lives. They also amaze other orders with their capacity for physical endurance by staying up through the night on watch, going hungry, sleeping on hard stone or riding for hours in the rain, and all without a moment's complaint. There are some who accuse the Knights of making too much of a fetish out of their relics, using them as a crutch for insufficient personal sanctity; but such arguments tend to fall flat for those who have seen the Holy Sepulcher with their own eyes and felt its holy aura.

Oculi Dei

The Eyes of God are predominantly a lay organization. Clerical orders sometimes assume that because of this the Eyes are less pious than other inquisitors. Nothing could be further from the truth. A fair number of the Oculi joined the organization as the result of some frightening personal experience, but many simply find the order a perfect channel for both their godly yearnings and their keen powers of observation. Not a few actually considered taking holy orders at one time in their lives, but decided against it for whatever reason. It is true, however, that the Eyes of God take full advantage of their order's freedom from religious vows. Indeed, they view it as their duty to do so, just as the Knights feel that they must fight so other inquisitors don't need to.

The Oculi see themselves as brokers of unpleasant realities. They turn up the truths no one else wants to face. They do the everyday footwork of collecting small, seemingly irrelevant pieces of information so that when the time comes for a formal Inquisition, it's all there waiting to be put together. When the order feels the

need to guide Inquisition-wide policy (a much rarer occurrence than some imagine), it does so by the strategic withholding and releasing of information.

Some outside the order suspect the Oculi of being compromised by their close proximity to the enemy's temptations and their strict policy against direct action. They can take comfort in knowing that their suspicions are, if anything, outmatched by the Eyes' suspicions of each other; they know better than anyone else just how grave the temptations really are.

The Sisters of St. John

The Sisters, being nothing if not reflective, remind themselves daily that pride goes before a fall. Visions are a priceless gift vouchsafed by the Lord, and He expects those He so blesses to use them to do His good works. Visions are also, however, a potential seduction. One can become so caught up in the experience itself that one fails to follow through on the warning. One can begin trusting the visions to the exclusion of all else—the words of one's priest or bishop, for example, or even Scripture itself. When male inquisitors exhort them against the sin of placing personal revelation above the wisdom of the Church, the Sisters clasp their hands and nod fervently.

A quite different sort of talk goes on within convent walls, however. Among themselves, the Sisters hold animated debates and garden councils, comparing the experiences of their visionaries — especially the Blessed Teresa — to Biblical prophecy and the writings of the church doctors. Often, by the time a Sister (visionary or not) leaves the convent grounds to bring news of her order's gleanings to a cell of fellow inquisitors, she has a well-defined, well-supported theory about what it all means... that she often finds it prudent to keep more or less to herself.

The house of Murnau

It is a curious fact of history that often the most stringent persecutors have some personal connection with the group they persecute. Tomás de Torquemada, for instance, who will prove such a scourge to the Spanish Jews centuries hence, will also labor in his early career under the stigma of having close Jewish relatives.

The Murnau can certainly sympathize with this human quirk. They seek to win in the outer world the same struggle they wage daily in their inner worlds. This is not mere expiation of individual guilt or an attempt to avoid condemnation by joining forces with the executioners... although it's certainly that as well. It is,

at heart, a desperate pledge of allegiance to what they know to be the only power that can save them. It is the currency of an unspoken bargain with God and the Church. Those inquisitors with a less deeply personal interest in defeating the legions of Hell often find it hard to understand the ardor of the Murnau; however, instinct often tells them that *some* sort of war is going on behind those stoic countenances....

The Red Order

A good generation or two has passed since the "unfortunate matter" with Brother Everard, and within the Red Order hope springs afresh, as is hope's wont. Still, even the newest recruit knows that the order will never again enjoy the heady, undoubtedly naïve boldness of its earliest days. Some Theodosians hail the decision to join the Inquisition as a brilliant move — affording both an opportunity to fight evil and a powerful incentive to stay on the straight and narrow, as well as the sanction of Mother Church. Others, however, worry about the possible consequences of placing the order directly under the noses of those souls in Christendom most constitutionally inclined to distrust the esoteric.

Many in the Red Order yet subscribe to the quasi-heretical belief that magic can be honorably used in the service of God. Did not good King Solomon himself use magical arts to capture, enslave and imprison demons? To these Brothers and Sisters, it is not the arts themselves that are sinful (for all power, even demonic, ultimately comes from God), merely how they are used. One must not perform magic for personal gain and one must not pretend that such power can come from one's own being; it is the action of God, for which the magician merely provides a conduit. To the minds of Red Brothers and Sisters, the Church is tragically confusing the issue.

These views, however, are not politic to mention even among fellow Theodosians in the current climate. Order higher-ups step in quickly to quash such talk when they hear it, and may even investigate closely to see if perhaps another disaster like Brother Everard's is in the offing. The *study* of magic is still permissible, provided the student keeps quiet about it, as after all one must know the enemy to subdue it; the *practice* of it, never under any circumstance. Numerous Red Order scholars have written long apologetics defending the innocuous origins of those Theodosian arts of which other inquisitors are already aware; Marzone seems to have accepted these arguments, barring any darker revelations.



The charnel stench of slaughter lingered, but stale and old.

Baudioun le Breton guessed that whatever horror had taken place here, he had missed it by at least a day. Nonetheless, he gripped the blade of his sword while surveying the decrepit church.

The entire village was dead, and even a knight as brave and experienced as Baudioun had nearly been overcome with nausea and revulsion. Philippe had been unable to continue once they had passed the hovel where the children had been kept. Even now, Baudioun could faintly hear him weeping. The village was so still, Baudioun felt he could have heard a mouse cough.

But the *church*! The village had been decimated by a plague, but what had happened here? It looked as though some great battle had taken place between two swordsmen of remarkable skill. Even more interesting, Baudioun saw signs of fire damage, but the church itselfwas intact, if run down. At least five corpses rotted on its floor, all clearly several weeks dead, yet some still held weapons. And not one sword wound that I can see, thought the Poor Knight, but by God's wounds, I'll not be touching these unfortunates to see for certain. Aloud, he said, "So many unhallowed dead."

"Wrong, my friend," came a voice from behind him. Baudioun spun about and half-drew his sword, but the man standing there made no overture of violence. He looked Mediterranean and wore priest's robes. Baudioun searched his mind for one of the recognition codes that Leopold used to identify fellow warriors of Christ, but couldn't think of one. All he could see was the obvious *power* this man commanded. His eyes burned with a light that Baudioun had seen only in the most zealous inquisitors. "These dead are indeed hallowed, now. And the one that called their bodies to service as her unholy soldiers, she, too, is gone, naught but ash."

Baudioun le Breton narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "And who are you, young Father, and how do you know these things?" His hand had not left his sword — something about this beautiful "priest" made him uneasy.

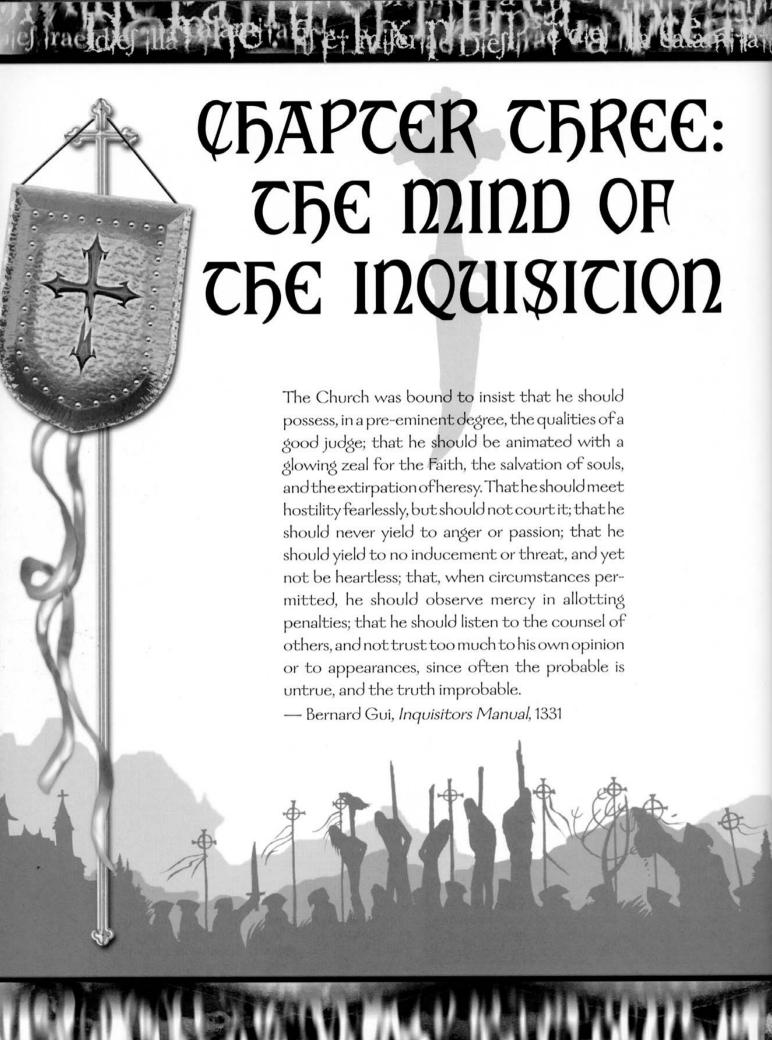
The man smiled. "I'm called Artemidorus. And, like you, I am but a soldier in God's army."

Baudioun's eyes snapped open as he remembered one of the codes. He nodded toward the back of the church, where a representation of the Savior should have hung. "There is the source of all light." He stared at the priest, waiting for the proper response. Artemidorus merely cleared his throat and looked expectantly at Baudioun. The knight began to draw his sword, but the odd light behind the young man's eyes stopped him. "You are no soldier of God," Baudioun whispered.

The priest's countenance changed. "I have done more for Christendom than even a brave Knight of Acre like yourself could ever hope. Pray, good Sir, that you need never learn more of me." He raised a hand as if in blessing, and Baudioun le Breton, who feared no man or demon, cringed.

The priest looked about the room. "Come, knight. There's nothing more to do here. Burn the place and be done with it, and perhaps God will call us together again someday." With that, the man turned and walked off.

Baudioun walked to the door of the church and watched the man ride away. "Be sure of it," he said.



Upon its tumultuous birth, the inquisition was in disarray. Dozens of very keen young inquisitors, eager to do prove themselves, died horribly at the hands of fiends. Those who stayed behind began jockeying for position and favor. The founder of the secret Inquisition, Cardinal Marzone, recognized the immediate need for a certain level of structure and control. Otherwise, he placed his few inquisitors, and possibly the entire enterprise, at risk from spies and corruption. Without structure, it would fall.

Cardinal Marzone was indifferent toward the traditional structure of the Church. The Church's rigid hierarchy and the immobility of clerics would limit his agents at best and encourage fraud at worst. He wanted autonomy, intelligence and initiative in his men, but he didn't want to leave them vulnerable to the enemy. Marzone designed a system for his new Inquisition consisting of discrete secret cells of trusted individuals who answered to local authoritative bodies. He wanted all the control without the suffocating hand of Rome.

The Dierarchy

The Inquisition is built on a simple hierarchy. Inquisitors, in cells, report to a Council of Faith. The Councils of Faith, along with their Procurators Fiscalis, reports to the Supreme Council. The Supreme Council reports to the Grand Inquisitor, Cardinal Marzone.

Agents have the maximum amount of personal power that any secret society controlled by a member of the Church can in good conscience allow. The Inquisition recognizes the integrity of a single inquisitor and the power of a few inquisitors banded together to tackle difficult tasks. Yet, the Inquisition does not allow agents to operate alone or even in pairs; the peril is too great and the chance of mistakes too high. Oversight is required. The Inquisition must maintain checks and balances, and communication on a local scale is a priority to the healthy functioning of the enterprise.

Inquisitors all

The Inquisition starts at its smallest unit: the inquisitor. Where there is an inquisitor, there is an Inquisition. He is a spy, a beggar, a virtuous man, a bishop or a wealthy noble. He is the warrior on the front lines and the scholar poring over ancient papyrus back at the castle. He wields the sword of justice and (ostensibly) tempers it with mercy.

An inquisitor is a combination of apostolic judge and medieval police officer who deals with offences against Christendom. He stands between the souls of humanity and the evil of demons, and he carries his faith in God as a shield. The inquisitor's mission, handed to him by Cardinal Marzone, is not hunting the fiends of the night and the heretics, but to save souls and protect them from the scourge of evil. The souls of the people are the strong backbone of Europe. If innocent blood spills in the line of duty, the inquisitor may be just as much a monster as the creature he or she hunts.

But an inquisitor is never alone. He has compatriots — other inquisitors — who arm themselves with swords of righteousness and fight the battles of the Lord. He believes in strength in numbers. He works with others in cells to plan, watch, wait and act. These brave men and women persevere through process and procedure, bureaucracy and split-second decisions and the balance of life and death — while holding to their moral integrity and their sanity.

Inquisitor Recruitment

The five orders of the Inquisition recruit from various places. Oculi Dei recruits from the laity, while the three clerical orders recruit in ways similar to other priesthoods, knightly orders and sisterhoods. The House of Murnau, of course, draws from the family for the most part. While inquisitors do exist who are part of none of these orders, the superiors in the Inquisition (Cardinal Marzone included) prefer to draw from these groups rather than from the other orders or from the general populace. The reason he avoids the latter is fairly obvious; such folk do not have the theological training to comprehend what they would see as inquisitors. The reason in the former case is mentioned to some degree in Chapter Two — Marzone isn't sure to what degree the other clerical orders might be compromised, and he prefers not to take chances.

The five orders are a motley group, but the Cardinal claims they are the perfect choice for tackling the problem of demons infesting Christendom. His judgment, the Cardinal said, was evidently correct, and no other orders could fill the roles as well as his chosen. No one else is as holy, wise or brave. No one else was so willing to give up a never-ending stream of members to fight the legions of Hell. From the sword of the Knights to the patience and precision of the Oculi Dei, they could see every move, council on the dangers, charge into the fray and heal the body and soul after the fight. They are perfect.

Few inquisitors have the true character to match Cardinal Marzone's dream, but most strive to do so. The very heart of Christendom is at stake, after all.

Recruitment is different for each order. The Knights prefer men who are not only stalwart on the battlefield, but who are trustworthy, loyal and have stood bravely before nameless evil. Men raised by the

order are, naturally, trained for such behavior since childhood. Knights recruited from other military orders must distinguish themselves not only as warriors, but as truly pious. If this happens, a candidate finds himself called to a meeting with a ranking Knight of Acre, who offers the soldier a chance to do more good in the name of Christendom — although it often mean leaving the front lines of the Crusades (or wherever the candidate happens to be at the moment). If the Knight shows interest, he is sworn to an oath of secrecy and is told of the Inquisition.

The Red Order has fairly strict recruitment policies. Members must meet certain base criteria, including fluency in Greek and Latin, a firm background in theology and law, a grounding in the natural sciences and achieved expertise in one major intellectual subject (individual Theodosians aren't above tutoring potential candidates in order to push them toward the acceptable levels of education, however). Local members of the Red Order meet once a season to discuss candidates. Recruiters approach the most promising top three candidates with an offer to join the inquisition. Those that take up the offer and swear an oath of secrecy find a new world of research available to them.

Sisters of St. John gain new members in the same method as most women's holy orders. However, they watch carefully for women who exhibit signs of the Holy Sight and then offer to take such women from their troubled parents (who are often only too glad to be rid of them). Other women simply enter the order expecting it to be little different than the Benedictine or Carmelite orders. The Sisters of St. John do not discourage this, feeling that God leads to them those sisters to the order who need to be there.

The Oculi Dei, of course, has its recruitment policies, but they have changed drastically over the last few years as the split between Rodrigue de Navarre and Aignen le Libraire has grown wider. Both men can approve members of the order, as can other regional superiors (such as Lizia Montesi di Roma). If there is any formal initiation (apart from the rigorous double and triple-checking of an individual that assuredly precedes induction into the order), the Inquisition at large is unaware of the particulars.

The House of Murnau leaves recruitment into the Inquisition to the whims of close family. The Inquisition is the Murnau family business, both a cross to bear and a right. When members of the House show promise as strong, striving young warriors with good hearts, the family waits until they come of age — normally 15 or 16 years old. Then, a trusted family member who is also an inquisitor takes a candidate aside and explains the sacred duty of the House of Murnau. Few proud chil-

dren shirk from their duty. Instead, they gladly take up arms for the cause.

Once someone joins the Inquisition, he is an inquisitor for life, even if he wishes to retire from the active life for more intellectual pursuits or be more active within his order. The Inquisition can call any inquisitor out of retirement at any time, for any reason. However, the sick and elderly are a liability and none are called up without a compelling need.

Titlesand Orders

An Inquisitor observes the promotions and titles within her individual order. While the Inquisition itself uses few formal titles, most orders have detailed ladders of promotion. A Doctor of Theology from the Red Order, for example, is still a Doctor of Theology, even if he or she must answer to a Council of Faith. A Knight promoted to Commander is still both a Knight and an inquisitor. Most inquisitors apply their successes in the field as inquisitors to promotion opportunities within their orders.

Inquisitors can gain promotions within the Inquisition itself. One who is more interested in the legal proceedings or the research instead of the fieldwork may apply to be a Procurator Fiscalis. Those who distinguish themselves on the battlefield may find themselves promoted to new Councils of Faith or to replace retiring or dead members. Council members of keen senses, strong objectivity and a proven record may find themselves called back to Rome to help administer the Inquisition and sit on the Supreme Council.

Inquisiting the faithful

Inquisitors answer directly only to their local Council of Faith, Cardinal Marzone and to cell mates. Their power ignores the bounds of ecclesiastical and secular authority. The Inquisition has authority to audit anyone, at any time — no one may stop an inquisitor once he begins his work. They are the hounds of the Lord and do not stop until their prey is in their jaws or dead.

However, the inquisitor's power is limited. She wields only ecclesiastical power. The Holy Office has no authority of judgment over secular crimes, such as theft, rape or murder. The inquisitor may bring proceedings against a subject only on justifiable grounds of heresy, and she must prove, absolutely, that these crimes are actual crimes against mankind and Christendom.

The secret Inquisition is less constricted than the Holy Office: Selling one's soul into the service of Hell technically qualifies as an ecclesiastical crime. Anyone who deals with the forces of the Adversary, purposefully

TITLES WITHIN THE ORDERS

he orders maintain their own ranks within their hierarchy. From their point of view, any titles bestowed upon their members by the Inquisition are honorifics that add to prestige, but hardly indicative of a member's standing in the order as a whole. Inquisitors proudly identify with their order's titles as well as their inquisitorial positions.

The Knights of Acre are very proud of their title hierarchy. At the top is the Grand Master, followed by Commander of the Tongue, Commander of the True Cross (Lord of Fortress of the Cross), Seneschal (Lord of a Castle or Holding), Commander of the Knights, Knight Brother, Turcoplier (Commander of the Sergeants of Battle), the Under-Marshal (Commander of the footmen), Sergeant Brother of Battle, the Standard Bearer, the Turcopoles (local, non-noble troops) and, finally, the sick and elderly brothers.

The Red Order bestows the degrees of Bachelor, Master and Doctor upon its more accomplished members. One with a bachelor's degree has no honorific. Members call them "Brother" or "Sister." A master is called "Master," like "Master Eduard of Glascony." A doctor is a Most Reverent Doctor and receives great respect.

The Sisters of St. John only have novices, Sisters and one Mother Superior per convent. Novices have no title, as they have not yet chosen their holy name, nor have they entered the order proper. Sisters are merely "Sister," followed by their name. A Mother Superior is called simply "Mother Superior."

The Eyes of God don't discuss titles, because it might betray their standing within the vast European conspiracy. They assemble themselves based entirely on seniority, and they believe overt titles might give them and their superiors away. When pressed, they either make up a title or pick one at random from the Sword of St. James.

The House of Murnau prides itself on its noble lineage. The head of the House is still the Count of Murnau, and other family members figure out their titles from there. For example, a cousin will be the "Third Cousin of the Count of Murnau." House members concoct titles that are both impressive and have as many links to the current head of the House as possible.

and with malice; engages in heretical arts, witchcraft and necromancy; or enters into deals using their soul as a bargaining chip has forfeited any protections faith would provide. Those who deal in evil in its myriad forms fall under the inquisitor's purview.

If the inquisitor bears witness to a secular crime — and they do in their line of work — the inquisitor also decides the criminal's fate. He can — and is encouraged to — turn the criminal over to secular officials. He can release the criminal. He may even mete out private justice if he feels the crime warrants the punishment, although the judgment and punishment of secular crimes at the hands of individual inquisitors is never encouraged.

The inquisitor lives under an eternal caveat: Bringing innocents before the Inquisition is a crime against God. The power the inquisitor wields is so great that using it to settle petty grudges brings the baleful eye of the Inquisition upon the transgressor. Should suspicion arise that the inquisitor not only accused an innocent man, but also did so purposefully and knowingly, the Procurator Fiscalis and the cellmates of the offender bring the inquisitor before the Council of Faith.

The inquisitor never brings sentence alone. Although she is sometimes a judge, she must answer to the Council of Faith. Too much is at stake for both the accused and the accuser. The inquisitor may request sentence should the accused be found guilty, up to and including death, but he cannot hand it out arbitrarily, and he cannot make those kinds of decisions alone.

However, should the inquisitor be attacked during duty, he automatically assumes that the attacker is both committing a crime and is guilty. The Inquisition empowers the inquisitor to carry out sentence and may do so quickly. In this case, the inquisitor brings back the "evidence" of a crime to the Council of Faith, which tries the case, with the defendant either in absentia or as a corpse. Sometimes, if need warrants, the corpse is burned at the stake.

Because inquisitors work within the system when they can afford to, they collect as much evidence as they can to convict their target and its related associates. The Inquisition keeps copious records on all of their observations, from the most minute to "Count Vlad in Castle Malebolgia is a vampire." They build vast libraries of notes and journals, all of which are held in Council of Faith chapter-houses. Because of the almost obsessive nature of the inquisitors, the Inquisition maintains some impressive libraries of histories, occult sciences, law, theology and taxonomy of unnatural creatures anywhere in Christendom, all open to any inquisitor who needs the information. The organiza-

tion of said libraries, however, leaves something to be desired. Much of the information still exists only as hastily scrawled notes waiting to be fleshed out by overworked monks, and still more it exists only in the minds of experienced inquisitors. A soldier of God trying to find one particular fact has a daunting task ahead of him, indeed.

When the inquisitor has tracked and cornered a victim, his job is to acquire as much evidence as possible to support his case. As those who commit heresy are traitors to the Church, the inquisitor has a large degree of latitude in collecting information. Often, this includes capturing the target, dragging them to an undisclosed location in bonds and forcing them to give up "evidence" in the form of confession. The Inquisition has no dictates on how this evidence is gathered, and inquisitors employ a rather large range of modes and methods. However, the inquisitor has no right to commit murder — at least, not purposefully.

YOho Inquisits the Inquisitors?

It takes a dedicated and tireless person of zealous faith, unbreakable spirit and peerless objectivity to be an inquisitor. Unfortunately, such men and women are difficult to find. Inquisitors are human, and all humans are inherently prone to sin, as much as it pains Cardinal Marzone to admit it.

Inquisitors go bad. They become infatuated with the minutiae of their work. They come to obsess over the legions of Hell, expect conspiracies in every corner and believe everyone they work with to be in on a plot to destroy all of Christendom. They focus on the material aspects of the job and spend time confiscating money and property from peasants, stuffing their own coffers. Crooked bishops and cardinals, sometimes themselves pawns of fiends, learn the true nature of inquisitors and manipulate them to their own ends. Inquisitors become heretics or are seduced by the Adversary's minions in even more perverse ways, becoming lemures or even Cainites. Some go mad. Some simply give up.

The Inquisition reserves the right to bring proceedings against its own members. Inquisitors assigned to such a case study the subject and turn evidence over to the Procurator Fiscalis. If the subject is irreconcilably guilty, the Council condemns the inquisitor, stripping him of all his power and, if the crime warrants it, sentences him to death. The Inquisition carries out the sentence immediately and the Council requests a replacement.

Inquisitors may begin proceedings against their fellow inquisitors at any time. In theory, a cell of inquisitors takes notes on one another constantly,

watching every step and wondering whether the other has gone over to the other side. They worry they are the next to fall under scrutiny for a perceived slip of the tongue or a failure to act, or that a fellow inquisitor will bring down the hammer of Rome upon them. However, should an inquisitor bear false witness against one of her own, the Council suspects the accuser of treason, heresy and various crimes against the Church.

Inquisitors have a second option for punishment should an inquisitor fall from grace: If the accusers belong to the same order as the fallen, the inquisitors may bring it to the attention of their superiors within the order. Each order has different penalties for failure, but often the punishment for failure and falling is censure, pilgrimage, penance or death (in extreme cases).

The Knights of Acre punish members who fail to uphold their vows and give in to fear before the enemy. Knights are stalwart warriors, and cowards have no place in their ranks. Flight from the battlefield is a betrayal of the order's creed. For the first offence, the Knight's superior assigns a regimen of meditation during menial labor — cleaning the barracks, polishing armor, tending to horses, standing watch and so forth. Multiple offenses call into question the Knight's ability to fight demons, and the superior typically calls for dismissal.

The Red Order has less patience than the Knights. Failure to uphold the tenets of the Inquisition includes delving into unapproved areas of the occult, dealing with demons and exploring the dark areas of the soul. Members of the Red Order play with metaphysical fire and falling from grace, for them, is tantamount to plotting against Christendom. The inquisitor's superiors are immediately called into meeting to discuss the nature and breadth of the crime, and whether the member's soul can be saved. If the member is salvageable, the superiors remove the member from the line of duty. The superiors assign the member to others within the order who specialize in theology and force the fallen to confront their deeds in debate and reflection. Those who cannot be saved are stripped of their red robes, excommunicated from the Church and handed back to the Inquisition for trial.

The Sisters of St. John do not believe in ever forcing a member from their ranks, even for the worst crime imaginable — murder. As an order with a focus on healing, harming another human being is equivalent to damaging their soul. But, no member is ever truly lost. They can save all with patience and time. Sisters who do fall from grace are removed from their duties and return to their convent. There, the

fallen member waits until the local Mother Superior believes she has "recovered." In mild situations, this may be days of reflection and prayer. In the most heinous, the order confines the Sister for life.

The Eyes of God have little patience for those who overstep the bounds and reveal the secrets of the conspiracy to those who aren't part of the order. A secret here and a secret there and the entire order unravels. The simplest breach of trust rates instant expulsion from the order without appeal (and those thus expelled tend to run afoul of fatal mishaps within days of their dismissal). If a single person talks and gets away with it, then the rest of Oculi Dei will think it's within bounds to let a few secrets out now and again — and that's unacceptable.

The House of Murnau polices its own like a family — higher-ranking members of the House may punish their children and other members in their care as they see fit. If a member of House Murnau commits an offense against the Inquisition as a whole, the House often covers it up ("keeping it in the family," so to speak) and attempts to deal with the matter on its own. While the House makes every effort to save a sibling or cousin who has fallen, it also holds few illusions — the House curse ruins at least one scion of Murnau in every generation.

Rumors circulating among some of the inquisitors speak of secret, special agents of Cardinal Marzone within the Inquisition who are charged with maintaining the integrity and purity of purpose of inquisitors. Some believe any inquisitor, at any time, may be other than a member of the local cell, may in fact be a mole taking notes on the loyalties of other soldiers of God and sending coded messages back to some secret master. Tales circulate of those suspected of heresy by these secret police turning up in secret tribunals before the Supreme Council. Many inquisitors do not believe these rumors, but they look over their shoulders and size up their fellow soldiers just the same.

No inquisitors have been unmasked as these socalled secret police, but some claim that people have disappeared in the middle of the night with no sign of fiendish activity or a struggle, only to turn up in a mysterious dungeon hundreds of miles away. How or why is a mystery.

Procurator fiscalis

The Procurator Fiscalis is a combination public prosecutor, archivist and expert in the ways of the damned, his knowledge culled from long years fighting in the field himself. A single Procurator Fiscalis serves a Council of Faith. Ones with especially keen minds, eyes for detail and objective outlooks are promoted to the position. While not a position highly coveted by inquisitors eager for action, it is a

fine station for older inquisitors looking to continue the fight but without the physical ability to do so.

It is too simple for an inquisitor, bearing a grudge or lacking objectivity, to accuse an innocent person — an act that may condemn the accused to death. The Procurator Fiscalis performs as a safety net for the Inquisition and maintains an objective face before very subjective work. His job is to determine the truth, not to convict on spurious grounds.

When an inquisitor cell gathers sufficient evidence against an individual, it approaches the Procurator Fiscalis and formally requests to open a judicial inquiry. The procurator assumes the accused is guilty of all charges before examining all documents brought before him. If he finds enough evidence to warrant a preliminary hearing, he draws up the papers and presents the charge.

The Procurator Fiscalis then brings the case before the local Council of Faith. If the Council agrees with his assessment based on the evidence, the procurator works quickly to assemble a case against the accused. The inquisitors receive the orders to "retrieve" the accused at any cost.

Within days, the Council holds a very short and informal trial at which the Procurator Fiscalis acts as an attorney for the prosecution. If the accused is not present, the Council holds the trial in absentia. If the accused is found guilty, the Council dispatches inquisitors to mete out sentence. If the accused is dangerous or the matter urgent, the Council holds a trial in the defendant's home, or while one inquisitor holds down the accused and another readies the stake.

Many inquisitors find the Procurator Fiscalis to be an annoyance at best and a stumbling stone at worst. Inquisitors believe they waste time, get in the way and generate unnecessary hassles. Rarely will the Council wave an inquisitor past the necessary procedure, however. More than a few inquisitors have fallen to Cocytus, and sidestepping of the process is an indicator that the inquisitor has become jaded, corrupted or worse.

Council of faith

In every city where the Church has its reach, Cardinal Marzone institutes one or more Councils of Faith. Council members are chosen from the pool of inquisitors with backgrounds as lawyers, theologians, clergy and distinguished laity, and they are entrusted by the Supreme Council to maintain the hierarchy and organization of the shadow Inquisition.

A Council of Faith comprises five venerable inquisitors. They administer the activities of local inquisitors, ensure timely reports to the Supreme Council in Rome and judge the trials of the Inquisi-

tion. They hold together the local inquisitor cells and manage their cooperation through reports and by providing a safe haven in a chapter-house.

The primary function of the Council of Faith is the trial of crimes and heresies. The Council operates on a "guilty until proven innocent" premise, and it takes more than begging for mercy for them to absolve the accused. The trial works in three steps: capture, arguments and sentencing.

First, inquisitors bring in the subject for trial. The moment a cell of inquisitors has enough evidence to convict someone of committing necromancy, consorting with demons or whatever the particular offense may be, they arrest the individual and, if possible, charge and arrest him for his crimes. (Accused exhibiting demonic powers or who attack inquisitors with such abilities are assumed to be guilty, and no trial is necessary. Likewise, inquisitors are fully permitted to defend themselves if need be.) The Council of Faith maintains elaborate containment facilities within the confines of its chapter-houses for dangerous prisoners, including cells, equipment, shackles and a wide range of items for "containing" demons. Technically, the subject of inquiry is not necessary for a trial — the Council may try any individual in absentia if necessary.

Next, during proceedings, the Council hears the evidence presented by the Procurator Fiscalis. The Council weighs the evidence against the Catechism of the Church and the Council's extensive knowledge of theology, the law and the occult sciences. If they find the subject guilty — and he almost invariably is — the Council retires and deliberates a sentence.

Sentences vary. For mere humans trapped in a conspiracy by those practicing witchcraft or necromancy, sentences range from an enforced pilgrimage to a holy site to penance, confession or scourging. For those who actively engage in heresy, practice overt witchcraft, or who have given themselves to darker powers, the sentence is uniformly death. The Council commonly burns the guilty at the stake, but it also uses more esoteric sentences, especially for demons and their ilk.

Once a Council passes sentence, the accused cannot appeal or argue it. The sentence is absolute. If the sentence is penance or confession, the Council charges a local inquisitor to approach the clergy and see that the poor, deluded soul is set on the path to righteousness or see to it himself. If the sentence is scourging, the inquisitor promptly scourges the guilty in the chapter-house cells and then releases him. If the sentence is death, the Inquisition handles the



matter quickly and privately. Inquisitors consult the Council on issues of carrying out sentence if they are not clear on the best manner to proceed (this typically happens in cases involving monstrous or powerful demonic beings or their servants). The Council directs the inquisitor to those who have that information, whether archivists, other inquisitors or other useful sources.

The Council is aware that their power lies ultimately in the strength and judgment of the inquisitors. With mortal enemies who dabble in the black arts, the Council has the luxury of trials and sentencing. However, the inquisition has no obligation to save those who are beyond mortal ken. The investigating cell makes a decision, sometimes swiftly, either to pursue a trial or to eliminate the threat before it imperils the souls of the Flock. In these cases, the Council authorizes cells to take the actions needed and fully report to the Council of Faith in the aftermath. The Council will weigh the evidence against the cell's actions and determine whether the action taken was necessary. In nearly all cases, the Council sides with the cell — rarely does the evidence of clear and present danger contradict the actions of the inquisitors.

When the Inquisition establishes a Council of Faith in a new city, it starts "months of grace." During this period, the cells answering to the new Council enter the community and observe the locals for strange behavior. When inquisitors stumble upon interesting evidence of disreputable behavior — suspicious marks in the forests, commerce in unnatural items, disappearance or reappearance of locals — they report the matter. The Council notifies local parish priests that certain members of the congregation require confession and penance. As the inquisitors compile evidence, they turn it over to the Procurator Fiscalis, who compares it to notes of previous inquisiting and prepares the cases.

After the months of grace end (and the actual amount of time ranges from a few weeks to several years — indeed some "months of grace" that began in the early stages of the Inquisition still continue), the Inquisition commences. It begins secret trials of true sinners, heretics and minions of evil. Inquisitors question witnesses, compile evidence and prepare assaults against enemy strongholds. As the trials near completion, the Council orders the inquisitors to carry out the sentences in the most efficient manner while harming the fewest possible innocents. Councils may take years to complete their trials and sweeps of the region. Once a Council of Faith digs in, it is there permanently.

Checksand Balances

The Council has a secondary, but no less important, function: maintain checks and balances within the Inquisition. Inquisitors spend much of their time apart from their superiors, chasing after all manner of heretics, fiends and devils. Much of it takes a toll on the mind and the soul. Weak inquisitors die, become corrupt and betray their fellows. The Council acts as a supervisory party that may remove an inquisitor at any time.

Simultaneously, the inquisitors keep a careful eye on their Council of Faith. The Council can be infiltrated, tempted, bribed or simply fall into disarray. As the Inquisition often works far away from the watchful eye of Rome, the Council is on its own monitor as much as that of the cells it supervises.

The cells and the Council strike a balance of inquiry and judicial review. The Council, seeing all the cases presented before it with the evidence, makes aggregate judgments about the inquisitors as well as the accused. Over time, it becomes obvious if an inquisitor is slipping in his or her duty to the Church and God. If the inquisitor simply hasn't come up with anything in a very long time, the Council sees plenty of reason to cast suspicion. It can turn an inquisitor into a defendant at any time and may use other cells beholden to it to capture, imprison, question and try the ex-inquisitor.

Likewise, the inquisitors keep a watchful eye on the Council. If a Council repeatedly rejects cases with solid evidence, "misplaces" records, overlooks obvious infiltration by the enemy, or spends all of its time bickering, the inquisitors can open a case against them. Overturning a Council is more difficult than prosecuting an inquisitor, however. A judicial body must sit on site and listen to the evidence, even if the accused Council is absent. Another local Council may sit and listen to the evidence, or the inquisitors can take it to the Supreme Council. If the Council is guilty, the same penalties apply to them as to any other accused of the Inquisition. Councils that lose before the Supreme Council are in a very perilous position, as it has its own teams of inquisitors to deal with renegades.

Should a Council of Faith fall, whether to the enemy, more mundane mishaps, or by corruption of its members, the inquisitor cells must build a new one. They quickly elect five among the survivors from the supporting cells to constitute the new Council. One of their number goes to stand before the Supreme Council and receive ratification for the new Council of Faith. If the cells are also wiped out in the assault, Rome will send an entire new set of

cells and a Council to the affected area — a major blow for the Inquisition.

The balance of power between the cells and the Council keeps everyone alert. Lies and politics certainly have their place in the Inquisition, but pointing a finger and bearing false witness carry serious consequences for the guilty. The Inquisition considers perjury a crime tantamount with heresy and murder and condemns it with stiff punishment, including time incarcerated, dismissal from the Inquisition and excommunication.

The Supreme Council

The Supreme Council comprises seven members: Two inquisitors of high standing, two secretaries, two lawyers or experts in theology and one Advocatus Fiscalis—the financial advisor. The Supreme Council also commands a small army of experts in theology, law, war and the occult sciences as advisors on a number of subjects, from maintaining the Church's interests to the best way to destroy fiends through the use of mounted cavalry.

The Supreme Council has three functions. The first is as an executive board that oversees the direction of the Inquisition. It hands direction down to the Councils of Faith, makes final recommendations on appointments and promotions and works with delegations from the Church. It may dissolve or reconstitute Councils of Faith at any time or force a group of inquisitors to relocate to a new area.

The second position is to act as the Council of Faith for Rome. The Supreme Council hears and judges cases too sensitive — or involving people too powerful — for a mere cell of inquisitors and a normal Council of Faith. In secret chambers hidden within the Vatican, members listen to arguments on the sanctity (or lack thereof) of fallen bishops and powerful lay nobility. The Supreme Council sits unmoving as masked inquisitors drag the offender before them, and it considers the case presented by its own Advocatus Fiscalis. The advocatus presents his charges, and he allows the offender either to admit to them or to offer a defense. After the trial, the Supreme Council retires to deliberate.

The Supreme Council bases much of its attitude in handing down sentence on the similarity between heresy and high treason. In their eyes, as those tried before them are in positions to influence and corrupt the souls of hundreds of people, practicing heretical acts is tantamount to plotting to overthrow all of Christendom. No act of heresy is too innocent; no communication with the "other side" is too arbitrary. They mitigate their punishment based on circumstance and station, but the punishment for high treason is always the same: death. The Supreme Council prefers

death by fire. (Of course, dragging highly placed officials and nobles before the Supreme Council is disrupting to Christendom in and of itself, and doing so causes enough problems that it occurs only as a truly last resort. If possible, the Inquisition seeks to ruin corrupt men of power through subtler means, at least initially.)

The final function of the Supreme Council is secret, even from Cardinal Marzone himself: The Supreme Council can vote to remove the Cardinal from office. If Cardinal Marzone falls to the caprices of evil, the entire Inquisition falls with him. The Supreme Council shepherds the succession of Grand Inquisitors to protect the integrity of the entire enterprise. The secret vote must be unanimous among members of the council before they can order their inquisitors into action to remove Cardinal Marzone to the dungeons and start treason proceedings. Then, they will begin the vote among themselves as to who will take his place.

But, this has never happened. Cardinal Marzone is the first and, to date, only man ever to hold the post of Grand Inquisitor, and no plans exist to unseat him. No one is scheming against the head of the Inquisition — at least, no one who has been detected (and survived) thus far.

The Supreme Council has never informed the Cardinal of its ability to remove him on a moment's notice — they have never needed their contingency plan and so see no reason to share it. There might come a time or a need, no matter how remote or improbable, when Cardinal Marzone must be replaced with someone younger and more capable. The Cardinal might become old and sick. He might be afflicted with dementia. He might even fall from grace. The Inquisition must stand, whether the Cardinal follows it into the future as Grand Inquisitor or not.

Taking the place of the previous Grand Inquisitor is no mean feat. The politics of the Church and state must be on the side of the Supreme Council, and they must have the confidence of the Pope. Only he has the power and the strength to deal with a rogue and decrepit Grand Inquisitor properly. Proving to the Pope that the Grand Inquisitor has fallen would require more than extensive evidence. It would mean convincing the Pope that none of the evidence was forged, then maneuvering the Pope into a position where he is ready to confirm a new Cardinal who can become the new Grand Inquisitor.

The Grand Inquisitor, Cardinal Marzone

Cardinal Marzone stands at the head of the Inquisition. By virtue of his credentials, he enjoys the ability to delegate his power and infuse inquisitors with the power of the Church. He is a man of irreproachable character; an impeccable Christian who believes strongly that the Church is the only true defense against evil. He absolutely and immovably believes that the Inquisition is all that stands between the fiends and the fall of all of Christendom.

As Grand Inquisitor, Cardinal Marzone speaks with the authority of the Pope on all matters of faith (within the shadow Inquisition, that is). He works as a conduit between the rest of the Episcopal authority and the Inquisition. However, the Church has no hold over the Inquisition save through the Cardinal; all that individual clergy, even Cardinals, can do is suggest, complain, cajole and threaten—those who even know of the organization's existence. The Cardinal works to preserve the Inquisition's integrity, sanctity and secrecy.

Cardinal Marzone has minute control over all members of the Inquisition, from the highest advisor to the lowest servant. He has ultimate control over the Supreme Council, for which he may appoint, reappoint, transfer or remove members at a whim. The moment he feels someone is not adequately trustworthy, not handing down sound judgments or not acting in the best interest of the Church, Cardinal Marzone can remove him. He does not have to give any reason. His actions do not even need to be sound. His word is law.

The Cardinal's command is never in question. His grip on the organization is absolute, and no one dares question his rule. To date, he has never

given anyone reason to contradict his direct orders, as he does not steer the Inquisition away from God, nor does he hand down frivolous or pointless commands. He is a fair leader and a man with a commanding presence. But, he neither feels compassion for the lesser foot soldiers, nor does he connect with their plight; he's too busy seeing the overall picture to worry about the affairs of his reports. He's aware of the men who serve under him and their importance, but he also believes in delegating the control to those who are worthy of his trust. Cardinal Marzone does not suffer betraval. What the Cardinal does with fallen members of the Inquisition is completely up to him. If an inquisitor failed horribly in his trusted position as a defender of souls — he or she was easily bribed, not competent or lacked the backbone to do what needs to be done — he demotes the inquisitor and sends him back to his order. Rumors say that the Cardinal maintains his own secret dungeons in the Black Forest of Bavaria for those who truly betray the Inquisition to the

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legions of Hell. Darker,

more vicious rumors sug-

gest that those fallen are dragged to the dungeons,

tortured with hot pincers for their knowledge

of occult magic, forced

into confession of dalli-

ances with demons, and

have their tongues torn from their mouths so

they will never utter

another evil word to

another man of God.

Then, the Cardinal

turns them loose again

into the world to live as outcasts and suffer the taunts and shouts of children until the end of their days.

Should a Council of Faith betray the Inquisition, Cardinal Marzone orders his Supreme Council to dispatch inquisitors to bring its members in for trial. The Supreme Council strips the members of power and influence on their arrival in Rome. The Supreme Council is then free to try the rogue Council members just as they would anyone who falls under their purview. Cardinal Marzone does not believe in mercy for those who have come into the fold of the Inquisition and used it for their own ends. He leaves the Council in Rome to its task of hearing the case, judgment and punishment.

Should someone in the middle or lower ranks come to the attention of the Cardinal in a positive way, due to heroics beyond the call of duty, he recognizes their abilities. He moves them to an active cell, appoints them to an important Council of Faith, or brings them to Rome to advise the Supreme Council on cases. Cardinal Marzone is not a micro-manager, but he recognizes talent, and he wants that talent working to the best of its ability. The Inquisition is young, and the Cardinal wants the best people in positions of leadership. It takes acts of great bravery to prove the loyalty and the intelligence to rate a position of power on the Cardinal's prize staff.

Operating Across Europe

The secret Inquisition operates in cells as small as two inquisitors and as large as a score. The cell size varies, depending on the density of the local population, the influence of the Church in the area and the direct need for inquisitors. Quiet areas need fewer inquisitors, while those with more activity require more supervision. Areas without Church influence are often without cells and on their own — the Inquisition worries about saving Christendom proper, not the surrounding lands full of unbelievers.

Cell size also fluctuates by need. If the area is sparsely populated, but sports heretical cults lurking in its forests — as may be in the thick woods of Bavaria — the cell grows to a dozen members or more until they lance the problem. If a call for help arrives, inquisitors travel to the needy area and assist the suffering cells. Inquisitors move from cell to cell, tracking the scent of evil. The Inquisition doesn't have the personnel to truly coat all of Europe, and inquisitors go where they are needed or assigned. Once inquisitors cleanse an area, they are free to move to the next.

Multiple cells inhabit the same area if the population (and enemy activity) supports them. In Paris, for example, several cells operate in tandem. Activity is so high in Paris and the surrounding lands that inquisitors need to distribute their duties to cover enough ground. However, large stretches in the Kingdom of Hungary are without cells for miles.

The local cells meet in undisclosed and unpopulated areas, often work at night (when enemy activity is highest), and leave behind only coded messages and whispers. Their chapter-houses can be anything from someone's private residence to the catacombs beneath the local church. They find private locations with few visitors and plenty of space to maintain stockpiles of notes and tools. Typically, the Inquisition meets in monasteries, convents, churches, chapels and other areas that are both safe and hallowed ground.

The cells carefully obscure their presence from anyone who is not a proven member of the Inquisition. Each chapter-house has a distinct set of secret signs. These signs point the way to the chapter house, but the local members design them to be as innocuous as possible: An eye carved into the side of a wall, an arrow, a shared code word in Latin or Greek. A traveling inquisitor must have a letter of introduction and a listing of the symbols to find the chapter house. Whereas the peasantry is blind to the workings of the cells, the Inquisition's hunted prey are cunning and wily foes. Many inquisitors die because the enemy tails someone to the meeting hall.

Cells in a given area report to the local Council of Faith. The Council of Faith maintains channels of communication between the cells of inquisitors, while providing archiving services and communication with Rome, including the local secret signs and appropriate letters of introduction. The Council also acts as an auditing body on the inquisitors and their work.

The total number of cells across Europe is unknown to anyone save Cardinal Marzone. The estimates among members range from hundreds to thousands. The truth, however, is probably closer to the former than to the later. The Inquisition, as a whole, is small, and its cells are widely dispersed.

Communication Lines

In a world where cells are scarce, meeting is difficult and discussion is slow, maintaining the communication lines is a primary goal for the Inquisition. Normally, inquisitors go about their daily business of collecting information. When real trouble appears, inquisitors need quick access to information from other cells, from libraries, or from the collections held by the orders.

The center of the communication network is the Procurator Fiscalis. As part of his duties, he archives every piece of evidence in a case and every letter he receives from other Councils, inquisitors or the Supreme Council itself. For pure history, he is an incalculable resource: An inquisitor, intent on a case, can petition access to the procurator's files at the chapter-house of the Council of Faith and receive the information. The procurator hands over the information if the inquisitor can demonstrate reason.

Only one Procurator Fiscalis is assigned per Council of Faith; the organization does not have enough experienced staff to assign more. The procurator often wants for his own staff, because the mountains of data generated by inquisitors are far too much for one person to handle, but until the Inquisition matures, Procurators Fiscalis must contend alone. One Council of Faith might be responsible for an area of several hundred square miles, and the Procurator Fiscalis contends with the data and details of every small village, cave, forest and castle within those borders.

The procurator sends out periodic delegations to collect information for his own library, or collect information from the Inquisition cells. Naturally, he runs into some contention — the Red Order, for example, is unlikely to release on a whim precious and irreplaceable ancient books detailing various heretical subjects — but, at the very least, his authority will demand a letter with a reference to the information. He also sends out delegations to other Councils of Faith, largely for the same purpose.

He works to maintain communication between the cells that report to the Council of Faith by receiving and filing their semi-periodic reports. He simply scans reports for information to send to the cells and files them away in his ever-growing mass of paper, notes and archives. When something appears in the report of one cell that is clearly suspicious, he reports it to the Council and passes it on to relevant, nearby cells.

The five Orders

The five orders have different destinies, but for the time being, the Inquisition forces them to work together. This does not mean all the members work together seamlessly. Often, the loyalty is to one's order before the Inquisition, and those duties push and pull the inquisitor while he tries to do his job. The inquisitor finds himself torn — does he serve the masters from his order or does he serve the masters of the Inquisition? What happens when the orders conflict?

When the member does find himself in conflict, he falls back on those beliefs and teachings of his order. From there, he must decide what is best for him, best for the order and best for Christendom. The orders provide a personal identity, a path to faith and a way to God for the members. They bring together very passionate souls with a certain opinions and beliefs and turn them into soldiers of Christendom.

The orders do not always cooperate. An Eye of God feels more than a little annoyance when a Knight hefts a great sword and dashes into a castle, and the Sister wonders whether her friend, the Brother of the Red Order, really needs another vial of demon blood. But, the great challenge of working in the secret and most holy Inquisition is overcoming such base prejudices and working together toward a greater good.

The order descriptions on the following pages are arranged thus:

Title: The name of the order.

Overview: A brief look at the history, beliefs and structure of the order.

Appearance: What a given member of the order might look like, including habits and standards (in the case of the clerical orders).

Initiation: The standard methods by which a pilgrim might come to join the order.

Organization: A condensed explanation of the order's hierarchy.

Holdings: The locations of the order's most important chapter-houses.

Superior Virtue: Which of the three Superior Virtues the order prizes.

Blessings: The category of Blessings in which the order specializes.

Curse: The category of Curse that most commonly afflicts the order.

Order Benefit: The game effects of the order's benefits, should the player choose to accept them (see Chapter Four).

Order Drawback: With the good must come the bad. If a player chooses to take on the order's benefit for her character, she must also accept the order's drawback.

Character Creation: Suggestions for players on which Traits are most appropriate for characters of the order. Remember that these are suggestions *only*, not hard-and-fast rules.

Quote: A comment indicative of members of the order.

Outlooks: The order's outlook on the rest of the inquisition, the Flock and the Adversary.

ORDER OF THE POOR KNIGHTS OF THE PASSION OF THE GROSS OF AGRE

We shall bring our swords to the fiends themselves and slay them where they stand!

One night, a small group of Teutonic Knights and Knights of St. Thomas, led by Gauthier de Dampiere, stole and smuggled a shard of the True Cross out of Acre under the cover of night. They hid it on a cart, buried in pig fat and protected from the sharp senses of the fiends hiding among the Crusaders and the

religious sentimentalities of their Muslim enemies. By land and over sea, the relic traveled to a small fortress on the isle of Cyprus. There, the Knights interred the shard in the chapel of the newly named Fortress of the Cross. That night, standing before the altar, Gauthier gathered the kernel of a new order of knights to fight the encroaching darkness: The Poor Knights of Acre.

The Knights of Acre are former members of the Hospitalers, the Teutonic Knights, the Templars and the Order of St. Thomas. They sued for recognition first in 1217 and again in 1218. Pope Honorius III, successor to Innocent III, formalized the Knights of Acre in a 1219 Papal Bull and granted them the monastic rights and duties similar to the Knights Hospitaler of St. John and the Knights Templar. The Papacy endowed the Knights with extensive privileges, including independence from all spiritual and temporal authority save that of Rome, exemption from tithes, protection from interdicts from bishops and the right to have its own clergy, ceremonies and cemeteries. In exchange, Rome charged the Knights with the military protection of the souls of those traveling to the Holy Land; the sacred defense of Christendom; and the destruction of heretics, fiends, witches, necromancers and demons.

The Knights blend a monastic life with a rigidly militaristic one. Along with taking up arms, they take sacred vows to submit to the Rule of the Order, maintain chastity and live in poverty save for their arms and mounts. These vows are lifelong commitments to the Church and God, and the Knights punish any violation of their vows or their rule of law with penance, pilgrimages, prayer and scourging. Those who maliciously break their vows face expulsion from the order and possible excommunication from the Church.

Leaving the order voluntarily is a very serious undertaking. Only the Grand Master can permanently release a petitioner from his vows after due consideration and thoughtful deliberation. Once released, the order promptly strips the petitioner of all rights, responsibilities, rankings, arms and mounts acquired while with the Knights of Acre. The ex-Knight is expulsed from the order with no chance of re-entry, although he or she is still a loyal Christian in the eyes of the Church.

The Knights follow a strict military hierarchy. The head of the order is the Grand Master, Gauthier de Dampiere, a grizzled fighter. His iron will is framed in a slowly withering body. As Grand Master, Gauthier commands the tongues, as they're called, which represent the order in different countries, each speaking a slightly different language. There are eight tongues — Provence, Auvergne, France, the Papal States, Aragon, Castile, the Holy Roman Empire and England. Groups of

Commanders report to each tongue, and there are from one to a dozen Commanders per tongue. Beneath the Commanders are field commanders, cavalry units, heavy and light infantry and regulars.

If the order needs to select a new Grand Master, the Commanders of the tongues meet in secret and vote on one of their own. So far, there has been no need to call this vote. But, if the order is to continue into the future, a new Grand Master must rise someday, and Gauthier de Dampiere has prepared the Knights well.

On the field, the Knights wield whatever tools necessary, from a burning torch to a standing army. The Knights stockpile relics and weapons, plans and maps, men, horses and mounts. Commanders dispatch light infantry, heavy infantry and cavalry units into the heart of darkness. The Knights show

no mercy to their sworn enemies, as their enemies certainly show them no quarter.

OUTLOOKS

The Fight: The quest to fight against the hordes of evil is not just to protect the Holy Land or the pilgrimages, but to protect all of Christendom itself!

The Adversary: The fiends infect every walk of life, burrowing into the most sacred of institutions. They must be destroyed using any means necessary.

The Flock: The innocents must be protected, and those who fall to the sword are mourned.

The Red Order: Our Red Brothers can find the light of knowledge nearly anywhere, but often forget that staring too long at *any* light eventually blinds.

Sisters of St. John: Meditation and peace are good and wise — when the war is over and the blood of the fiends stains the battlefields.

The House of Murnau: They can sense evil and that is fine, but what matters is if they conquer and destroy that evil with weapons of justice.

Oculi Dei: The Eyes are cowards who slink and hide in their caves. They stand around with their quills in their hands while the real men do the work of God.

raelder illa Pretta thet Willer of Berlin

The order is not quite as eager to die for God as it is to kill His enemies. One should stand after a battle rather than die on one's sword, so one can battle again (although the Knights praise glorious deaths in the service to the order). They don't believe any of their number will die of old age, but they do believe the Knight's sacred duty is to take into death as many heretics and villains with him as possible. The Knights' burial grounds overflow with the bodies of those who engaged the enemy and fell—while their monasteries harbor Knights eager to continue the fight.

Appearance: The Knights of Acre don a white mantle with a broken red cross. In times of war or battle, the Knights wear a white surcoat with the broken,

red cross over their armor. They commonly ride white horses.

Initiation: A common method of entry into the order is through already being a prominent knight of another military order (see p. 75). Already proven on the field, these individuals pass through a quick and secret initiation ceremony and enter the order on the fast track to promotion within the ranks.

Others lay dreaming of fighting Satan's minions. These members must prove themselves on the field of battle against a known enemy, where they take the title of Man-at-Arms. After distinguishing themselves, they submit to an elaborate initiation process where they take their vows, swear to the service of Christ and relinquish all possessions.

Organization: The lowest level of the Knights of Acre is the Man-at-Arms.
Considered light infantry, these support troops maintain mounts and arms and they fight on the very front lines of battle. The most common level is the Knight, warriors who move in ones or twos (or with a cell), hunting fiends across greater Europe. The order assigns Knights arms, armor, horses and men. Knights can take shelter in any of the order's many manors, mansions, hospitals and holdings.

Distinguished members are promoted to cavalry, then to field commanders and, later, to Commander. Commanders lead anywhere from a handful of Knights to entire field armies. A Commander of a tongue might conceivably ascend to become Grand Master once the current Grand Master passes on.

Knights far removed from the central body of the order report to the nearest, highest ranking officer. If the Knight

is alone without any contact from his order, he assumes the ranking officer in the field is himself.

Holdings: The Knights of Acre (as an order, not individually, of course) own manors, mansions, hospitals, monasteries and plots of land across Europe and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Most castles hold only about fifty men. The manors hold considerably fewer.

Their most important holding is the Fortress of the Cross in Cyprus, a highly fortified military stronghold near Nicosia. The order believes the shard of the True Cross is in a golden reliquary beneath the altar in the main chapel. To honor the shard, the Knights hold the ceremony of the Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday.

Other important holdings include the De Château Au-dessus of Poitiers in France and the Fortress of the Saints in Augsburg, as well as the ones listed in Chapter Two.

Superior Virtue: Zeal

Blessings: The Knights are blessed with Investitures. They can draw upon their internal reserves with great effect to bolster their strength, bring peace of mind, heighten their speed or even heal wounds.

Curse: The Knights of Acre suffer under Interdictions, which restrict their actions. The most important vow is that of strict adherence and loyalty to the Order, followed by their vows of chastity and of poverty. Other aspects of the vow include abstention, fasting, silence and prayer.

Order Benefit: The Knights of Acre have the greatest stockpiles of holy relics in Christendom. Some accuse them of being downright fetishistic about their trinkets, but others note the effectiveness of an anointed blade on the flesh of a demon and let the

matter lie. If the player chooses the or-Knight of Acre character, oints in the Holy Relics

der benefit for a Knight of Acre character, she receives three free points in the Holy Relics Background.

Order Drawback: The Knights of Acre do not issue their prized relics to just anyone. Any Knight character who carries a holy relic is held to a higher standard of behavior than his fellow. In game terms, the player must check for loss of Piety as if the character's rating were one point higher than it actually is.

Character Creation: The Knights often have very military concepts. The Gallant Nature and Vanity Impulse often rule them. Physical attributes are usually primary, as are Skills. Knights commonly have Allies, Mentor and Status as their Backgrounds. Their primary Virtue is Courage.

THE RED ORDER

The knowledge is at the tips of our fingers! What law tells us that we cannot use the knowledge of Hell against its minions?

Theodosius was born to a rich Greek family in AD 812, into the heresy of Manichaeism. He spent his youth idly readingpassages from Greek philosophers, the teachings of the Gnostics, the works of alchemy and the depths of natural science. As a young man, he traveled the world, collecting rare tomes, meeting with imams in Syria and searching for the lost works of Hermes Trismegistus in Alexandria. He dabbled in all manner of heretical thought, as well as pantheism, Buddhism and Islam.

Weary of years of travel and finding no answers to the questions burning in his soul, Theodosius traveled to Rome. There, he reportedly experienced the stigmata, fought with a powerful vampire rumored to be hiding in the catacombs beneath the city and underwent a conversion to orthodox Catholicism at the feet of the Pope. His pursuits led him into temptation and into clashes with darker powers, and he recognized the need for the strict rigor of monastic life to keep his mind clear and his soul pure as he researched forbidden subjects. Soon, he gathered followers in Rome. His passion for research had made him famous, and his conversion brought European scholars into his fold.

The order got off to a rocky start. Although established by a Papal Bull by Pope Benedict III, declaring the creation of the Order of St. Theodosius of the Abbey of St. Denis, later known as the Red Order, their charter was nearly revoked by Pope Honorius for heresy and witchcraft. During a petition to re-establish an Abbey, their past came to light, complete with the sordid details of various accusations of sorcery by high Church officials. The order persevered with a combination of politics and a careful presentation of the evidence against the charges, but the Church remains wary of their continued existence. St. Theodosius died in 871, but he left behind a treasure trove of journals, research, writings and thoughts that make the backbone of the order. Some say the blessed saint tainted his works with the workings of the magi, leaving behind hints and clues to the path of real power. Those of the Red Order toil endlessly trying to unlock the secrets of St. Theodosius. Others claim that there are those who succeeded, then disappeared or wandered into some battle with a dark evil they could not control. Most of the Red Order argues that the writings are benign, simply advanced theological or philosophical works on Socrates and Aristotle. However, the Red Order hides the most controversial of Theodosius' works from the prying eyes of the Church — protecting the writings from those who would misuse them or concealing information that could damn the order?

Life within the monastic order is structured and active. The Red Order believes normal monastic life paralyzes the mind and dulls the senses. Instead, the members of the order engage in study, vigorous debate, teaching and other intellectual pursuits. Research and experimentation is highly encouraged. Alchemy is popular, as is plumbing the depths of knowledge about the enemy: learning the heretical faiths, studying the feeding patterns of the fiends and memorizing demonic incantations. Anything that is not expressly maleficium is permissible to the Red Order. Some would call this research heresy in itself, nullifying the sanctity of a Holy Order, but the order doesn't let the details slip out too often. Besides, the Red

Order refers to this sort of research as "learning the tools of the enemy."

Because these studies can easily lead a good Brother or Sister into temptation, the order demands rigid codes of conduct among its members. The order toils under the Rule of St. Theodosius, written after the blessed saint's long life of travel and observation. Most of the Rule addresses personal conduct, outlining the need for humility, subservience to one's superiors, the reverence for God and prayer, the distribution of possessions and the requirement that all research be "good works." The remainder of the Rule outlines penalties if a Brother or Sister should fall from Grace and engage in heretical acts themselves. The penalties are largely penance and prayer, although expulsion is reserved for the most heinous of crimes. Many whisper of the fallen Brothers and Sisters who have strayed from the Rule of St. Theodosius and succumbed to the allure of black ritual magic.

Levied against the order is a strict warning, however: No research or experimentation is to occur outside the hallowed walls of the Abbey, upon pain of expulsion and excommunication. The rule is based on the tale of one Everard of Gascony who, a century before, pushed the will of God too far. He hid his research in a mountainside cave in the Pyrenees and dragged good Brothers and Sisters with him. In their curiosity, they, too, began to practice sorcery in secret. They were no longer good Christians, but a cult, and whatever they summoned rained down eternal damnation and pain upon the entire monastery, obliterating it entirely. None survived.

OUTLOOKS

The Fight: The philosophy is simple: Use all the tools available to defeat the enemy, even if those tools are the enemy's tools and those weapons are the enemy's weapons.

The Adversary: The enemy is intelligent, well armed and has a diverse set of weapons. Learning about these weapons is the only way to victory.

The Flock: What can we glean from the pattern of the wounds and the positions of the bodies of the fallen? Perhaps our prey has a method to its attacks and a cycle to its need for flesh?

The Knights of Acre: Staunch warriors who are sadly ignorant of the real weapons they can bring to bear in the fight.

Sisters of St. John: Our sisters in battle who learned internal strength yet squandered it on unholy visions.

The House of Murnau: The can smell evil, in their own strange way — possibly, once we study this strange ability, we can duplicate it for ourselves and dismiss this cursed House altogether.

Oculi Dei: They collect vast volumes of data and knowledge that they hoard, not share.

Word of the incident swiftly circulated among the nearby villages. The incident could not be concealed — it left behind too many witnesses and too many bodies. The Red Order was saved by the fast actions of Abbot Gualhard de Mozencs of Toulouse, who burned the offending materials and enforced the Rule of St. Theodosius. While the order's charter was not revoked — due, in no small part, to the politicking of the good abbot and his connections to Pope Alexander III — people approach members of the Red Order with suspicion, as if they might grow fangs and begin reciting demonic incantations at any moment. If one fell, they could all fall.

The Order's deepest secret — that their most beloved members suffer from the stigmata — was an effective bargaining chip with the Papacy during their deepest times of need. Bearing the wounds of Christ is, according to Church doctrine, a sign of grace bestowed only upon the most devout of the faithful. At any time, the order could be disbanded by a single act of the Pope, but the blood of Christ holds his hand at bay, time and again.

Academics greatly admire the order, although they

speak about it only in hushed tones. Rumor has it that members of the order can call down both miracles from God and great evils from Satan. The appearance of their red robes causes both a rush of excitement and fear. Some members of the Church and the intellectual elite wonder whether the Red Order has a grander plan — a melding with evil, perhaps, or a parallel, more secret war, wherein they manipulate the Church for their own plans. Some niggling evidence of mutiny against the Church came to light - lately, several Doctors of Theology, well respected in their fields, were caught manipulating a Bishop of a small diocese in Gascony for his influence over Church politics. Interestingly enough, this diocese was close to the site of the abbey destroyed by Brother Everard. Although these men were summarily disciplined by the order, the Church wonders how many more of its middle- and high-ranking offi-

Red Order's elite.

Appearance: The Brothers of the Red Order attire themselves in red robes, garbed with a black leather girdle. The Sisters wear red habits garbed with a silver belt and a rosary

cials have become puppets for the

Initiation: The Rule of St. Theodosius outlines the initiation of young boys and girls into the Red Order. Elder members of the order sponsor boys and girls, who then participate in rigorous intellectual, physical and theological training. Their first year is a trial period. They may work in the field and serve under elders, but the order has the right to dismiss them for any infraction at any time.

Members may be taken in as young as age 12 if they show proper amount of intellectual promise. Children who become novitiates are trained in languages, philosophy, writing and theological thought. The Red Order prefers to "get them young," knowing it is harder to teach an adult the fundamentals of literacy then it is a child.

Organization: The Red Order does not have a titular head; individual non-Red Order abbeys and cloisters report to Cardinal Marzone

alone. Within the Red Order, there is no rigid organization per se, although priors and prioresses are elected once a year from the members.

The Red Order does award degrees for teachers. Most teachers receive the title of Bachelor of Theology. They are masters of minor subjects, such as Latin grammar. Masters of Theology direct several Bachelors and master more complicated subjects, such as the Holy Scriptures, philosophy or the occult sciences. A Doctor of Theology is an accomplished researcher or theologian, able to lecture in depth on various occult subjects.

Holdings: The Red Order's largest abbey is the Monastery of Laurendine in Toulouse. The monastery houses the order's greatest library in three spiraling towers. More than 300 members of the order live within its walls.

They also hold the Convent of St. Scholastica in Rome, a building tended by Red Sisters. Inside the building is another large library and the holy body and relics of St. Theodosius. Legend states that touching the sacred relics of St. Theodosius momentarily gives a petitioner a glimpse into the mind of the Adversary.

Superior Virtue: Wisdom

Blessings: The Red Order is exceptionally gifted in its manipulation of the Holy Art. Its signature path, Boni Spiritus, allows for a wide range of effects, including holding demons at bay and even calling down the judgment of Heaven.

Curse: Members from the Order of St. Theodosius suffer from the stigmata. Their palms bleed, their backs ache as if from lashings and their foreheads sting from invisible thorns. For a rare few, a horrible seeping gash opens in their side.

Order Benefit: Some Theodosians have been allowed to study truly heretical and malevolent texts, culled from the libraries of unrepentant heretics and demon worshipers. While this has the unpleasant effect of tempting the Red Brother or Sister toward heresy and corruption (see below), it also gives the inquisitor knowledge — and therefore power. Ingame terms, the character's learning on the subject of heresy and demons grants three free dots in the Exposure Back-

ground. Players and Storytellers both should remember, however, that this information is culled from books, not firsthand experience. Therefore, the character might be quite surprised when a creature doesn't behave the way the books portrayed it.

Order Drawback: Reading the Devil's literature takes its toll on the sanity of the reader and tempts him down dark paths. Theodosians who study forbidden

> lorefindresisting their base urges more difficult. The difficulty to avoid acting on Impulse while Callous is considered one higher for these characters.

Character Creation: The
Red Order tend toward highly intellectual concepts. The Primary
Attribute category is normally Mental,
as are Knowledges. Theodosians often
have an Autocrat Nature and a Dominance Impulse. Backgrounds include Mentor,
Chapter-House and Status. Their primary Virtue is

Self-Control.

SISTERS OF ST. JOHN

I see in my mind's eye that on the turning of the leaves and the redness of the moon the hand of God shall reach down through His faithful and smite the unbelievers dead with swords of flame!

The first confirmed treatise on the Sisters of St. John occurred in 1217, when Sister Teresa, an acclaimed Iberian seer, petitioned Rome for the establishment of a new women's order. With the help of Otto von Murnau and Cardinal Ugolino, she was able to gain recognition for the order. The Vatican granted Sister Teresa a formal convent and hospital in Tyre. There, the Sisters took up the laws of St. Augustine, they recited the Divine Office according to the Rite of the Holy Sepulchre, lived in austere cells and spent time in deep meditation upon the grace of God. Although the original hospital was in poor repair, through hard work they prospered. The order enjoyed great success and popularity for its efforts in the Holy Land, especially supporting and healing the troops fighting the Fourth Crusade.

The nuns stayed at their hospital in Tyre for seven years, until Saracens destroyed this first convent in 1222. The nuns migrated west. Within ten years, they established convents in Castile, France, the Italian peninsula and Germany.

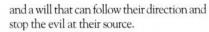
The life of the Sisters of St. John focuses on prayer. Sisters engage in meditation by concentrating on the mysteries of God and joining others for choir during the daily recitation of prayer. They fast, maintain codes of silence unless they are chanting the Divine Office, live in the strictest of cells and meditate for long periods.

This lifestyle helps to keep their visions away — violent, random, intensely personal visions which start simply by touching an object, seeing a painting, or remembering a warm summer day. They touch a sword and see the faces of victims as it was thrust into soft bodies. Standing in a graveyard reveals a parade of ghosts — past and future. They touch a simple iron peg and witness, in vivid detail, its use as an instrument of horrific torture. The more evil they see, the more they *remember*. The visions crawl through their minds like a long-decayed demon from their nightmares.

Their austere lives give them control over what they see, what they think and what they do. The worst stays at bay. Meditation and faith give the visions a veneer of predictability and help remove their horrificedge. Moments of peace calm their minds and reduce the pain. Prayer focuses the visions on something more useful and pleasant than murder, rape and burning forever in a lake of fire. Holy ground lends them solace.

The visions are random and powerful. The sheer force and unpredictability of the Sight terrifies young Sisters. The walls of the convents echo with their screaming recitations of the rosary from inside locked cells. Few younger sisters leave the walls of the convent and fewer leave their rooms.

Yet as they grow older, Sisters feel compelled to act on the evil they see, even at the cost of incurring unbidden visions. They know hiding for a lifetime in a convent will not stop the visions forever, only for small droplets of time. They feel they can contribute more by sharing the information in their heads than simply stopping it with chants and prayers. Somewhere, out there, is someone with a sword



These Sisters leave the safety of their convent to journey into the world, where they establish little oases of peace and holiness — secret hostels and hospitals, where they hope to heal the bodies, the minds and the souls of those who fight the evil. The traveling Sisters build a special brand of sanctuary: the eremitic convent. These can be established anywhere, even on a field of battle. It requires only some form of shelter and a Sister of St. John. Knights, warriors and seekers arrive at the doors of the convent, looking for quiet and a period of healing. For these petitioners, the Sisters attend to the wounds of the soul, put cold compresses on the wounds of the flesh and dispense wisdom from their private visions — tales of family far away, or victories yet to be won.

For a rare few, the Holy Sight turns relentlessly and constantly violent, and not even time in a desert convent will control it. Some of these mad nuns succumb to the visions of evil that crawl through their minds, and they howl their visions to any who will listen. The insane scream a jumble of half-understood sentences, yell in forgotten tongues and prophesy the end of the world.

Appearance: Sisters garb themselves in black habits with white hoods. They wear long ropes of rosary beads and tie their habits with

OUTLOOKS

The Fight: Until the world is cleansed of evil, there will still be pain and death at the hands of evil, and we will be forced to bear witness.

The Adversary: The works of fiends disrupt the natural path of the soul from the Earth to Heaven. Only in stopping them can there be true peace.

The Flock: We can see their fates, the poor dears, as they fall to the whims of the demons of Hell. We have a choice — we can attempt to save them once their fate has claimed them, or we can reach out and nurse their souls back to health before the worst occurs.

The Knights of Acre: Godly men and women who pick up their swords and fight the good fight in the name of God, Christ and all of Christendom.

The Red Order: They are named for the color of their robes, but when I look at them, I see *blood*....

The House of Murnau: Those who find faith will triumph; those who wallow in their temptations will fall.

Oculi Dei: A strange batch who can never find restful peace because they cannot share what they see and meditate on its worth.

a silver cord. They often wear black gloves. Many Sisters of St. John go barefoot.

Initiation: Women expressing interest in joining the order submit to an inquiry into their background and their parentage. If they prove acceptable, they enter the order as novices. A special master is assigned to the novice to guide her and teach her the prayers of the Divine Office. After a probationary year, other members of the order vote on the novitiate for admission. Those who fail are dismissed. After acceptance, the Sister takes her vows, chooses a holy name, enters the convent and becomes a true Sister of St. John.

Organization: The Sisters of St. John maintain a very loose order among their numbers and between their convents. All nuns begin their careers as novices. Later, they become Sisters. Most nuns stay Sisters throughout their careers. One Sister is elected as Mother Superior per convent and she oversees day-to-day business and metes out menial work to the Sisters.

Holdings: The Sisters of St. John have holdings across France, Iberia and the Holy Roman Empire. Their main chapter-house is the Abbey of the Blessed St. John the Evangelist, located near Sister Teresa's home just outside Madrid. The body of St. Teresa is interred here in the main chapel.

They also maintain the important desert convent, the Convent of the Holy Mother, for pure meditation and discussion on the nature of God, in Aix-la-Chapelle. Many great knights and kings, weary from the battles of the Crusades, among themselves, or with fiends, travel a great distance to cloister themselves with the Sisters here and meditate away their sins.

Superior Virtue: Faith

Blessings: The Sisters of St. John are touched by the Word of the Lord. They make use of powerful Psalms in their crusade against the Adversary.

Curse: In meditating on the nature of Godand the words of Christ, Sisters' minds wander to the Last Judgment. They are treated to torturous Visitations of death, judgment, burning flames, tortures and the demons of hell. Once the visions start, they cannot easily be stopped and so come unbidden to a Sister at all times of the day.

Order Benefit: Many Sisters of St. John receive divine visions. These visions always have a trigger of some kind — some Sisters see visions upon touching a subject, some merely upon sight, some upon making the sign of the cross over a given target and others see their revelations in dreams. These visions are rarely pleasant and may be precognitive (showing events yet to come) or postcognitive (showing the past). The Storyteller is encouraged to decide when these visions occur and exactly what information they impart. If a character wishes to induce a vision, the player must spend a point of Willpower and roll Perception + Empathy (difficulty varies based on how strong the emotional impressions of the target are; see the Auspex power Spirit's Touch on p. 177 of Dark Ages: Vampire). Success indicates the Sister receives a vision, varying in intensity and usefulness by the number of successes rolled. A failure imparts no information; a botch triggers the order's drawback (see below).

Order Drawback: Not all — in fact, not even most — of the visions that the Sisters receive are benevolent. Most of the time, the Sisters see blood, death and apocalyptic horror, even when the visions are informative. In game terms, any time a Sister receives a vision of something particularly horrible or tries to induce a vision and botches, the player must roll Courage (difficulty 7). Success on this roll indicates the character is unhurt, merely shaken by the strength of her vision. If the roll fails, the unfortunate Sister loses a point of Willpower out of sheer horror and a botched roll strips the character of a point each of Willpower and Conviction.

Character Creation: The Sisters of St. John rely on their innate talents and their giving personalities. They often have a Penitent Nature that sometimes becomes the Masochism Impulse. Social Attributes and Talents are usually primary. Common Backgrounds include Allies, Chapter-House and Flock. Most Sisters have high Self-Control ratings.

THE HOUSE OF MURNAU

Do you not smell that? That horrible, sickening, smell of...oh. It's probably nothing.

In AD 1117, Günter of Murnau encountered a new kind of evil in the forests just north of Toulouse during a pilgrimage to a well-known church. The fiend hunted Günter for some days. By the light of the moon on October 15th, Günter trapped the deranged creature in its lair and treated it to the blade of his sword. The letters back to the family afterward from Günter were not filled with horror. They were, instead, filled with a rather upbeat message. "Our knowledge shall not come to naught," wrote Günter. "Instead, it shall be used against the fiend's own dark works, for the glory of God." From that day forward, the mission of the House of Murnau - for those worthy of the honor - was to face the terrors of the night.

Ever since Günter, members of the House have followed his example, hunting and killing fiends whenever they find them, even if it cost their sanity. They claim they their sensitivity to the corruption in others drives them to the hunt. They can see it in the eyes of corrupt military officials, bribed Cardinals and fallen nobility. As House members approach a foe, their heads pound, their vision blurs, and they know instinctively that evil lurks ahead. They are compelled to dismantle it, or else live with the evil forever. They prefer to live without it.

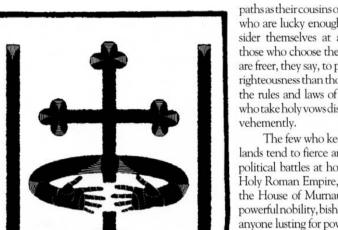
There is something else in Murnau blood, too, and it compels them just as strongly: A streak of unexplained strangeness. Some House members attract followers. Others attract sudden, unwanted influence. Some fall into sudden money, only to find out that it came from explicitly evil sources. Some suddenly find themselves stripped of all power, wandering in the woods alone, for no reason whatsoever. All experience random and terrible streaks of bad luck.

Worse, more than a few House members draw large groups of enemies, both human and diabolical. They attract the machinations and plots of evil from hundreds of miles around. Fiends seem drawn to the members of the House of Murnau like moths to a flame.

The members of House Murnau have one advantage against the curse: Their heightened senses tell them instantly who is corrupt and who is not —an incalculable advantage when dealing with shifty enemies, blackest fiends and the plots of the damned. Rumors claim that members of the House of Murnau can smell evil from a dozen leagues away, even on each other.

Compelled by their sensitivity, their enemies and their need to cleanse the world, some House members dedicate themselves to lifelong service to the Church. There, they reaffirm their faith in God and believe there is more behind their gift and their curse than mere blood. Possibly, it is a gift from Christ himself, and one to use for a greater good.

Those Murnau who do not join the Church venture out in the world alone. They lift their swords and stride forth, hoping to destroy some of the evil they sense is lurking in the forests before their bad luck catches up with them. Often, they find themselves walking the same



paths as their cousins of the cloth. Those who are lucky enough to survive consider themselves at an advantage to those who choose the Church - they are freer, they say, to pursue the path of righteousness than those hemmed in by the rules and laws of the faith. Those who take holy vows disagree, sometimes

The few who keep to their family lands tend to fierce and nigh-constant political battles at home. Deep in the Holy Roman Empire, ambitions catch the House of Murnau between kings, powerful nobility, bishops, cardinals and anyone lusting for power. House members, men and women, develop into wily politicians and bureaucrats. They trade in connections and knowledge, and they broker power to the highest bidder. They make themselves indispensable advisors, pointing out to an employer who is a true ally and who is really an enemy.

The most famous house member is Leopold of Murnau, a Dominican monk of no small accomplishments. An older man, he

OUTLOOKS

The Fight: We have been given this great gift to detect evil. It is our destiny, handed down from Heaven, to take up arms and fight against the legions of Hell.

The Adversary: The adversary cannot hide from our cunning senses, our keen intellects or our sharp swords, for we are of the House of Murnau and our blood is stronger than any force from Hell!

The Flock: The peasants are an unfortunate casualty in this war. They neither know what is happening nor why, and were we to inform them, they would only panic.

The Knights of Acre: A fine but rather intense group of men whose propensity for rushing into battle headlong without knowing the extent of the evil often results in more dead Knights than dead demons.

The Red Order: We do not smell the odor of corruption on them nearly as often as others would think. But virtue has its own scent, and that one is conspicuously absent from the Theodosians as well.

Sisters of St. John: An odd complement to our own senses—they can see evil, and we can feel it. They confirm exactly what we know - demons stalk the land, and the world will end if we don't do something about it.

Oculi Dei: Yes, they watch, but wouldn't their jobs be easier if they simply knew who was corrupt and who was not?

committed his life to the works of God and furthering the Inquisition. He is zealous, faithful and fearless before the enemy. Leopold gained notoriety as a writer, a theologian and the brother of the head of a wealthy family. He brought great honor to the House.

Through Leopold's influence (and his nephew Otto's impulsive offer), the House of Murnau staffs the secret Inquisition with its own progeny, both lay and of the cloth. The family's desire to confront corruption drives its members to work against the evil infecting Christendom. The Inquisition finds their ability to ferret out evil highly helpful, but sometimes slightly annoying, as occasionally they detect corruption in the most inconvenient of places within the Inquisition itself.

Appearance: The crest of the House is a pair of arms supporting a cross bracketed by two horizontal silver bars against a purple background. It decorates their shields, tabards and other such trappings. Only the head of the House bears the coat of arms as banner. House members in knightly orders or who take up arms wear the coat of arms as a badge on their tabard.

Women wear dresses of silver, purple and black. Men dress according to their station. Murnau who belongto holy orders dress as mandated. Many also often have red hair and blue eyes. Twins are very common in the Murnau family.

Initiation: Members of the House of Murnau who also serve the Inquisition might be full-blooded Murnau (in which case they often evince the house curse), those related only by marriage or servants of the House (the latter of whom do not suffer the curse and the better for them). Not everyone involved with the House of Murnau serves the Inquisition, however. Whether agiven Murnauenters the fight or not depends on her life experience; if she runs afoul of demons or other supernatural strangeness, she is probably inducted into the Inquisition in short order. The Murnau curse all but assures that full-blooded members suffer such encounters....

Organization: The eldest member of the family heads the House, who takes the title of count. Currently, the head is Frederick of Murnau, a middle-aged man hardened by a lifetime of familial bickering.

The head changes frequently due to intra-family politics and the occasional "accident." Belowthehead, the House organizes itself like a family: Those of direct blood relation to the head command the most power, including grown children and siblings. Following direct blood relations are those who are married into the main line: Spouses, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law. Finally come the cousins and family members removed by marriage.

Holdings: Castle Murnau has stood for nearly 300 years in a dense forest in Bavaria outside the county. The vast, rambling, cold stone fortress protects the family from their sundry enemies and itinerant worshipers. Outside the main fortress, the family maintains a vast array of summer cottages, winter havens and whatever other comforts their money and influence can buy.

The family also holds a second manor in the Piedmont outside Saluzzo. Farther away from the Patrimony of Rome, this smaller home base sits in the shadow of the Alps. Family members out of favor with the current head of the family often find themselves living in the Piedmont.

Superior Virtue: Any (player's choice)

Blessings: The curse of House Murnau has its beneficial side. The members of the House have learned to control various aspects of their arcane heritage, known collectively as Legacies.

Curse: Members of the House of Murnau suffer from Maledictio. Members of the House of Murnau are afflicted by strange curses and long runs of very bad luck. This can include anything from stumbling

over every stone on a road, to having saint cults spontaneously manifest and worship the House member in question. Typically, the curse draws the unwanted attention of fiends to the House member.

Order Benefit: Members of House

Murnau who do not exhibit the family curse, for whatever reason (be it that they married into the family or that they serve the family in some capacity and bear no actual relation by blood or marriage), still enjoy the benefits of being attached to a noble house.

Such characters have three free dots to divide among the Allies, Resources and Flock Backgrounds.

Order Drawback:
Pledging service to the cursed house, or worse yet, marrying into it, is not without risks.
God, evidently, greets such things with increased risk of Hisdisfavor. Players who choose the order benefit (rather than an Endowment) for their Murnau characters add one to rolls for acquiring new Curses (see p. 202).

Character Creation: Murnau characters uphold the honor of the House above all else. Defender is a common Nature (and carries with it the Conservatism Impulse). Social Attributes are often primary, and Skills are usually their primary Abilities. Backgrounds include 'Exposure, Status and Influence.

OQULI DEI

We cannot reveal what we know until all the facts are in, no matter how many might die in the meantime. God understands.

Once, the Sword of St. James had a serious weakness. Most of their number, save founder Rodrigue de Navarre, had never laid eyes on a fiend, let alone done battle with one. Although zealous in their wish to fight the enemy, they were a walking blind spot. Woefully unprepared, the Sword was almost destroyed after a conflict between their founder and the vampire Xalbador. The encounter left Rodrigue de Navarre scarred and paranoid, the Sword scattered.

Shaken to his faith by the encounter with the fiend and convinced of a dark conspiracy across Europe, Rodrigue needed a group he could depend on, one who could watch for him, and, most importantly, one who would believe him. From the most faithful and loyal of the Sword of St. James, Rodrigue formed the Oculi Dei. Their mission is to discover the lairs of the fiends, observe their feeding patterns, map their holdings, track down their pawns and return with this information. Once they amass clear and ample evidence, their superiors grant the authorization to burn and kill.

The Eyes of God were originally a secret, internal wing of the Sword of St. James, a lay group of men and women dedicated to the eradication of the infernal at the blades of their swords. Secret members of the Oculi are sometimes publicly members of the Sword of St. James. Regardless, they never reveal their real allegiance.

The Sword of St. James and other militant groups destroy fiends in their lairs, ride into history as heroes and claim the purity of the soul of Christendom. The Oculi are in a more tenuous and important position. They learn all they can about this so-called dark conspiracy in Europe. They chart, they plan and they watch. They feed off their own personal paranoia, obsessively take notes and prepare for the kill. They root out the truth and find the center of the evil conspiracy.

The Oculi Dei note every coming and going of every official in every city in which they are stationed. They plot out the daily habits of political and religious rituals. They watch the marketplace. They observe the military. They take note of every detail, every man, woman and child. The Eyes are experts at picking up the most minor nuances in changes in routine. They know those changes may lead directly to the heart of the beast.

Inside their hidden lodges and sanctuaries, their hidden meeting places and roadhouses in the forests, their mountain caves and their dusty rooms, the Oculi build vast altars of notes, tomes and references to their bleak obsessions. These alcoves are more than just meeting places, safe houses and storage depots. They are shrines to the Eyes' ever-vigilant quest against the darkness. Somewhere in these piles of moldy parchment and foul-smelling books are the comings and goings of the fiends, charted in minute detail. If someone could just sit down

and process it all, maybe, just maybe, the dark conspiracy could be revealed.

Many Eyes are frustrated by the unbalanced ratio of researching to acting. They'd rather act on the information they have instead of waiting. Clearly, the fiends are near and oblivious, and it would be a simple matter to destroy them. Their superiors stay their hands, however - the Eyes must be extremely careful in how they act, when they do. If they are caught, even once, the world will know they exist and their mantle of secrecy will be removed forever. Those who act prematurely — and are caught are cut off from the order, returned to the Sword of St. James (if they were ever members of that group) and sometimes removed from the society entirely.

All of the watching, studying, staring, hiding and waiting make the Oculi Dei a paranoid and unfriendly lot. Anyone, anywhere could be a fiend, in on the plot. Some Eyes who cannot balance their missions with their inner codes of ethics and

OUTLOOKS

The Fight: The fight is a waiting game. Evil is impatient and foolish. Soon, the fiends will tip their hands from overconfidence. Then, the wrath of God will fall upon them.

The Adversary: The fiends are more than mere monsters that rend flesh and drink blood. They hide behind a screen of petty evils to work out their great conspiracies. And those great conspiracies link to other conspiracies. There are thousands — nay, millions — of conspiracies, all interconnecting, everywhere, crushing us all.

The Flock: It is unfortunate that those caught in the fiend's grasp cannot be saved, but those who die provide valuable data.

The Knights of Acre: Hot-headed simpletons who act at the merest hint of evil and pick off one or two of the fiends while letting the real evil go free.

The Red Order: Pitting knowledge against evil is a fine strategy, but working evil against evil is itself evil.

Sisters of St. John: Their contemplation is admirable, but their tendency to trust visions instead of evidence makes their conclusions suspect.

The House of Murnau: An interesting but hotheaded family with strange temptations surrounded by even stranger occurrences. In the few short years of our existence, we have learned more about their curse than they themselves know.

morals become callous, cold and cruel. Many go insane. Rodrigue de Navarre himself, it is said, lost his battle with darkness. He is said to live a paranoid existence, and rumors abound about his indulgence of every dark whim that enters his mind.

Who are the Oculi Dei, really? What do they look like? Only they themselves know. The existence of the society is unknown even to most of the Sword of St. James. The Eyes of God can be anyone: A local bishop, a magistrate, a poor yeoman or a madman in a square. They are anyone, and everyone.

Appearance: The Oculi have no particular uniform, as a uniform would give them away to their enemy.

Initiation: The Eyes of God are largely chosen from those close to Rodrigue de Navarre or Aignen le Libraire from among the Sword of St. James. Few come in from the outside, simply because knowledge of the existence of the order does not extend far beyond the Eyes themselves. Aignen has considerably more say in membership than Rodrigue, as Rodrigue de Navarre isn't quite the same man that he used to be.

Oculi may recruit from the Sword of St. James into their organization those they feel will greatly benefit their cause. Typically, new recruits start off as informants. Later, their patron Eye indoctrinates them into the cause — taking notes, keeping dark secrets, meeting at night. If the recruit works out, he or she may become a full Oculus. Oculi do not hold initiation ceremonies; new Eyes are simply acknowledged by the rest of the organization.

Organization: The Oculi Dei have no formal organization. Instead, they have a loose hierarchy that reports to Aignen le Libraire—although Rodrigue de Navarre is convinced they report directly to him. A certain amount of prestige surrounds those who have been members of the Oculi Dei the longest, and those with seniority are acknowledged as superiors.

Most groups of Eyes are small, no more than a group of five in a city of moderate sized. Many Eyes work alone, carrying out their tasks in discreet silence with no overseers or lords.

Holdings: The Oculi hold small, secret burrows in major cities from the Kingdom of Leon all the way to the Kingdom of Hungary. Aignen le Libraire commands the order from his base in Toulouse, which is built atop a large basement that doubles as a storage room and meetinghouse. They also congregate at the Inn of the Seven Secret Dancers in Barcelona — the kind of place people don't ask too many questions and don't remember too many faces.

The Oculi hold a forgotten castle outside of Augsburg in Bavaria. They store important books and findings in a library in the westernmost tower, in hopes that a later archivist will make the pilgrimage to the Black Forest and sort out the facts about the fiends' plans in secret.

Superior Virtue: Wisdom

Blessings: Many of the Eyes are blessed with Benedictions. Their prayers are answered. The Lord allows them to see the hidden, blend into the crowd and feel a comforting hand in a time of deepest need.

Curse: The Eyes of God suffer from Anathemae. They begin to despise, then loathe and finally fear their order. At first, they seem merely jaded — they've seen it all. Later, they start to blame their order for their self-loathing. Finally, they believe their order is in on the vast conspiracy, using them merely as pawns in some terrible plot.

Order Benefit: The Eyes of God see acts and decisions that most folks aren't aware of. They know about crimes and acts that, while not the Inquisition's purview, are still illegal or immoral in some capacity. The Oculi (and in fact the Inquisition in general) don't possess the resources to pursue all of these infractions, but individual Eyes can and do put their information to good use. This allows an Oculus character to make use of blackmail material, granting three free dots to be divided among the Contacts, Influence and Resources Backgrounds. The player and the

Storyteller should work out the details of who is being blackmailed and in what capacity.

Order Drawback: No one likes to be blackmailed. An Eye who makes use of his secrets this way is a marked man. The character is considered to have an Enemy (as the Flaw, but the player receives no bonus points; see page 306 of Dark Ages: Vampire) rated at three points. This enemy might not be in any position to harm the character at the beginning of the chronicle, but things change....

Character Creation: The Eyes can have any kind of concept, but many come from the military arm of the Sword of St. James. Many have a Pedagogue Nature and the Fanaticism Impulse. Mental Attributes and Knowledges are usually primary. Oculi commonly have Chapter-House, Contacts and Resources as Backgrounds, and many have high ratings in Self-Control.



The crowdhad grown to nearly a score.

They stood and watched as Sean threw himself about the pen. The pigs were long dead, having been eaten months ago when the famine began, but their stink was still oppressive and it coated the young man like a second skin. The night air was warm and humid, but Agnes still felt a distinct chill as she walked toward the pen.

"He's possessed," whispered someone nearby. Someone else muttered in agreement. Agnes didn't know yet, but it certainly seemed possible. She'd heard the gossip circulating around town — that Sean and his family were devil-worshipers, that they'd caused the famine, that they bore the mark of the Beast on their backs. Agnes of Kent was prepared, however, for the Lord had shown her the truth in a vision the night before.

In the place where our Savior cast the demon Legion, there find a soul not yet rested.

She stepped to the edge of the pen. Sean was on all fours in the mud, screeching like a piglet. He pulled himself up to his knees and gasped for breath. "Holy Sister! Please help me! I'll put it back! I'll—" He pitched forward again, rolling around in the filth and tearing at his flesh.

The curiosity of the youth damns him. Only by the power of the Lord will the youth

be freed.

"Where is it, Sean?" Agnes spoke firmly, trying to reach the boy through the spirit. Sean jumped to his feet and charged at the sister. She stepped back in fear and he collided with the fence, pitching forward out of the pen. The stench followed him and the townsfolk drew back in disgust and terror.

The fall, though, seemed to clear Sean's head somewhat. "It's here." He pulled a small, gold ring from his pocket. Agnes reached for it, but Sean pulled it away, his face contorted in a horrific scowl. "You shall not have it! It's mine! I took it from that thieving

bitch when I killed her!"

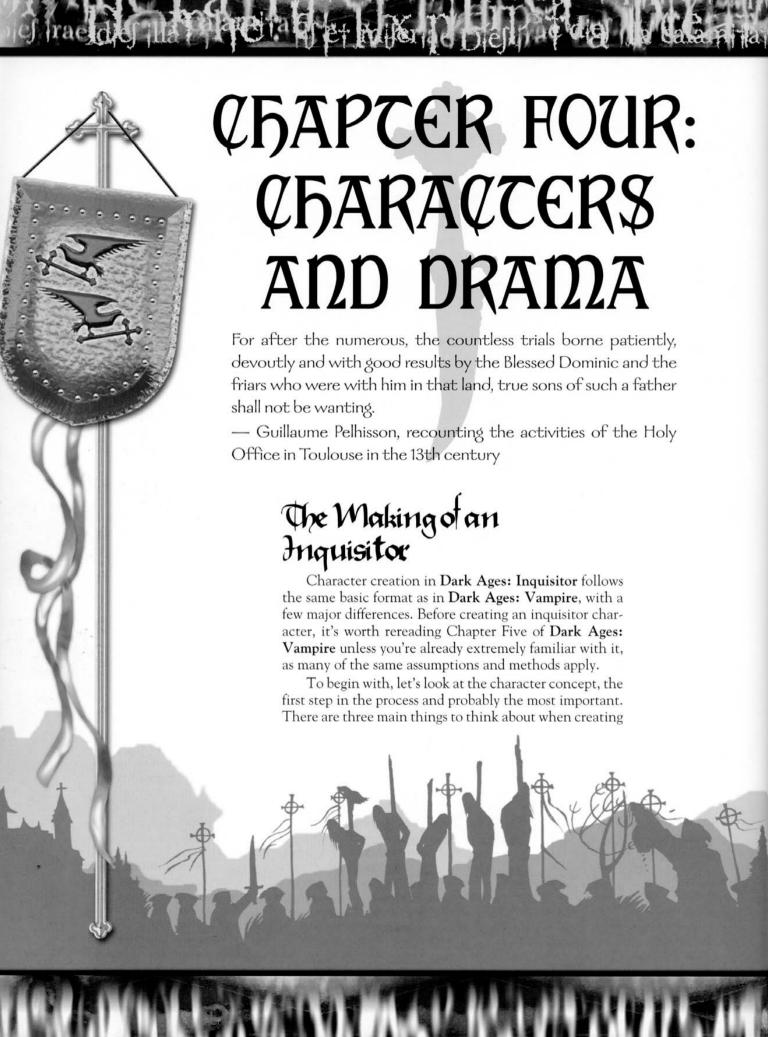
The onlookers gasped, but Agnes raised her hands. "It's not him talking, but the spirit in him!" Rather than try to convince them further, she clasped her hands to his face and locked eyes with the tormented youth. "Out! I cast you out in the name of God the Father and in the name of Christ the Savior. Leave now this boy and begone, and never again trouble him or his people." She kept her voice firm. She was unafraid, protected as she was by her faith. Sean began to shake, whereupon Agnes — and judging by the fact that the townsfolk did not scream, only Agnes — saw a shape rise up from the poor boy's body. It looked like a man, a mercenary or a highwayman, but in its belt were tucked swatches of hair from countless women.

It pointed at Agnes and spoke words only she could hear: "I'll have your pretty hair in my belt, little nun. Don't think the barrier between life and death will keep it from me." Then it vanished.

Sean collapsed, panting. Agnes took the ring from his hand, and approached the village smithy.

Gold melts, and along with it, the power of the demon.

Agnes knew she had no reason to be afraid. The wisdom of God was with her.



an **Inquisitor** character: The sort of life the character has led; his particular experiences that brought him to deep faith and the Inquisition; and his relationship with his order. These three factors define the sort of person he is at the start of the game. Let's look at each of them in turn.

Mn Life

While the mission can sometime seem all-consuming, an inquisitor is more than just a servant of the Church and the Cross. Like every other person in the Dark Medieval, he has some involvement with others, be they family, friends, comrades in arms or fellow men of the cloth. He may have had some trade or occupation prior to his membership in the shadow Inquisition, and those skills and contacts may well be called upon as he pursues his new calling.

The greater the depth of background you can give your character at this stage, the easier you will find it to play him realistically in the chronicle itself. The more information you have in your mind about the sort of person he is and the experiences that have shaped him, the better placed you are to react as he would to the crises he will inevitably face. Certainly the values, morals and ambitions that the character had prior to his commitment to fighting Satan will continue to influence his decisions and actions.

Did the character come from a poor background or a noble one? The Dark Medieval allows far less social mobility than we are used to today, and the origin of the character certainly influences how other people, including other inquisitors, react to him. It also has a major impact on the sort of skills that he will have been able to acquire prior to becoming an inquisitor.

A significant proportion of inquisitors served in the Church prior to their recruitment into the shadow Inquisition. Facing the enemy's servants brings terrible risks of corruption, among other things, and the church prefers to employ those who are already strong in their faith. They may have served in the Dominican order of monks, which has strong links with the Inquisition, or even the Franciscan order. While there is certainly tension between the Church and the Franciscans, the Inquisition is pragmatic enough to overlook this tension in favor of recruiting those with the necessary skills. That same pragmatic attitude allows it to recruit the lay brethren, soldiers and merchants that make up the principal membership of two of the Inquisition's orders. It cannot act with the same overt methods as its Papal cousin, the Holy Office, so it relies more on nonclerical members who attract less attention in society and who are less likely to be associated with inquisition, to get the job done.

At any rate, those truly blessed by the Holy Spirit are too rare to be turned away merely because they lack formal church training. The requisite theology and procedures can be taught once they join the Inquisition. The twin requirements are a committed faith and the skills — or blessings — that will make them a useful member of the organization.

Thus, an inquisitor can come from almost any background. The important issue is to decide what that background was and how the character came to the point where her faith allowed her to stand against the monsters.

My Savior

Faith is a constant of the Dark Medieval. In the modern age, faith is an option and many religions preach tolerance of other beliefs. This is not the case for your character. In Europe, Christianity is a nearuniversal belief. While it may stand beside the remains of pagan faiths - and the church was extremely effective at assimilating existing deities as either saints or demons — Christianity is the default belief system for the majority of people. Indeed, deviance from the accepted norm of Catholic belief is called heresy, and rooting it out and destroying it is the primary purpose of the Papal Inquisition or Holy Office. While a certain amount of debate about the exact meaning of the Bible is allowed, departing from the norm of belief is not tolerated by Church or, often, by society.

However, your character is a little different from the mass of the population. Something has happened to her to inflame her belief in God, far beyond what most people possess. Some might describe it as a visit from the Holy Ghost, others as a blessing from God Himself. Still others consider it nothing more than having their eyes opened to the servants of the Adversary in the world. However your character views it, it is the single most important step in becoming a front-line member of the Inquisition.

The process of coming alive in the belief in God may have been a sudden revelation or a slow process. A confrontation with a demonic creature may have made your character aware of the physical aspect of the spiritual struggle between good or evil. Indeed, just escaping with her life might be enough to make an inquisitor-to-be come alive to God. Alternatively, she might have become aware of a creature of Satan that had infiltrated the court or the church,



making her realize the very real nature of good versus evil struggling in the world.

Whatever the form of the revelation, it was a defining moment in your character's life, and if she wasn't already working for the Inquisition, it started her journey toward that form of service.

However it happened, your character is aware of the existence of God and Satan to a degree that most other people are not. The church might be a major part of their lives, but the day-to-day battles between the servants of the Lord and the hidden servants of evil are not part of their experience. Because your character's eyes have been opened, God is able to work through her in more powerful ways. He can bestow blessings on His chosen servants that give them the chance to stand up to the servants of the Adversary.

While not all members of the Inquisition have these blessings, your character does. She has taken the first step in the direct service of the Lord, has a very real sense of divine blessing and now has a mission to pursue.

My Order

The Inquisition is a secret organization, hiding its activities behind those of the Holy Office and the Church in general. Its existence and the nature of its crusade are not common knowledge, even to senior clerics within the Church. Thus, few people seek out the Inquisition to become members. Instead, the Inquisition finds them. Senior members are constantly listening for people who have shown a talent for dispatching the servants of the Adversary, and news of such people quickly spreads throughout the Church. A local priest mentions it to his bishop, who raises it in a theological discussion with a visiting Dominican monk who has connections to the Inquisition, and through a chain of whispers a decision is reached.

Others are simply inducted into one of the orders because they have skills that are badly needed by a particular order. It is only once they have actually joined the Inquisition that they go through the sort of defining awareness of the evil in the night and the spiritual revelation that it brings that they become true warriors for God.

A very few members of the Inquisition join almost by default: Retainers, relatives or servants of a member of one of the orders, they are dragged into her fight against some unredeemed servant of the enemy and find themselves caught up in a struggle they never imagined existed. Others are simply as-

signed to the Inquisition from other parts of the church, their piety, determination and skills such that they are marked for this calling, possibly even by God himself.

However your character comes to the Inquisition, each of the five orders has its own recruitment policies. While it is possible that a character might not fit neatly with any of the five orders, this is a rare occurrence — most individuals inducted into the Inquisition find their way into one of these groups readily, depending on their inclination and the needs of the order.

Some characters may be members of one of the orders prior to joining the inquisition. Whereas the vast majority of inquisitors are members of one of the orders, not all members of the orders are active in the Inquisition. Once within an order, the character will be trained in the ways of the Inquisition and the particular skills and outlook of that order, and so made ready for her first mission. See the description of the orders in Chapter Three for further details on each order's particular outlook and role in the shadow Inquisition.

Unlike the clans of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, the Inquisition's orders are social, financial and philosophical support structures oriented toward a single goal: defeating the tools of the Adversary and keeping the world safe for good, Christian folk. People recruited to the shadow Inquisition are chosen to serve that cause and are expected to give up much, if not all, of their previous lives to do so.

The order is going to be a defining part of the way she lives her life in the coming months and years. It gives her a firm moral and theological base for launching her inquisitorial efforts, and to resist the blandishments of the enemy.

The major struggle in the inquisitor's life should be with the enemy, not with the order she serves. Without the backing and support of her order, the inquisitor is alone in a struggle few know about and whose existence the church as a whole is reluctant to admit.

Thinking Medieval

To modern sensibilities, the focus of the Inquisition on the God versus Satan battle as being the defining heart of a struggle of good versus evil can seem odd or even uncomfortable. More importantly, the concept that "anything that isn't our way is automatically of Satan" can seem alien and possibly abhorrent. However, it's important to remember that this mindset was prevalent in the 13th century, and that inquisitors have good reason to be more keenly aware of it than other people. Their belief in

Together, Against the Adversary

n inquisitor is more than just a lone force against Satan. He is one of a group of dedicated, faithful people all fighting the same fight for the glory of God. They work in groups for a reason — survival. Few of them are granted enough Blessings to have even the slightest hope of standing against a monster without help from other inquisitors. The Inquisition stresses the need for its servants to work together and to support each other. Its leaders reason that a united cell's members are both more effective and better able to keep one another on the right path, in the face of rampant heresy and Satanic horrors.

Character creation is best done in discussion with the other players in the chronicle. While you don't need to give up all your character's secrets to the other players, creating a group of inquisitors who can work together without major effort is probably wise. The main source of conflict in **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** is external: the fight against the monstrous enemies of the Cross. Inevitably, the pressures that come to bear on the characters as a result of that crusade will creation tension between members of the cell.

One way to help cement character interaction and cooperation is to create a Background pool. This process is described on p. 157 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, and discussed with regard to **Inquisitor** characters below. Sharing the responsibilities that such a pool creates helps each player gain a sense of how her character fits into the group and what her role therein encompasses.

All of this is not to say that there can't be areas of disagreement between the characters. Indeed, if the inquisitors come from different orders, such disagreements are likely and make for good roleplaying opportunities. The key idea is to create a group that, while it may disagree over issues of approach, will still pull together in the face of a creature from the Pit of Hell.

God is what gives them the strength to fight the supernatural.

Nevertheless, atheists and pagans exist in the period in small numbers (but the latter group is much larger than the former). However, people with those beliefs are not going to be members of the Inquisition. The 13th century is a time of ruthless suppression

of heresy at the hands of the Holy Office. The Inquisition, which has to face the very servants of Satan, has no choice but to be rigorous in policing its own ranks to keep them free from the taint of heresy. While encounters to come may test your character's faith sorely, as the game begins she should be a committed Christian, believing sincerely in the power of the Holy Ghost. After all, she has seen, and perhaps felt, the powers of those touched by His spirit to overcome the forces of evil.

It's also worth reiterating that liberal attitudes on faith are virtually nonexistent. If an inquisitor encounters someone espousing a non-Christian faith, she is not going to view the unbeliever as exploring an alternative form of spirituality with as much right to exist as her own. Instead, she sees a heretic or pagan, damning himself to Hell and running the risk of corrupting others with his Satan-inspired lies — and that means the unbeliever is better off dead.

The Dark Medieval is not a time of religious tolerance, but that is part of the strength of the Inquisition. It's that very strong, focused faith that gives inquisitors the ability to resist the enemy's powers.

five Stepson Gods Path

Now that you have a clear concept of the character, the next step is to start translating it into dots on the character sheet.

Preliminary Assumptions

Many of the same assumptions that apply to **Dark Ages: Vampire** also apply here. However, a few major points are worth noting.

• Experience. The default character in Dark Ages: Inquisitor is someone who has just come alive to the power of his belief and been granted the first of his blessings by God. He has been with the Inquisition for a number of months, during which time he has undergone some training in the group's practices. He is already inducted into his order and should be aware of its basic requirements and tenets.

The character can be of any age and background. The determination to destroy or redeem the minions of Satan is the only common thread that runs through all inquisitors.

• Teamwork. Characters in a Dark Ages: Inquisitor chronicle have been put together as a cell because their superiors consider them to have complementary sets of skills that will make them effective agents of the church, as discussed above. It's important, if the characters are to survive their encounters

with night creatures, that they are able to work together and that they have a good range of abilities. Inquisitor characters are inherently less self-serving than Cainites. They are true believers in God, with all the lofty morals that the Church espouses (in theory, if not always in practice).

In short, an inquisitor is acting for the greater good of the church and the people of Europe. She rarely acts purely for her own benefit — there are many, many better ways to achieve power in the Dark Medieval than hunting monsters. Even the Holy Office carries more rewards and fewer risks than that.

Step One: Character Concept

If you've read through the early section of this chapter, looking at the character, her faith and her connection, you already have the main points of the character decided. You don't need every single detail worked out at this stage, as you can develop many of the specifics later in the process, or even after the chronicle has begun. However, some major points need to be established now.

Order

You've probably decided on your character's order already. If you haven't done so, go back and read the order descriptions (in Chapter Three) and the discussion above. Remember that the order doesn't completely define the character's personality and actions. It merely indicates a particular inclination in the character's approach to inquisition, plus the likely training and Endowments she has. The orders are not collections of faceless minions to the church; they are individuals who share a particular approach to dealing with the monstrous enemies of the Cross.

Archetype: Vlature, Impulse and Demeanor

The Archetypes are a useful shorthand for your character's personality. Her Nature is her true personality, while her Demeanor is the face that she shows the world. For some characters they will be the same — they wear their true personality openly. For others they may be dramatically different, reflecting an effort to utterly conceal your character's true personality.

However, each of the Natures also has an Impulse attached to it. These are the dangerous extremes of that personality type, ones that the inquisitor can be driven to in times of stress. Details of the Impulses can be found below (p. 152).

Character Creation Summary

Character Creation Process

• Step One: Character Concept

Choose concept, order, Nature, Demeanor and Impulse.

• Step Two: Select Attributes

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Attributes. Start with 1 dot in each Attribute; divide 6 additional dots among primary Attributes, 4 dots among secondary Attributes, 3 dots among tertiary Attributes.

Physical Attributes: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina Social Attributes: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance Mental Attributes: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• Step Three: Select Abilities

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Abilities. Divide 11 dots among primary Abilities, 7 dots among secondary Abilities, 4 dots among tertiary Abilities.

Talents: Innate aptitudes

Skills: Learned abilities.

Knowledges: Academic and intellectual lore. All inquisitors must have at least Theology 1 and Linguistics 1 (Latin) is recommended as Latin is often the common language between inquisitors.

No Ability can have more than 3 dots at this stage.

Step Four: Select Advantages

Take one dot in your order's primary Superior Virtue. *Choose* either one Acolyte-level order Endowment (and one Curse) or the order benefit (and attendant drawback). Choose one Orison. Divide 5 dots among Backgrounds, 7 dots among the basic Virtues.

• Step Five: Finishing Touches

Starting Conviction is the sum of your character's primary Superior Virtue and its controlling basic Virtue (Conscience + Faith, for example). Starting Piety is equal to the sum of Conscience + Self-Control. Starting Willpower is the sum of your character's Courage + Zeal. Spend 21 bonus points (see chart below).

Orders

The Monastic Orders

- Knights of Acre: Warrior inquisitors, facing the enemy in battle.
- Sisters of St John: Clairvoyant nuns, who protect the weak.
- The Red Order: Monks and nuns who wield the power of Holy Rituals.

The Lay Orders

 Oculi Dei: Lay brothers and sisters who gather information about the enemy. • The House of Murnau: A noble family, dedicated to seeking out and exposing Satan's corruption.

Endowments

- Benedictions: Divinely inspired prayers, through which God works His wonders.
- Investitures: Channeling the power of God through the inquisitor's mortal frame.
- Legacies: The odd and arcane birthrights of House
 Murnau.
- Psalms: The Word of God, channeled through the inquisitor's voice.

The Holy art

- Sophia Patris: Revealing the truth through the Lord's wisdom.
- Sedulitas Filius: Using God's strength in battle.
- Boni Spiritus: Drawing upon the soul's closeness with the Spirit for protection.

Backgrounds

- Allies: Trusted individuals who share your cause.
- Chapter-House: A secure base of operations.
- Contacts: Sources of information.
- Exposure: Encounters with the enemy before joining the Inquisition.
- Flock: Other Christians willing to support your cause.
- Holy Relics: Weapons and items imbued with the power of Faith.
- Influence: Authority and status among ordinary people.
- Mentor: A sponsor or guide among inquisitors.
- Rank: Authority and status among other inquisitors.
- Resources: Property and other sources of value.
- Retainers: Personal assistants and other servants.

Bonus Point Costs

- Attributes: 5 bonus points per dot.
- Abilities: 2 bonus points per dot.
- Ability Specialties (max. three per ability): 1 bonus point each.
- Backgrounds: 1 bonus point per dot.
- Virtues: 2 bonus points per dot.
- Willpower: 1 bonus point per dot.
- Piety: 1 bonus point per dot.
- The Holy Art: 5 bonus points per dot.

Endowments and Orisons may not be purchased with bonus points.

Step Two Choosing attributes

This stage allows you to assign numerical values to the character's basic capabilities. Physical Attributes measure your character's innate strength, ease of movement and endurance; Social Attributes define her ability to get on with others, to influence them and the impact of her looks. Mental Attributes cover her awareness of what's going on around her, her ability to reason and the swiftness of her thought processes. Full details are given in Chapter Five of Dark Ages: Vampire.

Choose one category as the most important to your character and divide 6 dots among the three Attributes. The category that comes second receives 4 dots to be shared among the Attributes, while the category that is least important gets 3 dots to be distributed.

Step Three: Choosing Abilities

There are three categories of Abilities

- Talents: Innate aptitudes and competencies that can't be taught, only learned through experience.
- Skills: Abilities that require training, practice and use to learn.
- Knowledges: Intellectual pursuits and information that can be learned through study.

Full descriptions of the Abilities appear in Chapter Five of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, with some additional ones later in this chapter (p. 154).

As with the Attributes, you must decide which of these groups is most important to your character and which is least important. The primary group receives 11 dots to be distributed among them as you see fit, the secondary group 7 dots and the tertiary group just 3 dots. None of the Abilities can be raised above three dots at this point. Scores of above three dots represent exceptional levels of training and aptitude that very few people posses. You will be given the chance to raise some of them beyond this limit at a later point in the character creation process, if you wish.

All inquisitor characters must have at least one dot in Theology, reflecting their basic education in the Church's most important beliefs. While Linguistics (Latin) isn't required, the Inquisition uses Latin as its common language, as it doesn't change much from region to region and is the language of the Church. An inquisitor who doesn't understand Latin is probably in for a difficult time.

Step four: Select Advantages

This stage of the character creation process deals with the things that lift the inquisitor a little above the general mass of humanity. The backing of the Church, the favor of God and perhaps the blessing of an exceptional life all give that character an extra edge in the struggle to survive and battle the Adversary in the Dark Medieval.

Backgrounds

Backgrounds represent influences and advantages a character can bring to bear that aren't directly related to her capabilities as a person. Some of them represent the patronage of the Church and some of them her particular circumstances. You have 5 dots to spend on the different Backgrounds. The players can pool their dots in the following Backgrounds: Allies, Chapter-House, Contacts, Flock, Holy Relics, Influence, Mentor, Resources and Retainers. See **Dark Ages: Vampire** (p. 157) for rules on pooling Backgrounds.

Some additional Backgrounds, specific to inquisitors, can be found later in this chapter. An inquisitor character may not buy the following Backgrounds: Domain, Generation, Herd and Status. Mentor represents a more experienced inquisitor who has taken the character under his wing. Retainers are members of the character's order who have been assigned to work for the character.

Orisons

Each character receives one Orison. These are minor gifts from God, usually serving to reduce the difficulty on a particular roll or aid the character in some other small way. Orisons are based on the basic Virtues (Conscience, Self-Control and Courage).

Order Benefit and Drawback

You may choose to take either a Blessing appropriate to your character's order or that order's special benefit. Taking the order benefit simply indicates that your character is especially involved with her order and does not preclude obtaining Endowments or the Holy Art in the future. However, with each order benefit there comes an attendant drawback. The benefit and drawback for each order are detailed in their descriptions in Chapter Three.

Note: Full-blooded members of House Murnau *must* take their order benefit (or the player should come up with a compelling reason why the family curse has not manifested in his character). Likewise, servants and other non-Murnau sworn to the House

cannot choose the order benefit and must instead take an appropriate Endowment.

Endowments

The proximity to God that inquisitors cultivate in their mission grants them certain abilities above those of ordinary people. They view them as gifts of the Holy Ghost, spiritual armor and weapons to be used in their crusade. You may chose one Acolytelevel Endowment from those granted to your character's order (with the exception of the Red Order; see below). A full list of Blessings can be found in Chapter Five. If you choose to have your character begin with her order's benefit and drawback, she does not receive an Endowment as well.

The Boln art

As well as receiving gifts directly from God, inquisitors can call upon the Holy Art, which allows them to petition the Holy Spirit for blessings or aid in times of danger. See Chapter Five for full details. Red Order characters who begin with the Holy Art (as opposed to their order benefit) receive one dot in any one path. Other characters may begin with Holy Art ratings as well; House Murnau and Oculi Dei characters must take Sophia Patris as their primary path, Sisters of Saint John must take Boni Spiritus, and Knights of Acre must take Sedulitas Filius. Non-Red Order characters may begin with Holy Art paths only if the player spends bonus points to purchase them, and then only at the Storyteller's discretion.

Curse

No one is truly innocent (or, at least, almost no one — see the Pure Merit on p. 169). When your character felt the call of faith, he also had to make atonement for his sins. Such sins are not bought off cheaply, especially not for the chosen of God. If you choose to take a Blessing (as opposed to the order benefit), you must also choose an Acolyte-level Curse for your character. See p. 201 for more information on Curses.

Virtues

The three Virtues reflect your character's noble qualities:

- Courage measures your character's ability to stand firm in the face of danger.
- Self-Control measures your character's ability to keep herself from committing self-destructive and sinful acts.
- Conscience measures your character's commitment to the moral values espoused by the Church.

Each of the Virtues is rated from 1 to 5 dots, with one dot represents the most abject coward and sinner, whereas five dots represent a shining example of Christian life. You have 7 dots to distribute among these Virtues to define your character's moral strengths and weaknesses. As in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, you begin with one dot in each of these Virtues.

Superior Virtues

The Superior Virtues reflect your character's spiritual life above the rest of the faithful flock. The Holy Ghost has touched her soul and she is now capable of things that other people aren't as a direct result of that spiritual blessing. While each of these Traits is based on one of the basic Virtues, they are a great leap beyond them.

- Zeal, based on Courage, reflects the passion your character has for fulfilling God's mission.
- Wisdom, based on Self-Control, reflects the understanding of the world that God has granted your character.
- Faith, based on Conscience, reflects your character's utter belief in God and ability to hold to His principles of compassion, forgiveness and redemption.

Your character has only just come alive to this enlightened spiritual state and so has one dot in her order's primary Superior Virtue. Full descriptions of the Superior Virtues appear on p. 157.

Step five: finishing Touches

The main part of the character creation is now done. You have taken your character concept and translated it into a record that will allow you to quantify your character's capabilities in play. All you need to do now is round out the character with a few Traits that will fluctuate during the game and boost her capabilities with bonus points to better match your ideal vision.

Conviction

Conviction is a measure of your character's commitment to the cause of the Inquisition and your belief that it is right and God's will. It allows your character to resist the enemy's influence and to call upon God's blessings. While normal people possess a single point of Conviction, your character has moved beyond that and is now filled with passion for the cause.

Conviction is measured on a scale of 1 to 10. Starting Conviction is equal to the sum of your

character's Superior Virtue and its controlling basic Virtue (Conscience + Faith, for example).

Willpower

Willpower measures the ability of your character's determination and strength of will. Like Conviction it is measured on a scale of 1 to 10. While most people have a Willpower score of 2 to 3, inquisitors often find that standing up to the temptations of the enemy requires considerably more than the average. Starting Willpower is equal to Courage + Zeal.

Pietn

Similar in some ways to a vampire's Road Trait, Piety represents an inquisitor's devotion to God. Piety, like Willpower, ranges in score from 1 to 10. A character's starting Piety is equal to his Conscience + Self-Control.

Bonus Points

You have 21 bonus points to spend on your character. These bonus points are intended to reflect those additional qualities your character has gained through her initial training with her order. However, they can also be used to correct any major annoying or inconsistent gaps in your character, because of the limitations imposed on them by the character creation process.

You cannot raise your character's Abilities beyond three in Step Three of character creation. This limitation exists because few people ever exceed that level of competence — three dots in an Ability marks a character as one of the most skilled in his region. However, the intense preparation your character endures after joining the Inquisition can lift him to levels where he is among the best in his country, or even in the world. After all, inquisitors are the Church's chosen protectors, and must be among the most committed and skilled Christians on the planet. However, think carefully before doing raising Abilities to four or five dots: Does your character really merit such ratings this early in his career?

Dots in different traits can be raised according to the bonus point table in the character creation summary on p. 147. However, you cannot use these bonus points to increase your Conviction, Superior Virtues, Orisons or Endowments. Those can be increased only through actively pursuing God's mission in the course of the chronicle.

The Spark of Boly Life

It's often the case that as ideas become ratings on the character sheet during the character creation process your character concept changes, possibly a little, maybe even a lot. It's worth spending a little time to revise that original concept to match what you have now and to integrate any new ideas you came up with in the process.

This is also the best time to go into detail about your character. You have a broad idea of how attractive he is, based on his Appearance, but what does he actually look like? How does he talk and dress? What color are his eyes and hair?

You can think through how the character gained each of the Abilities on the sheet and how that affected his life. How did he learn to fight, read or care for animals? Why does he speak an additional language? Who are his Retainers or Allies, and how do they deal with the character? If he has Rank, what has he done or whom does he know to allow him to rise within the Inquisition?

It takes only a little thought to take those dots on the character sheet and turn them into a detailed picture of your character's existence. It's these details that really bring a character to life. See p. 134 of **Dark Ages: Vampire** for more ideas on the best way to do so.

Traits

Some Traits are unique to Dark Ages: Inquisitor characters beyond those listed in Dark Ages: Vampire. The call of inquisition makes particular demands on the mind, body and soul of a character that causes him to grow in particular ways. These differences are detailed here.

Nature and Impulse

When an inquisitor allows his commitment to inquisition to override his commitment to God, he become Callous (rules for Callousness and further explanation of the state can be found on p. 162). At these times, the darker parts of his nature come to the fore. Every human being is fallen because of the sin, an age ago, of Adam and Eve. No one's soul is entirely pure, and that corruption can turn holy commitment into unholy destruction without the inquisitor realizing what has happened. Truly, the enemy is subtle at times.

The destructive, selfish parts of a character's personality are collectively called the Impulse and

Strongerin Go& armor

The default character in Dark Ages: Inquisitor is a newly blessed person who has just taken a stand in the struggle between good an evil. If you wish to create a character, with the approval of your Storyteller, who is more or less powerful than these novice inquisitors, then three options are given below. However, the ascension to higher stages in game play is quantified by the character's total Superior Virtues. For example, a character with Faith 2, Wisdom 0 and Zeal 2 is considered an "Acolyte-level" inquisitor. If she gains another dot in any Superior Virtue (including her first dot in Wisdom), she is now considered a "Advocatelevel" inquisitor. This system is included purely for purposes of determining what level of Endowments the character is capable of learning without risking new Curses (see Chapter Five). These levels reflect the stages in an inquisitor's development, although the categories are not clearly recognized by the inquisitors themselves. The titles are purely for game purposes; no inquisitor will ever speak of himself as a "Judge-level inquisitor."

Stage ! Servant of the Inquisition

The least powerful — yet perhaps the bravest — of inquisitors are those members who have yet to be blessed by God and who still face the enemy, knowing that they stand little chance of victory. These courageous souls may have picked up a knack that helps them out, represented by their single Orison, but they are still as vulnerable to the enemy as the rest of humanity. Characters at this level often serve as assistants to experienced inquisitors. Like most of humanity, Servants may not have more than a single point of Conviction.

Character Creation

Backgrounds: 2

Virtues: 4

Superior Virtues: 0

Endowments: 0

Orisons: 1

Curses: 0

Bonus Points: 18

Stage 2: Acolyte Inquisitor

These are basic starting characters as described in this chapter. A character with Superior Virtues totaling 1 to 4 dots is considering an Acolyte.

Stage 3: Advocate Inquisitor

These are the true Soldiers of God, whose many Blessings lift them far above the normal person. They have suffered repeated and harrowing exposure to the forces of Heaven and Hell and are forever changed by their experiences. They now have a clear idea of their objectives, but come across as both holy and somewhat discomforting to normal people — their increased Superior Virtues can make them seem overzealous and dangerous, aloof or even eerie. An inquisitor with Superior Virtues totaling 5 to 9 dots is considered an Advocate.

Character Creation

Backgrounds: 8

Virtues: 9

Superior Virtues: 4

Endowments: 3

Orisons: 2

Holy Arts: Varies (three if a member of the Red Order; one otherwise)

Curses: 3

Bonus Points: 28

Stage 4: Judge Inquisitor

Inquisitors at this level of experience are among the legends of the Church. The have given themselves utterly over to God's service and seem like angels incarnate to ordinary people when they encounter them. They have faced the devil's minion in battle and triumphed. Life to them is a matter of black and white, good and evil, and so they render swift judgment in God's name upon those things that they see as corrupt. Many of them frequently prophesy and speak in tongues. An inquisitor with 10 or more dots in Superior Virtues is considered a Judge.

Character Creation

Backgrounds: 11

Virtues: 12

Superior Virtues: 9

Endowments: 7

Orisons: 5

Holy Arts: Varies (six for Red Order; three otherwise)

Curses: 5

Bonus Points: 35

An Inquisitor's Prelude

he prelude marks the completion of the character creation process. You sit down with your Storyteller for a session and work out together a story that takes in all the elements you've woven into your character concept and creation. Obviously, the prelude should take in the main points of the character's life prior to joining the Inquisition. However, it should pay particular attention to the character's religious life — how he felt about the members of the Church he encountered and how it affected the decisions he made. Religion is central to the character's role as part of the Inquisition, and this is your first real chance to explore its deeper effect on his life.

It's also the chance to roleplay your character's first encounters with the supernatural and the profound spiritual effect that it had on her. You can also play through your character's recruitment into the Inquisition and eventual training in one of the orders, giving you the chance to come to grips with your character's beliefs and theology before they are tested in the field against the unliving heresy of the enemy's minions.

they are derived from the character's governing Nature. If a character's Nature ever changes, for whatever reason, his Impulse changes with it.

autocrat - Dominance

While you seek to put the world right, sometimes you step over the line and become so obsessed with your vision of how it should be that you seek to impose your will on everyone around you. You are right, the only one cognizant of God's true plan, and they must submit to your way of thinking or suffer the consequences. You seek power, because it is the only way to remake this fallen world in God's image.

Bravo - Violence

You've always respected words more than deeds. However, at times deeds are all that matter. You will do whatever is needed to get the job done. You know that your cause is just, so anything done in its name must be done with God's blessing. Any action you take, however violent, however contrary to the strictures of society and the Church, is done only for God's glory in your mind. When the moment has passed, though, you might view your actions in a different light.

Note: The Bravo Archetype replaces the Barbarian Archetype found on page 138 of Dark Ages: Vampire. The spirit — changing the world through deeds, not words - remains the same, but the contempt for civilization is replaced by a contempt for those the inquisitor perceives as weak.

Caretaker-Possession

Others need to be provided for, but sometimes their own actions make it hard to do so. How much better it would be for them if they let you control their lives. Only if they are truly yours can you protect them from the terrible creatures that would do them harm in Satan's name. You do your best to sever their links with anyone else who could undermine your influence over them. Then they are truly safe.

Celebrant-Redonism

You enjoy God's creation so much that, sometimes, you come to think your purpose is to enjoy everything it has to offer. Surely if you are deep in ecstasy in the wonder of God's bounty, you will be immune to the blandishments of Satan? When you are Hedonistic, you throw yourself into whatever pleasures you, from gluttony to prayer, from battle to contemplation, with an unhealthy obsession. You might think that they aid you in your struggle — but instead they are delivering you into the Adversary's hands.

Detender-Conservatism

You seek to prevent the good things in the world being destroyed. Well, what better way than to ensure that they never change at all? People must be dissuaded from new ideas, or prevented from entering dangerous situations. Society's structures must be kept the way they are, and everything can then continue in God's protection, safe from the Satanic forces of change and hurt.

Dreamer - Escapism

The world could be better. You can imagine God's ideal, perfected and redeemed creation sometimes. If you are to make it a reality, you have to understand, and that means studying it. It may not exist anywhere but in your head as yet, but surely the gritty business of inquisition can be put aside for a time, while you seek to comprehend the nuances of God's great plan for creation. Once you understand it all, then you'll be able to act. There's so much to understand, though....

Gallant - Vanitn

You are an inquisitor, one of God's chosen defenders of the faithful. You must be an example of



all that is best about humanity — his favored creation. Your dress must be a hymn of glory to His name, your manners a prayer to His greatness and your behavior a model of piety for others to emulate. If they have you to look up to as a very model of godly perfection, then people will make themselves safe by emulating you.

dester-foolishness

The world is fallen, and everything humanity does is mere idiocy in the face of His power. You laugh at the societies man has built, from the crown to the Church, just as you laugh at the petty, amusing machinations of the enemy. All of it is laughable in the face of His blessings. Once you see that He makes everything else laughable, you can revel in your own safety. How could He not protect you from such ludicrous dangers?

Judge-Sadism

The more you look at the world, the more you realize that everything in it is guilty in His eyes. He has given you a mission — to judge the sinners — and you find everyone guilty. Everyone from the most brazen monster to the lowliest peasant scratching a living out of the earth has succumbed to Satan's wiles. They must all be punished, for only then can their souls be purified. They may not agree, but that is their burden to bear. You have been given the burden of making the world pay for its sins.

Pedagogue-fanaticism

It has always been your mission to tell others the error of their ways and teach them about the Lord's Word. You have come to see that the world can be truly saved only when everyone fully defines his life by submission to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and you are the one person who can teach them. Those who will listen are saved, but they must truly believe before you will trust them. Indeed, only those who have fully accepted your true vision of the Lord can be counted on at all.

Penitent-Masochism

You, like everyone else, are a sinner. However, not everyone is called upon to face the enemy and use God's power in His cause. To keep yourself worthy of His blessings, you must suffer for your sins. Fasting, abject poverty, sleep-deprivation, even self-flagellation: These are all tools you can use to cleanse yourself of sin, show God that you are truly repentant and thus be granted the chance to destroy the enemy. No suffering is too great for a sinner like you.

Perfectionist - Negativity

While it would be blasphemy to believe that you could obtain God's perfection, you strive to be the best that a poor, sinful mortal can muster. Keeping true to the Bible and pursuing your mission resolutely are the absolute center of your life. However, sometimes the failings of yourself and others become too much for you. You cannot help but dwell on the terrible state of this fallen world, and you despair of ever winning redemption through Christ.

Rebel-anarchism

It's too late. Satan has infected all of Christendom. Society must be torn down if God is to triumph, as He must. Anyone in power might be an ally, witting or unwitting, of the Great Corrupter, and it is your duty to smash those supporters of the institutions that Satan exploits. Only once society lies in ruins will the enemy stand exposed. Then, he and his servants can be driven from the world and a new Eden built in its stead.

Survivor-Selfishness

The Lord has chosen you to defeat the servants of evil, and as the Lord's chosen one you must stay alive to carry out your calling. Your survival is more important than coming out victorious in an encounter with a monster. After all, if you die defeating one a minor imp, who is left to continue the Inquisition? Indeed, it's more important that you survive than any of your companions. You are the chosen one; they are merely helpers on the mission.

abilities

The pursuit of truth and the absolute commitment to rooting out the lies of the enemy calls for special training. Many inquisitors possess two Skills that can prove invaluable for uncovering the enemy's hidden plans and exposing them to the light of God's judgment. They are detailed below.

New Skill: Torture

The Torture Skill represents the knowledge and technique needed to inflict pain on others, in the hope of extracting information or confessions from them. It includes knowledge of both the physical and psychological aspects of torturing a victim, the best means of keeping people alive so they can endure further torture and the use of specialized torture equipment. This Skill can be used on monsters as well as mortals, but the unusual constitutions and Satan-granted powers of such beings can make them

less susceptible to such techniques, unless the inquisitors can learn of their particular weaknesses. However, in some cases, techniques such as the use of fire can be even more effective on Hell's minions than on normal people.

- Dabbler: You've tied up a few people and hit them until they started talking.
- • Student: You understand the basic technique of torture and can use fire, the rack, dunking and other techniques without killing a subject.
- ••• Learned: You realize that sometimes the mind can be the most effective implement of torture, when coupled with use of approved instruments of Inquisition.
- •••• Scholar: You can choose the appropriate tool, technique or mental game to force a confession with admirable speed and efficiency.
- •••• Master: The mere rumor of your presence has prisoners desperate to confess before you start to work upon their vulnerable flesh.

Possessed By: Papal Inquisitors, Judges, Gaolers, Soldiers, Witch-Hunters, Spies, Bounty Hunters, Cultists

Specialties: Humans, Vampires, Werewolves, Wizards, Witches, Demons, Forced Confessions, Conversions

New Skill: Interrogation

Interrogation is the art of extracting information from unwilling subjects through the careful application of intimidation, threats, appeals to their religious duty and any other leverage that the inquisitor can use to gain co-operation from their subject. Unlike Intimidation, you are not trying to make them do what you want, just force them to give up some information that they would not willing disclose.

- Novice: You can ask questions and threaten violence.
- Practiced: You realize that alternating friendliness and hostility can sometimes be a useful technique.
- Competent: You can force peasants and minor nobility to give up information without challenge.
- •••• Expert: There are few creatures whose will can stand against yours when you are

determined to know the truth.

•••• • Master: Whole heretical cults are put to the flame based on the information you can extract from a single captive.

Possessed By: Papal Inquisitors, Judges, Priests, Confessors, Spies

Specialties: Guilty Secrets, Blasphemy, Heresy, Concealed Interrogation, Forgotten Memories, Mind Games

New Backgrounds

Inquisitors, by dint of the lives they lead, their commitment to God and their backing by the Church and the orders of the Inquisition, have access to certain resources in their mission that are unique to them. These assets are represented by the three new Backgrounds below. As with the Backgrounds presented in **Dark Ages:Vampire**, the characters does not think, "I have a flock of exactly 100 people to count on for prayer and aid against a night fiend." They think in less clear-cut and more general terms—"A good congregation whose faith is strong stands with us in our hour of need."

Chapter-Bouse

A chapter-house is the physical building in which a cell of inquisitors makes its home. The buildings have the appropriate staff to run them, but these people (often low-ranking monks or lay members of the order) will not participate in the active work of the Inquisition — that is the function of Retainers or Flock (below).

The property does not belong to the inquisitors. It is the property of the Inquisition and is granted to the characters for their use in pursuing the mission. While they have free and unrestricted use of it, it must be kept in good order, as far as the mission allows. It certainly cannot be sold, rented or used for any other purpose than that set for the characters by their order.

Using Chapter-House is similar to using Domain (see Dark Ages: Vampire, page 155). Points spent on the Background can either make the chapter-house larger or more secure, but can have other effects as well. Points spent to increase the chapter-house's size do so per the following chart:

 A small house or church building, probably within the confines of a larger church community such as a monastery or cathedral that allows the inquisitors some measure of privacy.

- A small church, significant town building or other building of similar size, that allows the inquisitors to conduct their work within the building, as well as sleep there.
- A fortified building, section of a castle or monastery, or several houses on a city street that are granted to the inquisitor to aid her mission.
- •••• The inquisitor has unrestricted use of a small country estate, castle or several town houses for her mission, along with a number of staff to keep the buildings running.
- ••••• A whole religious community, such as an isolated monastery or a country estate of the Murnau family, has been ordered to support the inquisitor in her calling. However, the expectations placed on the character are likely to be equally expansive.

In addition, each point of Chapter-House does one of the following:

- Increases the size of the chapter-house, as indicated below.
- Makes the chapter-house more secure, with guards or dogs, increasing the difficulty to break in by one per point spent.
- Increases the chapter-house's Holy Ground rating by one per point spent.
- Provides space for the holding, interrogation and torture of hellspawn. The chapter-house has space for three prisoners per point spent in this manner.

Therefore, a troupe that pools six points of Chapter-House could use the church of a small town as their base (2 points to size). Only two doors into the church exist, and those are equipped with expensive and sturdy locks (3 points to security). In addition, the entire property is consecrated (1 point to Holy Ground).

Exposure

Exposure is the degree to which your character had been aware of the work of the Devil's minions in the world before she joined the Inquisition. While any good Christian knows that Satan is abroad in the world and that his minions may be anywhere, relatively few have direct experience with them. Your character has faced the enemy and come away un-

corrupted, if shaken, by the experience. She may have even gathered a few pieces of relevant information that could prove telling in the battles to come.

You and the Storyteller should work out the details of these encounters, preferably before the game begins. The encounters in questions should not give your character detailed information about the monsters in the Dark Medieval — unless you have also purchased the Occult Knowledge and are using these encounters as an explanation for that information being available to your character. When your character encounters a supernatural being, the Storyteller should roll Wits + Exposure on her behalf, to determine whether she can call upon her previous experience to aid her in this new test of faith. The Storyteller should always make the roll in secret and should feed the player dangerously erroneous information after a botch.

- You spent some time in a town notorious for its heretics.
- You now see the pale priest who only visited your village at night in a whole new light.
- ••• You have seen enough unpleasant acts that you begin to see patterns in the behavior of the enemy.
- Your hometown or abbey was infiltrated by the servants of Satan, but you are only now realizing their true nature.
- ••••• You grew up in a pagan community that accepted the minions of Hell as a natural part of the world, but since your conversion you realize just how much danger your soul endured.

flock

Christianity is not a solitary experience. It is in the fellowship of other Christians that one grows, as St Paul taught. The ability to pray together and to share the teachings of the Bible with one another is invaluable in the growth of the inquisitor's belief.

For an inquisitor, a group outside the Inquisition with whom he can pray and worship can be an invaluable link with the world he has left behind. It is easy to become entrenched in the fight against monsters and lose touch with the realities of life for most people. Worse, one can lose sight of God's Commandments when fighting the enemy becomes one's sole focus. The inquisitor's flock can often root him in the mundane world once more and remind him of the people whose souls he is fighting for.

A flock will not actually work for the inquisitor in his cause by confronting the enemy or researching its ways, and neither would an inquisitor willingly expose them to such dangers. Instead, they are a group of people who act as a bulwark for his belief, remind him of the reasons for his inquisition and who can actually boost his Conviction through joint prayer (see p. 160).

- You have a few friends you pray with occasionally.
- • A small village looks to you for spiritual guidance.
- ••• You are one of the most respected preachers in your region, and many people turn up to listen to you teach.
- •••• Word of your preaching has spread far and wide, and news of a visit by you excites the faithful and worries the sinful.
- ••••• Your preaching shapes the beliefs of a nation. Had you not been called to the Inquisition, you would be renowned as a bishop or founder of a monastic order.

Boln Relics

It has been said that if one were to collect all of the shards of the True Cross sold in Christendom and all of the bones of the saints thus peddled, one could build a new city and people to inhabit it. Possibly so, but some relics are indeed genuine receptacles of faith, whether through actual blessing from the Lord or simply the fervent belief of the Flock. Likewise, the most knowledgeable and devout inquisitors know how to create weapons anointed with the very essence of their devotion — items that inflict horrible wounds on the servants of the Adversary.

This Background indicates that the character possesses such a relic. These items can act as reserves of Conviction, aiding the inquisitor in her darkest moments. Once per story, the player may roll the character's rating in this Background (difficulty 6) and regain one point of Conviction per success rolled, up to a maximum of the character's Piety rating. More powerful relics have specific effects of their own. Some possibilities for Holy Relics, including weapons, are listed in Chapter Five.

- A finger-bone of a saint or some other relic of dubious origin.
- • A token blessed by Cardinal Marzone or perhaps even by the Pope.
- • A sword or other weapon prepared by the Forge of God ritus, or a similarly powerful

relic. If a weapon, choose one special property from the list on p. 196.

- A truly impressive item a shred of a saint's vestment or a weapon sanctified at several different holy places. If a weapon, choose two special properties.
- ••••• A vial of sand from Calvary or some similarly awe-inspiring item. If a weapon, choose three special properties.

Kank

The Inquisition is young and has only the loosest of formal structures. Its inquisitors are ostensibly too busy dealing with the spawn of Satan and preserving the souls of good Christian folk to bother with internal political strife or the worldly pursuit of power. However, the Inquisition still needs leadership and direction. Some inquisitors do rise through the ranks by dint of their faith, ability and successful record of dealing with hellspawn.

Each of the orders has its own particular idea of rank, structure and appellations, but this Background represents the inquisitor's overall level of influence and power within the Inquisition as a whole. The respect of fellow inquisitors means far more than any worldly title and is far more likely to give the character real power in the shadow Inquisition. However, as rank increases, so does responsibility. A character who serves on a Council of Faith is under much closer scrutiny by his fellows and his superiors, and his time is much more limited.

- You have exposed a few creatures of Satan and are respected by new inquisitors.
- You are well-known among local inquisitors, who look to you for advice and guidance.
- You serve on your local Council of Faith, helping direct the city's inquisitors.
- You serve (or have served) on the Supreme Council, advising on inquisition across the nation.
- ••••• You answer to God and Cardinal Marzone, and no one else.

The Superior Virtues

Inquisitor characters are called to fight against the unholy because their belief is greater than that of the general populace. The Holy Ghost has touched them and filled them with God's love and sorrow to such an extent that their Virtues are a leap above those of other people, even other Christians. They

reflect the character's utter commitment to the qualities God seeks in his servants. A character with Superior Virtues is among the most holy people alive in the Dark Medieval.

It is these Superior Virtues that keep inquisitors at least somewhat safe from the hellish powers of the enemy, by proving them worthy of God's blessings. As they progress in the Inquisition, these Superior Virtues grow, as exposure to God's power and the terrible face of the enemy make them more and more committed to the cause.

Like the basic Virtues, Superior Virtues are rated from 1 to 5 dots. Each of them is tied to one of the basic Virtues, in effect raising their upper limit from 5 to 10 dots. The character does not need to have reached five dots in a basic Virtue before she can gain dots in the Superior Virtue. However, her rating in a Superior Virtue can never exceed her rating in the associated basic Virtue.

faith

Faith is the Superior form of Conscience. It reflects how an inquisitor's moral code is utterly transformed by direct contact with the power of the Holy Ghost. What was once a set of moral rules that the character lived by steadily becomes the defining element of his personality. He lets go of material desire and sin, and he replaces them with purity and love for others.

At higher levels of Faith, the character's own personality, desires and wants slowly become subsumed by a humility and lack of desire that the "less blessed" find difficult and even disturbing to be around. The inquisitor, though, seems increasingly more happy and calm the greater his faith grows.

Benefits of Faith

Faith allows your character to move beyond her base nature, as reflected by Impulse when it rises to the fore. See Callousness (p. 162).

- Caring
- • Loving
- Merciful
- • • Redeeming
- • • Pure

Wisdom

Wisdom is the Superior form of Self-Control. The inquisitor's ability to control himself in extreme circumstances becomes insight into both his own nature and that of the world around him. The Godgranted understanding of the nature of creation

allows the inquisitor to comprehend matters that escape the understanding of normal people and gain an understanding of God's word and purpose that are almost miraculous in nature.

As the inquisitor's Wisdom grows, he becomes quiet and contemplative, speaking only to communicate insights and information that can benefit others. However, he becomes ever more watchful, reveling in the glory of God's creation and understanding even the place of monsters in it.

Benefits of Wisdom

Wisdom allows the inquisitor to resist the mental control of the minions of Satan. It also allows him to remember traumatic events with greater insight and clarity. See Thralldom (p. 162).

- Thoughtful
- • Insightful
- • Learned
- • • Enlightened
- • • Transcendent

Zeal

Zeal is the Superior form of Courage. Mere bravery is replaced by an utter focus on serving God's cause, whatever the risk. The zealous are able to do great deeds in the name of God simply because their desire to do that good is greater than their fear of death. Indeed, as their Zeal grows they cease to contemplate death, as they know that if God still has work for them they will survive, and that if they have fulfilled their destiny, God will welcome them into Heaven.

As the inquisitor's Zeal grows, she becomes increasingly focused on achieving God's objectives, be they bringing faith to others, caring for the sick or fighting the legions of Hell. Any other causes or activities cease to interest her as she commits her whole waking life to God's service.

Benefits of Zeal

Zeal allows an inquisitor to confront the infernal and satanic powers of the world without flinching. It also allows her to resist the insidious powers of the enemy when they try to inspire fear in God's servants. See Terror (p. 162).

- Dedicated
- • Worthy
- Committed
- • • Relentless
- • • Unstoppable

True Faith

ark Ages: Vampire includes a section on "The Blessed" (pp 287 – 291) and therein discusses a Trait called True Faith. Astute readers will note, however, that this Trait is not included in Dark Ages: Inquisitor. This is done for the same reason that only sketchy approximations of mage Pillars and werewolf Gifts are given in Dark Ages: Vampire — there simply isn't space enough in that book to discuss all of the possibilities for other types of characters and still have room for vampires. The powers listed under "The Gifts of Faith" (p. 288) are simple renditions of the Blessings and Endowments given in this book.

If, for any reason, you wish to calculate a **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** character's True Faith rating, assume that Servants have one dot, Acolytes have two, and so on up (yes, this means that True Faith 5 isn't represented at all by a stage of inquisitor; that's deliberate — such holy people cannot easily be quantified by any means).

Pietn

An inquisitor's duty, first and foremost, is to God. It is for the Lord's divine plan that they undertake their momentous task of keeping the world safe for His faithful Flock. A good inquisitor keeps God forever in his mind and heart, and does not allow his reverence and devotion to be outstripped by his desire to the cause of inquisition or his zeal for destroying demons or persecuting heretics. Unfortunately, things are never so easy.

The horrors and mysteries that confront inquisitors almost nightly tax their sanity and drive them toward greater heights of fanaticism and myopia, simply out of fear and a desire to gain a sense of control over anything they can. This devotion leads to Callousness and ultimately to Curses as God levies His judgment on those who transgress against His law. In game terms, this is reflected by a character's Conviction growing higher than her Piety score.

Piety represents a character's reverence for and devotion to God and the Church, not to the Inquisition. Piety begins equal to a character's Conscience + Self-Control and can rise and fall from there in much the same way a vampire's Road rating can. However, while the mechanical aspects of Piety and Road might be similar, the intent behind them is

	HIERARCHY OF SINS AGAINST GOD		
Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale	
10	Thinking impure or angry thoughts about another Christian.	You must be pure in mind as well as body.	
9	Engaging in any kind of sexual behavior.	The pleasures of the flesh are impure.	
8	Lying or breaking your word.	In truth there is redemption.	
7	Accepting monetary reward.	The riches of this world are the Devil's tools.	
6	Actingout of angerorany other sinful impulse (gluttony, lust, etc.).	Your behavior must be motivated by love for God.	
5	Notattempting to teach a heretic or a pagan.	ThosewhoknownothingofGodmustbeshowntheway.	
4	Not attempting to redeem a sinner.	Allthat Satan requires is that the faithful do nothing.	
3	Causing harm to a Christian.	Love thy neighbor as thyself.	
2	Aiding or allying with a demon in any way.	Shun the servants of the Adversary.	
		Nothing is worth putting yourself in their debt.	
1	Killinga Christian.	Thou shalt not commit murder.	

vastly different. A vampire clings to its Road in a mockery of faith, trying only to stave off the fury that is the Beast. The very measure of an inquisitor's spiritual worth is her Piety. An inquisitor who loses all of her Piety is not lost as a character, but has probably fallen so far from acceptable behavior that she is a likely target for inquisition herself. Then again, if the stories about Rodrigue de Navarre are true, perhaps it is possible to remain with the Inquisition after losing one's faith....

In play, Piety levies a standard of behavior for inquisitors. A character who violates one of the precepts of the Church risks not only official censure from the Inquisition, but a crisis of faith as well. In game terms, this functions much like degeneration (see Dark Ages: Vampire, p. 267); when the character commits a sin appropriate to her level of Piety, the player rolls Conscience + Faith (difficulty 6, or 7 if the character is currently Callous). If the roll succeeds, the character recognizes that she has sinned and loses a point of Conviction; this point can be regained by receiving the sacrament of confession. If the roll fails, the character either rationalizes her behavior as necessary to the Inquisition or simply does not notice her error and she loses a dot of Piety. If the roll botches, the player must immediately roll to see if the character acquires a new Curse.

Conviction

Conviction is a measure of the inquisitor's commitment to his cause: defeating, destroying or redeeming the servants of the Adversary. At times of success and achievement, when he feels God is with him and the enemy is on the run, the inquisitor will be full of Conviction, able to resist the enemy's wiles and free to call upon his Blessings easily. At other

times, when inquisition is going badly, his Conviction rapidly drops. Conviction is not some measure of mystical energy. It merely reflects how devoted to and confident in the cause the inquisitor is at any particular moment. The more committed he is, the better his ability to pursue his mission effectively.

Inquisitors are not the only people to possess Conviction. The general level of faith in the Dark Medieval is high enough that nearly all people have a single point of Conviction, which allows them a chance of resisting the influence of Satanic forces briefly. The only people who do not possess Conviction are those utterly without faith or those who are knowingly in the service of the enemy or its monstrous servants. Possession of Superior Virtues opens inquisitors to much higher levels of Conviction as they realize the true stakes in the struggle between good and evil.

However, too much Conviction can be dangerous. If it exceeds the character's Piety, he becomes Callous as his commitment to the Inquisition becomes greater than his commitment to God.

Conviction is rated from 1 to 10 points and will fluctuate markedly throughout the course of the game.

Spending Conviction

Conviction can be used in three different ways in the game.

• Activating Blessings

Conviction is often spent to activate the inquisitor's Blessings. See Chapter Five for more information.

• Virtue Rolls

A single point of Conviction can be spent on a Virtue roll to gain an automatic success, just as you

can spend a Willpower to gain an automatic success on other rolls. Note: You may spend only Conviction on Virtue rolls, never Willpower.

• Increasing Virtues and Gaining Endowments

Lastly, 10 points of Conviction can be exchanged for a single dot increase in a Superior Virtue or to gain an Endowment. For more details see Character Advancement (p. 161).

Regaining Conviction

A character may gain Conviction in four ways. These are detailed below.

Risking Conviction

Conviction can be gained by risking it in a roll for the use of a Blessing, be it Endowment, Holy Art or Orison. This represents the inquisitor throwing his all into a particularly critical moment in a confrontation with the enemy. If he succeeds, his Conviction grows. If he fails, it drops, as his confidence falters.

System: You may invest 1 to 3 points of Conviction in a single Blessing-related roll. Each invested point adds a die to your dice pool. If the roll succeeds, the character recovers all of the invested Conviction and gains an extra point. If it fails, she loses the invested Conviction. If the roll is a botch, she loses all her Conviction (see below for the effects of zero Conviction).

You may risk Conviction only once per scene.

Example: Simpkin Cotter, an Oculus, is trying to find a werewolf that has hidden in human form among the townspeople on market day. He calls upon his Blessing of Second Sight to try to find the demon. At the moment, Simpkin has six points of Conviction. Jesse, Simpkin's player, decides to invest three Conviction points in the roll, removing them from his character sheet, knowing that Simpkin has to find the werewolf before it escapes him again. Simpkin's Perception + Wisdom give Jesse a pool of five dice, to which he adds the three Conviction dice for a total of eight. He rolls and gets four successes. Yay! Simpkin spots the werewolf hanging about the edge of the crowd and moves toward him. Jesse returns the three Conviction he risked in the roll to his sheet, along with the extra point he earned, for a new total of seven points.

Victory

Striking a blow against the enemy in God's name can, and usually does, boost an inquisitor's confidence. This has to be a clear, obvious victory, such as destroying or achieving the redemption of a

creature of Satan. However, other tasks might qualify as well, depending of the inquisitor's own outlook on the situation. If the character was seeking to free a village of malign influence, then driving away a lone night beast that preyed on the inhabitants might be enough to boost his Conviction.

System: If your character achieves a convincing victory over the enemy, you may, at your Storyteller's discretion, roll the character's primary Superior Virtue + its controlling basic Virtue, against a difficulty of 7, to determine whether your character gains Conviction as a result. If the roll succeeds, she gains a point of Conviction. If it fails, nothing happens. If the roll is botched, she loses a point of Conviction; your character's confidence has obviously been shaken by what he has learned in the encounter.

• Prayer

The main source of an inquisitor's commitment to his calling is his belief in God. Direct communication with the Lord, through prayer, is a powerful way of boosting his Conviction. However, ordinary prayer will not achieve it on its own. This communion needs to take place on holy ground or jointly with a faithful and dedicated group of believers. Either method can generate enough spiritual power to renew the inquisitor's commitment to God's cause. The character may pray with other members of the Inquisition, but may roll only as many dice as the highest Faith rating represented.

System: The inquisitor must spend an hour in prayer, with his attention fully focused. Any interruption during that hour will prevent the prayer from having the desired effect. The praying must take place on holy ground, over a holy relic or with a flock (p. 156). At the end of the hour, roll the Holy Ground rating, Holy Relic rating or the Flock rating, against a difficulty of 7. The number of successes equals the number of points of Conviction gained. Each additional hour of prayer reduces the difficulty of the roll by one, to a minimum of 3. Such prayer sessions may be attempted only once per day. For each successive day that the inquisitor attempts to pray, the difficulty of the roll increases by one to a maximum of 10. A character may never raise his Conviction higher than his Piety rating in this manner. God does not force inquisitors into Callousness.

· New Story

At the start of a new story, the character's Conviction is increased to the sum of his Conscience + Faith, should it have fallen below that level at the end of the last story.

Losing all Conviction

An inquisitor who has lost all her Conviction through a botched roll, or simply through spending it all, is in dire straits indeed. She has no defenses against the enemy until such a time as she gains Conviction again. She may not call upon her Blessings and is unable to use Virtue rolls to resist the powers of the enemy. She suffers a crisis of faith and may need the encouragement of others of her chapter to pray for God's blessing and a boost in her Conviction.

Systems

Life as an inquisitor is dramatically different from unlife as a vampire, and some new systems are necessary to represent those differences. These new systems are detailed below.

Growing Infaith: Character Development

Characters in **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** can develop in two ways: mundane and spiritual. The character's mundane Abilities and Attributes grow normally, using the experience point system given on p. 166 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. This also includes the Holy Art. However, the character's Superior Virtues, Orisons and Endowments can be improved only by gaining Conviction through pursuing the cause of inquisition, as detailed below.

Backgrounds can be improved only through roleplaying. Chapter-House can be improved only by earning a larger base of operations from the character's superiors in the Inquisition or possibly by physically building such a place. Equally, Flock increases only if the character actually recruits more believers to his cause.

Spending Experience Points

As usual, increases in Attributes, Abilities and the Holy Arts need to be explained to the Storyteller's satisfaction. How is the character managing to improve this Trait? Is it through experience in the field, or through taking the time to study, exercise and practice?

The time taken to learn a new level in a Trait can vary from a matter of days for the lower levels, to weeks, months or years of persistent learning. Certainly, ratings of four or five dots should take months (at least) to obtain. The experience points required can be spent at the end of the training or spread out throughout the training period if the Storyteller prefers.

EXPERIENCE POINT COSTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	current rating x 4
Existing Ability	current rating x 2
Specialty	current Ability rating
New Ability	3
New Holy Art path	10
Primary Holy Art Path	Current Level x 5
Other Holy Art Path	Current Level x 7
Basic Virtue	current rating x 2*
Piety .	current rating
Willpower	current rating
*Raising a Virtue	loss not increase the

*Raising a Virtue does not increase the Traits based on it, such as Conviction or Willpower.

Of course, the orders offer an easy explanation for many Ability increases. A period of retreat in an order stronghold for training, education or contemplation during the downtime between sessions can justify many increases, particularly ones the character (as well as the player) feels she needs to be a more effective inquisitor.

Virtuesand Endowments

The only way to improve Superior Virtues, or to gain new Orisons or Endowments, is to exchange Conviction points. To this end, you may bank Conviction points toward the number needed to improve a Superior Virtue or gain a Blessing. This banking represents a character taking time to assimilate what they have learned through pursuing the mission into her faith, enriching her relationship with God. The character must spend at least an hour per point of Conviction banked praying, reading and meditating in seclusion. Banking more than one point of Conviction in a day requires the inquisitor to go on a period of retreat while she purifies herself, studies the Bible and undergoes extended periods of confession with her superior in the Inquisition.

Inquisitors who have become Callous (see below) have two choices. They may go on immediate retreat, leaving the business of inquisition to others until enough Conviction is banked to bring them down to pre-Callous levels. Alternatively, they may aggressively pursue inquisition in the hope of using up the excess conviction, or gaining enough through the holy work to immediately cash 10 points in for a new point of

Superior Virtue or Endowment. However, the latter path carries the risk of Curses (p. 201).

Callousness

The cause of the Inquisition is a noble one, seeking both to defeat God's Adversary and to protect the God-fearing people of the Church from the Satanic minions' malign influence. However, an inquisitor's first loyalty should be to his God, not to his calling. Many inquisitors lose sight of that and become so wrapped up in their mission that they forget their spiritual duties.

This state of mind is called Callousness and occurs when the character's Conviction is higher than his Piety. Callousness has a number of effects on the inquisitor:

- Empathy loss: The character loses any sympathy for the monsters and their victims, seeing only her immediate task. All rolls involving Empathy are at +2 difficulty while a character is Callous.
- Impulsive: While a character is Callous, her Impulse comes to the fore. Whenever a situation arises where his Impulse applies, the player must roll Conscience + Faith, difficulty 6, to avoid acting as the Impulse would suggest.

Example: Martyn d'Avignon of the Knights of Acre is, by Nature, a Bravo so his Impulse is Violence. He faces the unwilling thrall of the enemy. His aim is to subdue his enemy for interrogation and possible redemption. However, he is Callous and he wants simply to slaughter this tool of Satan. Martyn's player rolls Conscience + Faith, scoring no success. And so, Martyn gives into his Impulse and leaps at the possessed cleric, sword ready to strike....

Acting on Impulse by itself doesn't have to be harmful, but it often leads inquisitors into situations that test their Piety — which, in turn, lowers their resistance to Callousness. Wise inquisitors maintain their standards of behavior very carefully.

Thralldom

While some of the servants of the enemy are more than capable of tearing a man limb from limb, their more effective power is the ability to cloud men's minds. Many monsters have the ability to direct the thoughts of others, twist their emotions or even reduce people to compliant slaves. This is a state known as thralldom, wherein the character is under the mental domination of a supernatural creature.

To resist an attempt to control the character's thoughts, the player may roll Self-Control + Wis-

THRALLDOM, TERROR AND CONVICTION

character with even one point of Conviction may attempt to resist thralldom or terror, regardless of whether she actually has the Superior Virtue in question or not. If she does not, however, she must spend a point of Conviction in order to do so. This means that since most normal mortals have a single point of Conviction, they can (if they can muster the strength, which is up to the Storyteller) resist the powers of the unholy for a moment. However, another attempt on the part of a demon will surely bring the hapless mortal's resistance crashing down.

dom, difficulty 6 (if the character does not have a dot in Wisdom, the player must spend a Conviction point) in an opposed roll against the creature's. If the inquisitor wins, she succeeds in resisting the attempt to control her thoughts. If the roll fails, she may be allowed further attempts to roll whenever she is forced to do something against her nature. Inquisitors may resist Disciplines such as Dominate, Presence and Dementation (as well as mind-controlling powers from other sources) in this manner, but usually must be aware that something untoward is happening in order to make the attempt.

Example: Maria of Bristol, an Eye of God, has stumbled upon a cult of demon worshipers operating from a disused warehouse near the docks. The leader of the cult attempts to control her mind with his magic, scoring three successes. Maria's player rolls her Self-Control + Wisdom, scoring two successes. It's not enough, so Maria falls under the thrall of the demon priest. Later that night, the demon cult leader demands that Mary reveals the names of those inquisitors working with her. The Storyteller rules that it is against Maria's nature to tell, so the player rolls Self-Control + Wisdom, this time scoring four successes. Maria is free of thralldom! She answers the questions, but with lies, and bides her time in hopes of learning more about the cult....

Memory

Some encounters with the enemy are so traumatic that the inquisitor is unable to recall them at all. On other occasions, the hellspawn can use their powers to block the inquisitor's access to his memories. In such situations, the inquisitor's player can roll Self-Control + Wisdom, difficulty 6, to recall the events that took

place (again, if the character has no Wisdom, a point of Conviction is required). The more successes achieved, the greater the recall. If the memory loss was the result of monstrous powers (such as the Dominate power Reveler's Memory), the inquisitor's player needs to roll more successes than the roll to block or alter the memory originally achieved.

Terror

The life of an inquisitor is hard, and his calling to serve God often means he has to put his own life in danger. That danger can come in many forms: A ravening man-beast, a burning building or just a deadly leap. However, through his Zeal for the Lord's service he can overcome the fear that assails him.

Whenever a character voluntarily chooses to enter a dangerous or life-threatening situation, the Storyteller may call for his player to make a Courage + Zeal roll (difficulty 6) to be able to do so. If the character does not have a dot in Zeal, the player must spend a point of Conviction to make the roll. If the roll fails, the character is overtaken by terror. The player may then decide to have his character press

onward anyway, but loses one from all dice pools for the remainder of the scene.

Confronting the overtly supernatural, such as a vampire baring its fangs at the inquisitor, also calls for a terror roll, at the difficulty of 8 minus the character's rating in the Exposure Background, if any. If the roll fails, the player loses two dice from all pools until the end of the scene, or until the supernatural threat is vanquished or disappears.

Any use of fear-based supernatural powers (such as the Presence power Dread Gaze) may also be resisted by rolling Courage + Zeal (difficulty 6). If the players achieves more successes than those scored on the monster's roll, the inquisitor is unaffected by the creature's power. Involuntary effects that don't require a roll, such as the blind terror created by werewolves, merely require a single success.

Any botch on a terror roll causes the character to flee as fast as he can from the agent of his terror.

Example: Toby, a Red Brother, faces a demon spawn on a deserted country lane, on his way back to the local church where he's been sleeping. The demonic creature shows its true, monstrous aspect to the frightened monk. Toby's player rolls Courage +



Zeal at difficulty 6 (8 – his Exposure rating of 2) and scores a single success. Toby stands firm against the monster and desperately starts to call upon the Holy Art to bind the thing. The monster, determined to be rid of this monk, tries to invoke fear in him unnaturally. The Storyteller rolls the demon's Gnosis for its fear power and gets three successes. Toby's player rolls Courage + Zeal and botches. Toby runs screaming into the night, while the demonic thing is free to continue into the village.

Bealing

Injury in the Dark Medieval is a serious issue. While the Inquisition has access to some of the best healing available in Europe during the 13th century, it is feeble indeed compared to modern abilities. Any inquisitor who is sorely wounded faces months of mend, unless some Endowment is used that grants her a speedy recovery. Inquisitors heal at the same rates that mortals do, barring divine intervention (see p. 255 of Dark Ages: Vampire for mortal healing times).

Bunger and Thirst

Fasting is seen as an important part of religious devotion in the Dark Medieval. Characters may choose to fast to help deepen their religious understanding, to prove their commitment to their faith, as part of a religious ritual or merely as penance for a perceived sin against the Lord. Fasting can have serious effects on the body, though, as detailed below.

At the Storyteller's discretion, a fasting character receives a -2 difficulty modifier on all rolls to regain Conviction through prayer.

Gunger

Days 1 to 4

For each day without food, the character loses one die from all dice pools, as hunger begins to effect his concentration. These penalties do not apply to Endowment or Virtue rolls. The player may roll Courage + Zeal, difficulty 7, to ignore these penalties for a single scene. On days three and four the character also takes one level of bashing damage per day.

One day of good nutrition will cancel out all penalties.

Day 5 on

From the fifth day of fasting (or starvation) on, the character takes one level of lethal damage per two days of starvation. The dice pool penalties continue to accrue until the character is too weak to do move. If the character starts eating again, dice pool penalties decrease by one each day, until they disappear. Healing takes place at the normal lethal damage rates.

Thirst

Thirst kills much more quickly then hunger. Even characters that are fasting usually drink enough water to keep themselves alive. However, characters might find themselves subjected to extremes of thirst as captives of the enemy or as part of a particularly extreme fast.

Each day that the character goes without consuming liquid or eating, he loses an extra die from all pools on top of the fasting penalty. So, if he has abstained from both food and liquid for two days, his dice pools fall by four dice. After the second day of dehydration, he suffers one level of lethal damage per day, until he dies or is given water.

Once the character starts drinking again, the dice lost to thirst return at the rate of two per day. This does not affect the dice lost to hunger. Any lethal damage suffered heals at normal rates.

Poisons

The line between beneficial and enjoyable herbs and poisonous ones is fine and easily crossed, sometimes by accident and sometimes on purpose. Many poisons are in use during the Dark Medieval. Here's a list of the most common:

- Alcohol: Alcohol is commonly drunk in a watered down state as the staple drink of many communities, as it is usually safer than the local drinking water. However, people still drink to get drunk. Drinking has a rapid effect on a character's capabilities. Each pint of beer or two glasses of wine or spirits reduces the character's Dexterity and Intelligence pools by one die. This effect dissipates at the rate of one die per hour.
- Food Poisoning (Salmonella): Food hygiene is appalling in many places in the Dark Medieval. Most people are fairly resistant to food poisoning because they have developed immunities to most bacteria, but salmonella can still strike. A severe dose of food poisoning inflicts between one and four levels of bashing damage, as the character vomits her stomach's contents up. He loses one dice from all Stamina dice pools and two dice from all Dexterity dice pools. The effects of food poisoning wear off after about a day.

- Hashish: In common use in the Middle East and imported into Europe, consuming hashish has a calming effect but also affects the user's ability to concentrate. A character eating or smoking hashish reduces any dice pool involving Perception by two. These effects last for approximately two hours.
- Hallucinogens: Hallucinogenic drugs are an essential part of the medical tool kit in the Dark Medieval. Drugs such as cowbane, henbane and nightshade (belladonna) are used as painkillers. A character given such herbs in small quantities reduces all dice pools by between 2 and 4 dice, depending on the amount of the drug consumed. For larger doses, see Poison, below. Other effects are at the Storyteller's discretion, but may include vivid hallucinations or even a temporary extra point of Courage. In small doses, these drugs reduce the disabling effects of injury, lowering by 1 the dice pool penalty inflicted by wounds. The effects of hallucinogens last for a number of hours equal to (10 Stamina).
- Pain Killers: Hallucinogens are not the only drugs used to control pain. Herbs such as hemlock, mandrake and monkshood are also used as painkillers. In small doses, they reduce the disabling effects of injury, reducing by 1 the dice pool penalty inflicted by wounds. Again, in large doses they become poisons. The effects last for a number of hours equal to (10 Stamina).
- Poison: Larger doses of hallucinogens or painkillers, or extracts such as arsenic, strychnine or cyanide, can prove fatal. Once a character has ingested a poison, she suffers between one and three levels of bashing damage every scene or turn, depending on the severity of the poison in question. The damage continues to accumulate until the poison wears off, the character dies or an antidote is administered (should one exist).

Disease

Disease is a major factor in the lives of medieval people, as it runs rampant through unsanitary conditions and with little in the way of effective medicine to control it. Various diseases are ever present across Europe and elsewhere, of which the most common are listed below.

A player whose character is suffering from a disease may attempt a Stamina roll each day to fight off the effects of the disease. Alternatively, if the character is under medical care, an attending healer or physician may roll Intelligence + Medicine for the character. The Stamina roll is still required in this

case, but the difficulty is reduced by the attending healer's Medicine rating. If these rolls succeed for five days in succession, the character can be considered to have recovered from the illness. (For more information on diseases and their specific symptoms, see pp. 255 – 256 of Dark Ages: Vampire.)

• Dysentery (The Flux): A character suffering from this condition will incur one level of Lethal damage per day, until the disease is cured or he dies.

Difficulty of Medicine/Recovery roll: 8

• **Dropsy:** A character suffering from this disease has one fewer health level than usual and may never have a Stamina greater than 2.

Difficulty of Medicine/Recovery roll: Incurable.

• Leprosy: A character with leprosy sees his Appearance decrease by 1 dot for each month he suffers the disease, until it reaches zero. Even if the character eventually throws off the disease, he is forever scarred. Dice pools on all Physical and Social rolls are decreased by 2 due to the debilitating nature of this illness.

Difficulty of Medicine/Recovery roll: 9

• Plague: Characters with this disease suffer one level of lethal damage per day, until dead or cured. However, fever renders them effectively Incapacitated for the length of the disease.

Difficulty of Medicine/Recovery Roll: 7

• St Anthony's Fire (Ergotism): Sufferers endure three levels of bashing damage a day, along with a two dice penalty to all their dice pools, as they struggle to concentrate through the pain and convulsions.

Difficulty of Medicine/Recovery roll: 6*/9

• Syphilis: Characters contracting syphilis suffer two levels of lethal damage every three days.

Difficulty of Medicine/Recovery roll: 8

• Tuberculosis: Sufferers of tuberculosis suffer three levels of lethal damage, per week. The also lose one dot in Stamina or Strength each week as their body wastes away. If either of the Traits reach zero, the character collapses and incurs one level of Lethal damage per hour until them die.

Difficulty of Medicine/Recovery roll: 10

Corture

Despite their Hell-granted strength and unnatural flesh, many servants of the enemy are just as susceptible to the ungentle ministrations of torture as heretics. In the few years since its inception, the Inquisition has learned that although many of Satan's creatures can heal ordinary wounds at unnatural rates, certain techniques are far more effective on them.



Inquisitors have at their disposal a range of torture devices designed to minimize the healing abilities of monsters, for example by physically holding open a wound or by steadily streaming boiling liquids into the wound. The character must have a Torture rating of at least one to be able to use these devices effectively. Those with no skill at all are more likely to injure themselves than the hellspawn.

Yet, the physical damage inflicted on the creature is not the whole of the torture. More powerful still is the psychological damage the inquisitor wreaks on his victim. Satan's children are not used to being helpless before mere mortals and can be taunted and broken by a skilled inquisitor. Slowly, the creatures' confidence in their own hellish abilities erodes, and they confess to their demonic activities.

System: Once the victim is attached to a torture device, damage is considered to happen automatically. Such devices inflict between one and three points of lethal or aggravated damage per half hour of torture, and the inquisitor can determine the degree inflicted. The art of torture is to get the victim to confess before he (or it) expires or passes out. The victim may soak as normal, provided he is able.

For each half hour of torture that results in damage, the victim's player (usually the Storyteller), must make a Willpower roll (difficulty equals 6 plus the inquisitor's Torture rating) or confess and answer the inquisitor's questions. All that's required is an answer, however, not necessarily a truthful one, although Manipulation + Subterfuge rolls should be required to construct plausible lies in the face of torture (and wound penalties most assuredly count). If the character doesn't break, roll the torturer's Manipulation + Torture, with a difficulty of the victim's Willpower. Each success strips one point of temporary Willpower from the victim. When the victim's Willpower is reduced to zero, he breaks and confesses freely. Again, he may reveal truth or, if he has been given some indication of what the inquisitor wants to hear, lies designed to stop the torture.

Merits& flaws

Physical

Sale (2-pt. Merit)

God has granted you a strong constitution, so you may better serve His cause. You are rarely in less than robust health and take ill infrequently. Subtract two from all difficulties to resist disease, whether natural or supernatural in nature.

DISALLOWED

layers may not take the following Merits and Flaws for Dark Ages: Inquisitor characters:

Physical: Eat Food, Blush of Health, Child, Efficient Digestion, Smell of the Grave, 13th Generation, Ragged Bite, Permanent Wound, Flesh of the Corpse

Mental: Prey Exclusion, Religious Prohibition, Flesh Eater, Territorial

Social: Apostate, Hunted, Outspoken Pagan/Heretic (Note: Merits and Flaws referring to a character's sire, such as Infamous Sire or Prestigious Sire, are allowable, except that they refer to an inquisitor's mentor and the character must have the Mentor background to take these Traits.)

Supernatural: Inoffensive to Animals, Medium, Arcane Resistance, Oracular Ability, Initiate to the Road, Touch of Frost, Repulsed by Garlic, Repulsive to Animals, Cannot Embrace, Repelled by Crosses, Can't Cross Running Water, Cast No Reflection, Blood Madness, Grip of the Damned, Light Sensitive, Weak Blood

Pain Resistant (2-pt Merit)

The disciplines of faith, self-denial and mortification have granted you an unusual resistance to pain. Let Satan's spawn do their worst: The flesh matters not. All wound penalties are reduced by one (so at the Wounded health level your character loses one die, not two).

Weak Lungs (2-pt flavo)

God gives all inquisitors their own burdens to bear. Yours is a deformity of your lungs, meaning that you become winded easily. Increase the difficulties of all sustained physical activity (running, prolonged combat, climbing, etc) by one.

Aderly (4-pt. flavo)

God did not call you to his service until late in your life. Although your mind and faith are strong, your body is frail. Still, you bring experience to the Inquisition, which mean that you never question the wisdom of His choice, even though you lack the ability to stand side by side with your more active brethren. All difficulties on physical rolls increase by one, and if you ever botch such a roll, you must immediately roll the appropriate Attribute at diffi-

culty 6. If that roll botches, you lose a dot from the Attribute. Dropping to zero in a Physical Attribute may cripple or kill, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Mental

Uncanny Logic (2-pt Werit)

All inquisitors have to be able to separate truth from falsehood and right from wrong. You, however, have an uncanny reasoning ability that allows you to take apparently innocuous facts and ruthlessly deduce their true meaning. There is nothing supernatural in this: God has merely granted you an ordered and uncluttered mind that can work through trains of thought more fully than others can manage. All difficulties on rolls involving deduction decrease by two.

Worship Obsession (1-pt to 4-pt flavo)

God has laid a heavy burden upon you. You sense that he demands an unusually harsh regimen of worship from you. It might be regular prayer at predetermined times, as practiced by monastic bothers (1 point flaw). Two points might mean that you have to stop and pray with every obvious sinner you meet. A 3-point flaw might mean that you have to give up all worldly goods of your own whenever you receive them, whereas a 4-point flaw might demand self-mortification or flagellation each evening, to drive all the impurities from your corrupted flesh. Failure to perform your chosen worship costs you two points of Conviction for each day you miss, and missing more than two consecutive days requires a roll to avoid losing Piety.

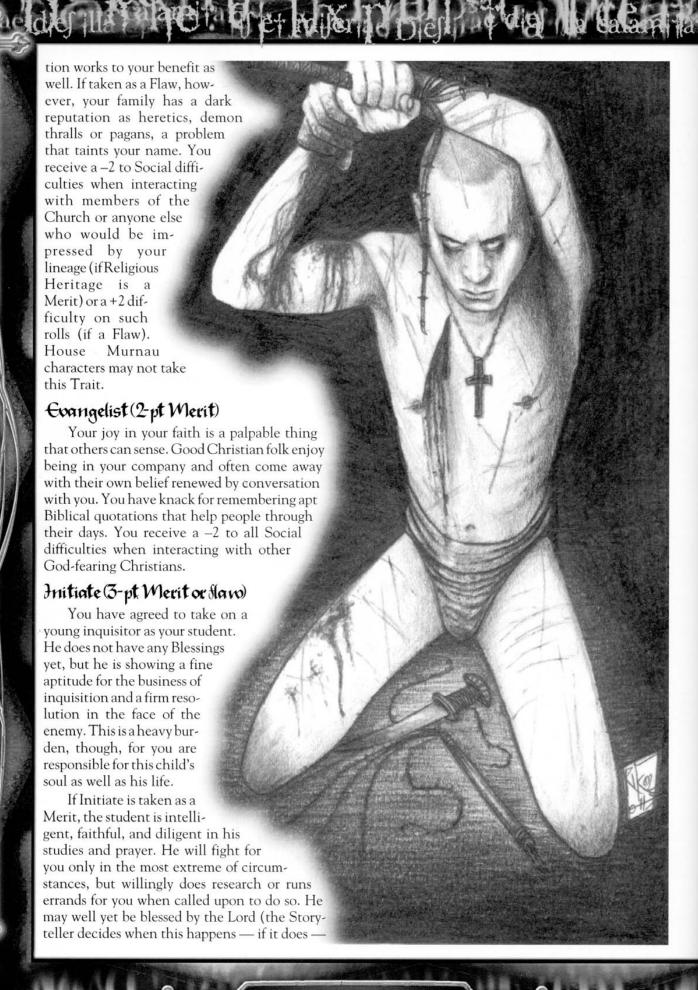
Sickened by the flesh (2-pt. flavo)

You are easily sickened by the sight of base flesh and all things to do with it. Whenever you witness a gory scene of battle, obvious signs of the corrupted flesh of the enemy or an overt display of carnal lust, you must roll Willpower (difficulty 6). If the roll fails, you are overcome with nausea for the next few minutes. While this doesn't mean you spend the time vomiting (unless the roll botches), it does mean that all difficulties increase by one during that time.

Social

Religious Beritage (1-pt Merit or flaw)

When taken as a merit, Religious Heritage indicates your family has a history of dedicated service in the Church, with many of your relatives gaining prominent positions through the years. That reputa-



based on how much time you spend training him and the experiences he has).

If taken as a Flaw, the Initiate is a problem who hinders your work. He's incompetent, lazy, petulant and he lacks dedication to his faith. Your superiors are reluctant to let him leave your service, for he already knows too much about the shadow Inquisition, so you have to do your best to whip him into some useful shape. However, he can be a danger and a liability to the safety of your chapter.

In either case, the Initiate requires training and spiritual guidance. The Storyteller should take care to ensure that the character is not reaping the benefits of the Initiate without giving the appropriate teaching.

Blasphemous Tongue (3-pt flaw)

Although your faith is strong and your hatred of heresy as great as anyone's, you cannot help but talk about God and his servants in an irreverent way. It's not that you are rude or insulting to Him, just that you don't treat your faith with the gravity that the Church demands. You suffer a +2 difficulty on all Social rolls with other members of the Church, and can expect your tongue to earn you censure from the Inquisition sooner rather than later.

Reformed Beretic (3-pt flavo)

Many monastic and clerical orders have experimented with variations on Christianity, which are tolerated until such a time as a Papal Bull declares them to be heresy. You followed such a path some years ago, prior to joining the Inquisition. You were granted the chance to repent and confess your sins when your chosen faith was declared heresy, and you accepted. While you are redeemed in the eyes of the Church, many individuals, if they learn of your history, will regard you with suspicion and possibly even hatred. Should your history be revealed to other inquisitors, members of the Church or even the laity, it is up to the Storyteller to determine how they react to you, but the response should be difficult to deal with.

Supernatural

Boly Aura (2-pt Merit)

God's touch upon you has an odd effect on the people around you. They sense that there is something different about you. The religious are drawn to you, and the criminal or heretical tend to avoid you instinctively. However, everybody finds it hard to lie to you or hide his true nature from you. All difficulties on rolls to lie to you or conceal something from you are increased by 2.

Boly art Natural (5-pt Merit)

One of the paths of the Holy Art comes very easily to you. For some reason, the Lord has blessed you with a particular aptitude, so that you may serve him better. Whatever the cause, the experience cost for your chosen path is (current rating x 4). You need not begin with any dots in your chosen art; if you choose not to, the cost to buy the first dot is 8 experience points.

Pure (5-pt Merit)

Most inquisitors begin play with an Acolyte-level Curse (see Chapter Five for more information). You, however, do not — either you have atoned for your sins sufficiently to negate the need for divine retribution, or you simply lead such a blameless life that no contrition is necessary. Whatever the case, you begin with an order Endowment, but no Curse. Obviously, this Merit is not available to characters beginning with their order benefit and drawback in lieu of an Endowment.

Ecstatic (2-pt flavo)

Sometimes, your joy in the touch of the Holy Ghost utterly overwhelms you and you speak in tongues, have ecstatic fits or start prophesying incomprehensibly. Every time you use a Blessing or the Holy Art and score more than three successes, you must roll Willpower (difficulty 6) or give in to ecstatic behavior. You may spend a Willpower point to delay the effect by one scene, if you wish.

Go& Judgment (2-pt. to 5-pt. flaw)

You have sinned against the Lord sometime in the past, and as a punishment upon you he has barred you from receiving some of His Blessings. A 2-point flaw bars you from gaining Orisons; a 3-point flaw from a particular form of Endowment or path of the Holy Art; 4-points ban you from gaining any Endowments; and 5 points ban you from gaining Blessings entirely. These are NOT cumulative. You suffer the penalty for the appropriate level only. That is, a character with the 4-point version of this Flaw may learn Orisons and the Holy Art, but not Endowments.



Giordano Vicola arzenta stoodinavoe

as his comrade-at-arms forced the creatures back into the cistern. He rushed to her side to close the door, but she waved him away and — still praying, her rosary in one hand to drive back the fiends — she swung the heavy oaken door closed and threw the bolt. Then she turned.

"I thank you for the attempt, Brother Giordano, but it's not necessary. I have everything well in hand, so there is no need for you to endanger yourself. Come morning, I shall open that door and perform last rites for all of those poor creatures."

Giordano's jaw dropped. "But, Sister! A cell is on the way here, now — Sir Giorgio and his fellows — surely the Knights would be better suited to that task."

Sister Vittoria Santini di Parma shook her head. "And supposing that one of them fell to lingering too long to look on the creatures' hideous faces? And what if the blood of that Poor Knight strengthened the creature? The results would be disastrous. But such creatures who feed on my blood choke, and you have seen it with your own eyes." She pointed a gnarled finger at the young monk.

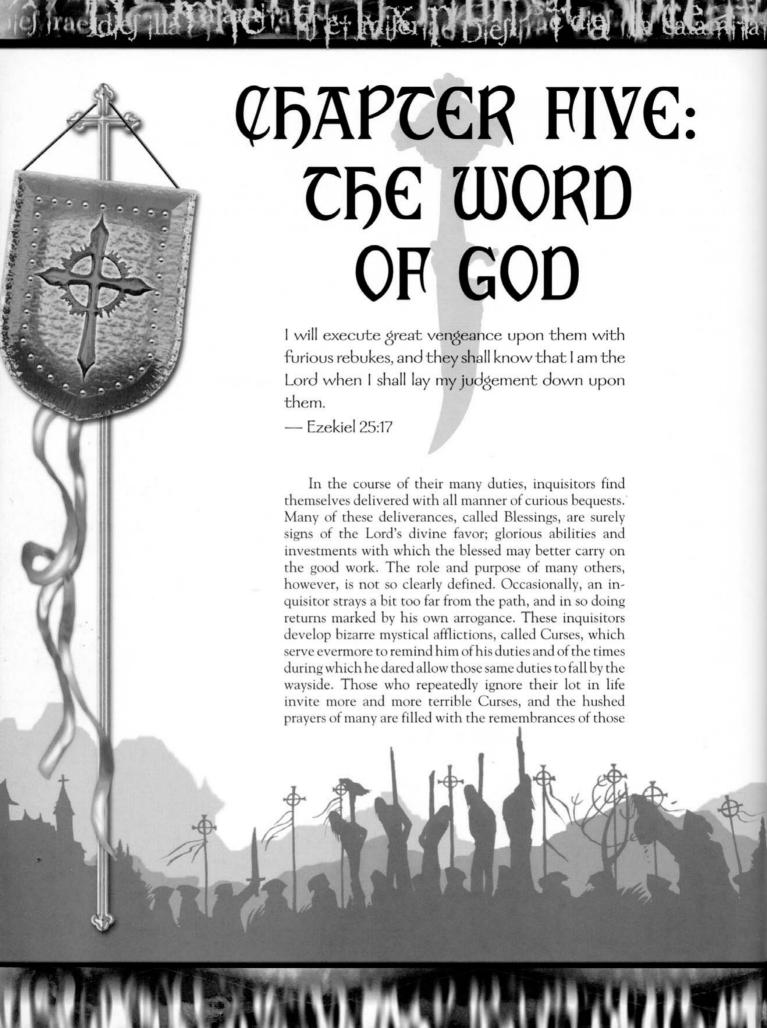
"Whether they choke or not, you would be just as dead," he answered, gesturing helplessly around him.

Sister Vittoria turned her back on him. "Brother Giordano, please mind me. You have been part of our Order for only a short time. I have been a Red Sister for years. Kindly recall that I know best."

Brother Giordano took a few steps back and then stopped. "No."

The Sister turned on him, and the fire in her gaze remind Brother Giordano that Sister Vittoria Santini di Parma was much younger and stronger than her appearance would indicate. "No?"

He squared his shoulders. "No, Sister. I may not have been a member of the order so long as you, but I recall what I have been taught, and my teachers taught me that any member of our order — or indeed the Inquisition — who exhibits unsound judgment in the face of the enemy is to be prevented from entering battle and should be taken off to pray." He stepped in front of the door of the cistern and braced himself, although he knew that Sister Vittoria would never strike him. "So, go off to pray, Sister. I shall watch the door until Sir Giorgio arrives. I will not let you walk into death. We have seen too much together, and I know that God still has work for you."



who have fallen too far to return, or even more frighteningly have willingly cast all grace (and thus God himself) aside, giving themselves over to the abyss entirely.

Although few can say when or from where these mystical forces may descend, or to what inscrutable pattern they may adhere, most inquisitors accept the righteousness and justice of their lot in life. Be it a divine blessing or a curse, it is the solemn duty of the inquisitor to take whatever measures are deemed necessary by God in order to preserve and protect the Flock. After all, the King of Heaven works in mysterious ways, and what righteous man would consider it his place to question Heaven's will?

Blessings

The divine gifts of Heaven are as varied as they are splendid. Each inquisitor has at his disposal a number of different weapons with which to fight the Adversary, each as glorious and as useful as the next. The most basic of these, Orisons, are even occasionally found among the Flock. Members of the laity who are endowed with such gifts make ideal candidates for induction into the Inquisition.

In addition to Orisons, inquisitors have at their disposal a more advanced type of Blessing called Endowments. These powerful abilities and imbuings are never found among the lay members of the congregation, as only proper inquisitors have the sanctity and dedication required to develop and control such unearthly powers. These types of Blessings include more dynamic displays of the Lord's power. They are funneled through and fueled by the virtue of the inquisitor who has been granted their use. Alongside Endowments are the various paths and applications of the Holy Art, a form of mystical theurgy employed and developed by the seers and

scholars of the Inquisition. These powerful gifts allow the blessed to stand toe-to-toe with witches, warlocks and other sorcerous evildoers.

Rounding out the Blessings, inquisitors also have access to Holy Ground — places sanctified to God, which provide soul-weary inquisitors with shelter and spiritual revitalization — and Holy Relics, objects of singular importance to the followers of Christ in their war against the depredations of the Adversary.

Acquiring Blessings

Inquisitor characters start with one Orison. Acquiring new Orisons may be done in play or during downtime by "cashing in" 10 points of Conviction (see p. 161).

Inquisitors of at least Acolyte rank also begin play with a single Endowment, chosen from the character's order specialty. If the character is a member of the Red Order, she begins with one dot on a path of her choice and a single Level One ritus, instead (the Holy Art is described later in this chapter). From there, inquisitors acquire new Blessings as they develop their sanctity and dedication to the cause. Endowments are self-contained sets of powers, granting the inquisitor the ability to call upon different aspects of the power he has been granted as he gradually develops his virtue. Thus, the most virtuous of inquisitors are able to produce a wide variety of effects from each individual Endowment. Meanwhile, the Holy Art is more traditional in structure, often allowing for quick acquisition of new powers, but with each path producing nighidentical effects from practitioner to practitioner.

Endowments are not necessarily linear. This means that it is possible for a character to purchase an Advocate-level Benediction for her character by spending 25 Conviction, regardless of whether the character al-

BLESSING COST	ΓS	
Experience Cost	-	Conviction Cost
None		10
None	***	10
None		15
None		25
None		35
-10		None
Current Level x 5		None
- Current Level x 7		None
	Experience Cost None None None None None Current Level x 5	None None None None None 10 Current Level x 5

ready has an Acolyte-level Benediction or not. Indeed, it is even possible to purchase Endowments of a higher level than the inquisitor's current stage of development. This kind of rapid advancement, however, carries with it the risk of Curses (see p. 201).

Orisons

These most fundamental of Blessings present a curious paradox. While they are undeniably the weakest of all divine gifts, they remain curiously discriminating about when and to whom they will appear. Orisons are gifts from God, imparted directly into the inquisitor's being through His grace alone. They cannot be learned or developed as can other Blessings — only bestowed by virtue of divine favor.

Orisons are linked to the three basic Virtues: Conscience, Self-Control, and Courage. This means that members of the Flock can and sometimes do exhibit these gifts, and that inquisitors may begin play with one from any group they choose.

Orisons of Conscience

Most Orisons of Conscience increase the inquisitor's ability to perceive and interact with the world around him, as he takes in God's mercy and learns to accept it.

Moral Compass

The character cannot overlook sin, not even his own. He has a nearly unerring sense of how badly those around him have transgressed against God, and may, with some extra effort, even use that ability to avoid Callousness.

System: The player rolls Perception + Conscience (difficulty 6). If successful, the character learns how badly those around him have sinned (including the target's Piety rating, if she has one). Pagans, heretics and other non-Christian humans come sharply to the character's attention if the player manages five successes, but do not appear odd otherwise. Supernatural creatures may or may not appear strange to a character using this Orison, depending on whether they consider themselves Christian and what manner of creature they are (Storyteller's discretion, and she should feel no compunction to be consistent). This perception lasts for one scene.

In addition, the character knows when she is nearing Callousness and may spend ten minutes in prayer to bring her Conviction to acceptable levels. For every ten minutes she spends in this intense prayer, the player may spend one point of Conviction and bank one (so the character loses two points from her immediate total, but banks one toward future Traits). This application of Moral compass may be attempted only when the character is about to become Callous (that is, her Conviction is equal to her Piety).

Moalstavor

An individual blessed with Noah's Favor possesses a unique quality that soothes the hearts and tempers of all nature's animals. Even wild beasts and those trained to distrust humans will usually demurat the approach of the gifted mortal.

System: The player spends a Conviction point and rolls Perception + Animal Ken (difficulty 6), allowing the inquisitor to communicate (albeit on a purely empathic level) with a nearby animal. Success indicates that the character can pick up on the creature's primitive thoughts and thereby get the gist of whatever it might be "thinking." This limited form of communication lasts for the scene (or until he tires of listening to the animal). Alternately, the character may attempt to calm an angry or frightened animal, possibly as a precursor to the above effect. This requires the same expenditure and roll.

The True Innocent

Very few in the Dark Medieval world are truly innocent; the hidden forces at work typically move to rob all innocence at an early age. Yet, a character with this Blessing has somehow remained untainted, a beacon of purest light in the darkness of his times.

System: The character's saintly nature provides him with a deep sense of caring and compassion, reducing the difficulty of all Conscience rolls by one. Furthermore, he may spend a point of Conviction to compel others to recognize the depth of his sanctity. Beings so compelled must succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty of the inquisitor's Piety) in order to take any harmful or aggressive action against him for so long as the creature remains in his presence. The Inquisitor may not use this latter application of True Innocent while Callous.

Orisons of Self-Control

The gift of common sense is one which is often attributed to the "simple, working man" in the Dark Medieval world, and these Blessings of insight and common sense provide some indication of why this has come to be the case.

Blessing of years

Regardless of the character's actual age, his mind is gifted with wisdom beyond its years. He has a tendency to grasp new concepts quite easily, and generally he seems to act with more maturity and confidence in most everyday situations.

System: At all times, the gifted inquisitor operates at a distinct advantage when it comes to common sense and learning. This Orison lowers the difficulties of all Knowledge rolls by one (these difficulties cannot be reduced to any less than 5 by means of this Orison alone; thus, if the difficulty for a Knowledge roll begins at 5, this Orison provides no further benefit). By spending a Conviction point, however, this broadness of wisdom and reason may even expand to include aspects of topics he has not studied yet. Such an expenditure may "push" the character's understanding forward a notch, allowing him to operate as though he had an additional (albeit illusory) dot in any one Knowledge he already possesses. The effects of this momentary flash of insight are good only for the scene, after which the divine spark recedes, leaving the inquisitor operating at his normal (albeit advanced) capacity.

Ene of Vigilance

The inquisitor requires much less sleep than the average person and finds that he can function quite well on as little as three hours a night. In addition, the character is roused more easily than others and awakens at the slightest disturbance of his surroundings.

System: By spending a point of Conviction, a character gifted with the Eye may extend his vigilance throughout the night, allowing him to require no sleep whatsoever until he retires the following evening. Although he will not feel as fully refreshed the following morning as if he had truly slept, his mind and body will be none the worse for wear and none of his dice pools will suffer during the day. If a character wishes to extend his vigilance over successive nights, the cost increases by one Conviction point each additional night (i.e., he would have to spend three Conviction points to stay awake through the third consecutive night). Thus, it is difficult for even the most committed of inquisitors to stay awake for more than four consecutive days by means of this Orison.

The Penitent Man

Simply by knowing his place in God's plan, a simple man can often understand more about the great wide world than the mightiest of kings or the most erudite of scholars. A virtuous mortal with this Blessing

may even receive vague impressions of when an activity or occurrence has upset the will of Heaven.

System: At all times, the character has a deep and abiding connection with the divine, on the purest and most basic of levels. The difficulty of all Self-Control rolls is decreased by one. By spending a Conviction point, however, the character can actively prostrate his very soul before Heaven, connecting with its heavenly host and thereby opening his heart and mind to the "divine vibrations" of its ebb and flow. At these times, he may roll Self-Control + Wisdom (variable difficulty) to get a sense of how Heaven "feels" about one event that has just taken place. (Storytellers are encouraged to be cryptic when imparting any information gained through use of this Orison.)

Orisons of Courage

These types of Blessings involve aspects of leadership, courage and willpower, and somewhat curiously, are found equally as often among all the members of the Flock — rich and poor, male and female alike.

The Hierophant

A person gifted with this Blessing is singled out by Heaven for his unshakable will in the face of adversity, and in turn, rewarded for it. He is the very model of poise and grace under fire, even as he walks in the shadow of death, and can do naught but inspire those around him with his fearlessness.

System: Reduce the difficulty of all Courage rolls by one. In addition, if the player spends a Conviction point and succeeds in a Courage roll (difficulty 6), the character may inspire the same glory in his comrades. For each success, one person may (the character chooses whom, but the targets must be able to see the Hierophant) reduce the difficulty of his Courage rolls by one for the rest of the scene.

Sanguine Bymn

The one song of the Heavenly host runs thick through the character's veins. Even her very blood is alive with her faith in the divine, thereby making it a virulent poison to any damned soul who would dare spill it in the name of preserving its own unholy existence.

System: The character's blood causes terrible wounds to any creatures that drink of it; one aggravated wound per blood point imbibed. Vampires drinking the inquisitor's blood, in addition to this damage, gain no benefit from the effort. Furthermore, the character may spend a point of Conviction

to intensify the faith in her blood, allowing it to preserve its "toxicity" outside the character's body. Roll Courage (difficulty 6), with success indicating that a bit of the character's blood will cause similar damage if splashed upon any demon, vampire or any other corporeal servant of evil (ghosts and other ethereal beings are unaffected). This toxicity fades once the blood dries.

Calespinner

The individual possesses a natural, unaffected zeal when spreading the Word of God. His delight in being one with the Lord comes through with every utterance, and many cannot help but be swept up in his dynamic retellings of various passages of Scripture.

System: Subtract two from the difficulty of all Performance rolls. Additionally, the player may spend a point of Conviction and roll Charisma + Courage (difficulty of the target's Willpower). If successful, one person to whom the character is speaking becomes transfixed by his tale, unwilling to leave or break eye contact until the character is finished. Spending a Willpower point allows the target to shake free, but the target probably won't do so without a compelling reason. This hypnotic effect is broken if the target is attacked or otherwise shaken free of the inquisitor's gaze, and is useless against those who cannot hear the sound of the inquisitor's voice.

Endowments

Once a devout mortal is pulled up from the Flock and inducted into the Inquisition proper, he gains the ability to develop his mystical connection to the divine. Although he maintains whatever holy Orisons he had known before the advancement (and indeed, may even acquire additional ones), he may now possess yet more powerful versions of the relatively minor Blessings he had demonstrated previously. These high-powered favors of the Divine are known as Endowments.

In starting Dark Ages: Inquisitor chronicles, characters may begin play with one Endowment from their order's favored category (see Chapter Three) and gain others as time and experience allow (see Acquiring Blessings table). All Endowments require the inquisitor to "cash in" Conviction before they may be bought and learned. This means that whenever the character has amassed and set aside an appropriate amount of Conviction, he may spend that Conviction all at once to learn a new Endowment. These are decision-making times, however, as Conviction expenditure is also required in order to

gain a new Superior Virtue, forcing inquisitors to make the difficult choice between power and sanctity. There are four broad categories of Endowments in **Inquisitor** games: Benedictions (the power of prayer, perfected by the Oculi Dei), Legacies (the birthrights of the House of Murnau), Psalms (the voice of faith itself, spoken through the Sisters of St. John), and Investitures (which make vessels for the will of Heaven of the Knights of Acre). The Red Order uses the Holy Art as its specialty.

Each category of Endowments is broken up into three "power levels," roughly corresponding to each of the three inquisitor stages (there are actually four ranks, but one cannot acquire Endowments at all until he reaches the Acolyte stage). An inquisitor can gain Blessings from a stage higher than the one at which he is currently operating by voluntarily gaining a Curse (see Acquiring New Curses, p. 202). Thus, only the most dedicated or ambitious inquisitor has access to the truly potent Endowments.

Each of the Endowments has three separate effects, based on the three Superior Virtues. Thus, an inquisitor gains access to additional powers as he acquires dots in the other two Superior Virtues, without having to learn a new Endowment. (It is important to note, however, that only one application of each Endowment is possible in a given turn; thus, even if the outward manifestation of the power is the same for all three classes of Virtue-determined powers, only one may take effect at any one time). Inquisitors come to understand that in order to be a complete servant of God, they must endeavor to be well rounded in their overall spiritual commitment. Those who do, placing the acquisition of Superior Virtues above all else, will eventually reap the benefits of His divine favor.

The Endowment examples that follow are precisely that — examples. They are not the only Endowments available to characters, simply those that are most commonly reported. The players may feel free to design others, subject to Storyteller approval. Unless otherwise noted in the description, any initial rolls and/or expenditures required for the primary power are likewise required for any and all ancillary effects as well.

Benedictions

This category of Endowments represents a collection of divinely inspired prayers, recitations to the soul through which the wonders of the Lord may be worked. As Benedictions are the specialty of the

Oculi Dei, many of its individual effects involve vigilance and secrecy.

Beavenly Shepherd (Acolyte)

This most basic of Benedictions grants the inquisitor the ability to call upon Heaven to allow him to move freely amongst the Flock, that he may serve them without undue distraction. Just as one cannot gaze directly upon the Lord himself, so too does His faithful servant gain the ability to pass unnoticed by the eyes of men. Heavenly Shepherd allows the Eye of God to "hide in plain sight" even as he does Heaven's work, and even to cloud the minds of those whose knowledge of his actions would do more harm than good.

System: The Wisdom-based effect of this Endowment allows the inquisitor to use the will of Heaven to cloud the minds of the damned, shielding his presence from supernatural creatures even as he stands openly among the Flock. This non-perceptibility is free of cost, requiring only that the character pray (silently or otherwise), and it may be maintained so long as the character continues to pray. If another being actively seeks him out, the player must engage in an opposed roll to see if the inquisitor stays hidden. The player rolls Wits + Wisdom (difficulty 6), opposed by the Wits + Alertness (difficulty of the inquisitor's Piety) of the creature attempting to locate his presence. If he acquires more successes, he stays hidden.

The Faith-based effect of this Endowment is the flip side of the primary effect. By focusing the will of Heaven on himself and his immediate surroundings, the inquisitor may protect the fragile minds of nearby mortals from the sight of supernatural creatures and occurrences. The player rolls Charisma + Faith (difficulty 6) and spends one Conviction point, allowing the character to create a barrier of ignorance through which no ordinary mortal may see. This zone extends a number of yards from the inquisitor equal to his Conscience + Faith. Mundane onlookers and passersby simply ignore any supernatural occurrences within this zone for the remainder of the scene.

The Zeal-based effect allows the inquisitor to remove the memory of a supernatural occurrence from the mind of one or more of the Flock. He recites a soothing prayer of peace and divine submission to the target, during which his player must spend a point of Conviction and roll Manipulation + Zeal (difficulty of the target's Willpower). If the roll is successful, the mortal's mind is gently wiped clean of

the unpleasant images it has just witnessed, allowing her to return to her normal life. Such images must be fresh, however, and only recent events (those taking place since the last sunrise) may be thus eased free of the mind.

Gift of Second Sight (Acolyte)

Many Oculi Dei are gifted with a preternatural awareness to help them in the cause. This awareness, often called "the Sight," allows an Eye to discern who is human and who is not among the Flock. It even allows such inquisitors to seek out supernatural creatures wherever they may be, regardless of the latter's efforts to foil being observed.

System: The player may roll Perception + Wisdom (usually at difficulty 6) to allow her character to discern supernatural creatures in his immediate area. This "second sight" reveals creatures that disguise themselves in unassuming forms, or those that simply are not human or alive, but it does not reveal the true natures of those beings. Rather, the character receives hints about the creature's appearance that give its true nature away. For example, a vampire might appear as an unusually pallid human who obviously draws no breath. It is up to the character (and the player) to interpret what is revealed. The Sight remains active for one turn per success. Spending a point of Conviction, however, extends the duration to one scene.

The Faith-based application of the Sight grants the inquisitor the supernatural ability to see in complete darkness or when otherwise blinded. This effect is entirely a product of the character's Faith, and permits sight even when his eyes are damaged (or missing entirely). If the player makes a successful Perception + Faith roll (difficulty 6), the character may see what lies in front of him as though he were in a clear, well-lit room. Supernatural darkness, such as that created by the Obtenebration power Nocturne, requires the expenditure of a Conviction point as well as a roll.

The Zeal effect allows the inquisitor to pierce the veil of a supernatural creature's magically created obfuscation. The player rolls Perception + Zeal (difficulty 6), opposed by the creature's Wits + Stealth (also difficulty 6). If he acquires more successes than the creature, the character sees through its foul dissembling. The inquisitor may pierce such Disciplines such as Obfuscate and Chimerstry with this Blessing, provided he has some reason to feel suspicious of what he sees.



Divine Liturgy (Advocate)

This Endowment aids the inquisitor in fulfilling his promise to himself and to God that he will strive in all things to protect the Flock. By speaking a brief recitation of scripture, the character may impose his devotion to the cause (and thus the will of Heaven) upon either another individual's conscience or upon his very own soul.

System: The Wisdom application of Divine Liturgy allows the character to bolster his own will through prayer. Roll Self-Control + Wisdom (difficulty 6) and spend one Conviction point. If successful, the character regains a point of temporary Willpower. This effect can be performed only once per day.

The Faith aspect of the Divine Liturgy allows the inquisitor to reverse the "stream" of his daily recitation, praying instead for reinvigoration of his dedication to the cause. With a successful Conscience + Faith roll (difficulty 6), the character replenishes one point of Conviction per success, up to his Piety rating. This power can be exercised only once per day, and is typically performed late at night just before the inquisitor retires to sleep.

To invoke the Zeal aspect, the character must convince another of the justness of his cause by speaking plainly to him in the words of the Apostles. The inquisitor's player must roll Charisma + Zeal at a difficulty of the target's Willpower. If this roll is successful, the character may make one suggestion to the target which the target must endeavor to fulfill. Although the target feels no direct supernatural compulsion being forced upon him, he may still choose to overcome the effect by spending a number of Willpower equal to the number of successes achieved. In this event, the target becomes immune to further applications of this power for the remainder of the story. This power is useless when employed against those not of the faith (although it does work on heretics). This power cannot be used to force a target to harm himself or in any way break the tenets of the Christian faith.

Fruit in Thee (Advocate)

"The law of the Lord is my delight," says the Psalm, and even the laity of the Oculi Dei understand this principle. By praising God, silently or openly, the character may infuse others with love for Him and His laws, causing them to lay down weapons or drive onlookers to their knees in humility.

System: The Wisdom facet of this power allows the inquisitor to cut through a target's countenance

to see the true person beneath. Spend one point of Conviction and roll Charisma + Wisdom (difficulty of the target's Willpower). If successful, the target forgets all pretense of dissembling or even humility and embraces his true Nature, acting it out fully and completely for the remainder of the scene. In essence, it makes one's Demeanor the same as one's Nature, thereby allowing a perceptive inquisitor to discern the latter through the target's behavior. (A target with the Child archetype would begin to act more childlike and innocent, etc.) The target also has trouble lying for the duration of this Blessing; any attempt to tell a direct and outright lie requires a Willpower roll (difficulty of the inquisitor's Piety).

By calling upon his Faith, the character can use his love of the Lord to stay the hand of any nearby combatants. The player rolls Charisma + Faith (difficulty 6), and if successful, no creature within (Faith) yards of the inquisitor may aggress against another. Creatures wishing to do harm must roll Courage (difficulty 6) and acquire more successes than did the inquisitor.

An Eye of God who embraces his Zeal by means of this Endowment may use himself as a conduit for the boundless love of the King of Heaven. If the player succeeds on a Charisma + Zeal roll (difficulty of the target's Willpower), he fills a chosen target with the overwhelming love of God. Two reactions are possible, depending upon the target's relationship with God: Most mortals thus affected will fall to their knees, crying and laughing in joy; abominations often run in shame from the inquisitor. In the case of those compelled to flee, they may remain in the character's presence only by spending a Willpower point and succeed on a Willpower roll (difficulty of the inquisitor's Piety).

Water to Wine (Judge)

Just like Christ's miracle of the loaves and the fishes, the inquisitor can take an ordinary, everyday object and transform it into another everyday object simply by reciting a short prayer and sanctifying the object to God. He must lay his hands on the original object and ask Heaven's permission to make the change; if granted, he will feel the object become something else under his very touch. With practice, he may even learn how to return dead and dying tissue to its former, healthy state.

System: The Wisdom application of this power requires the player to spend two Conviction points and roll Dexterity + Wisdom. The difficulty depends on how drastic the transformation. Transforming a

		The state of the
Danuara	Chaman	Difficulto
Degree of	Change	Difficulty

Slight	- 6
Moderate	7
Goodly	8
Major	9
Vast	10

Wisdom Rating Amount Changed

wisdom Rating	Amount Changed	
One	Small (one pint or four ounces)	
Two -	Moderate (one quart or one pound)	
Three	Goodly (one gallon or five pounds).	
Four	Major (five gallons or 25 pounds)	
Five	Vast (30 gallons or 150 pounds)	
and the same of the same		

cup of water into a cup of wine is only a slight change, whereas transforming a cup of water into a piece of lead would be a vast change of all component materials involved. The total amount of transformable mass is determined by the character's Wisdom rating. See the sidebar for difficulties and allowable mass of material.

The Faith application allows the inquisitor to transform scarred and damaged tissue into living, healthy flesh. He must kneel over the wound, whispering a benediction to the Lord and lay his hands upon the damaged area as he speaks. During this time, his player rolls Conscience + Faith (difficulty 6) and each success heals one health level of damage (bashing, lethal, or aggravated).

The Zeal application allows the inquisitor to tear apart the seams in another's flesh, thereby rendering it into jagged chunks. After making physical contact, the player rolls Strength + Zeal (difficulty 6); each success inflicts one level of aggravated damage. Creatures currently without earthly form are immune to this effect, and any inquisitor who uses this application of Water to Wine on a human being (obvious servants of the Adversary don't count) must immediately roll Conscience to avoid losing a dot of Piety.

Investitures

This category of Blessings is the pride and specialty of the military order of the Inquisition, the Knights of Acre. Its individual Endowments are each marked by an infusion of the divine into the body and spirit of the blessed. Rather than invoking an outside effect, most Investitures draw upon the divine righteousness placed within the inquisitor to produce a variety of effects through the agency of his form.

Catechumen (Acolyte)

The name of this power refers to a person being instructed in Christian doctrine prior to the sacrament of baptism. One of the more commonly exhibited Blessings among the Knights of Acre, Catechumen allows the character to exemplify his early lessons in valor, humility, and constancy.

System: For the Zeal effect, the character relearns the first and one of the most important knightly lessons — the lesson of valor. The player spends one point of Conviction and rolls Courage + Zeal (difficulty 6). Once this power has been activated, the character cannot be made to retreat or to otherwise move from the spot at which he stands unless he so wishes. He is immune to fear-causing powers and effects entirely, and may roll Courage + Zeal (variable difficulty, depending upon the strength of the assailing force) to resist any physical force that would compel him to move.

The Faith aspect of this power draws on the valuable lesson of humility. Provided that no sin currently weighs on the Knight's soul, he may call upon his faith and righteousness to bolster him in battle against the enemy. The player spends a point of Conviction for the character, and for the remainder of the scene the character may soak lethal damage, and he adds his Faith dice to his soak pool. If, however, the character has sinned and not made up for it (that is, succeeded in a Conscience roll to avoid losing Piety, but not yet undergone the sacrament of confession), he may not use this power.

Constancy — the spiritual fortitude that marks the Knights of Acre — is the purview of the Wisdom application of Catechumen. The player may spend a Willpower point and a Conviction point to negate a botch on any roll involving a Virtue (basic or Superior). This application of Catechumen may only be used once per story.

Tranfiguration of the flesh (Acolyte)

The inquisitor has been invested with the power to alter his physical capabilities by calling upon his unshakable virtue. By means of this Endowment, knights can bolster their reserves of strength or toughness, readying themselves for the battle at hand.

System: The Zeal application of this power strengthens the inquisitor's body. The player spends a Conviction point and rolls Stamina + Zeal (difficulty 7). She may then add dice to the character's Strength and/or Stamina ratings for the duration of a single combat. Each success gained on this roll

translates to one die the player can add to either Attribute; for example, if the roll resulted in three successes, she might add two dice to the character's Strength rating and one die to his Stamina rating for the remainder of the scene. This power may be used only once per scene.

If the inquisitor also has dots in Faith, he may opt to use this power to cleanse his flesh of taint. The player may roll Strength + Faith to rid the character's body of poison or other foreign substances. The difficulty depends on the intruding material; purging one's bloodstream of alcohol would be only difficulty 4, whereas removing vampiric blood or other supernatural poison from his system would probably be difficulty 9. Note that this power does not remove spiritual or psychological taint of any kind.

By using the Wisdom aspect, the character may shut out the crippling effects of pain. The player rolls Stamina + Wisdom (difficulty 7), reduces the character's wound penalties by the number of successes rolled. For example, if the player scores two successes, her character suffers no wound penalties until he is Crippled (and even then, only suffers a –3 to dice pools, not –5). The effects of this temporary boost in endurance fade at the end of the scene.

Hight of angels (Advocate)

This Endowment allows the inquisitor literally to reap the divine whirlwind when in combat with the minions of the Adversary. His virtue fills him with a fleetness of foot or of mind, allowing him to assail targets with a flurry of blows or even to preternaturally sense the approach of impending evil. When asked to the describe the sensations brought on by use of this Endowment, many knights describe the feeling as "being held aloft by the wings of angels."

System: The Zeal aspect of Flight of Angels allows the inquisitor to speed up his reflexes to truly superhuman levels. The player spends a point of Conviction and rolls Dexterity + Zeal (difficulty 6). For every two successes on this roll, the character receives one additional action on the next turn without having to take a multiple action (e.g., four successes translates to two extra actions). These bonus actions may only be used for physical actions, and the maximum number of additional actions permissible through this power is equal to the character's Zeal rating.

Calling upon his Faith, the character can also use his enhanced reflexes to jump in the way of an oncoming attack, essentially martyring himself for the cause. On any turn in which he has a higher initiative total



than a potential attacker, the player may spend a point of Conviction to allow the Knight to automatically dart in the way of a physical assault that was meant for a nearby compatriot (the character may then attempt to parry or block the blow, but at +1 difficulty). The distance of this power is limited by the amount of ground he can cover in this split second — two feet per dot of Faith the character possesses. If the would-be martyr's initiative is lower than the attacker's, he may still make the attempt, but the player must succeed in a Wits + Faith roll (difficulty 7) in order for the character to get there in time.

The Wisdom application of this Endowment allows the inquisitor to enhance his mental quickness and response time. The player rolls Wits + Wisdom (difficulty 6), with each success temporarily boosting the character's Wits score by one dot. If this increase raises his Wits above 5, the character gains the ability to presage oncoming attack. In game terms, the player may roll Wits + Alertness (difficulty 7); any successes either translate to extra dice usable to parry or dodge an incoming attack or add to the character's initiative that turn. Regardless of the outcome of the roll, this application of the Endow-

ment lasts only for a brief period (ten minutes or for the remainder of the scene, whichever is shorter). At the end of this time, the character's acuity and reflexes return to normal; if the character had been operating at a truly superhuman level (Wits 6 or above), he must spend a Willpower point at this time in order to adjust to the sudden change in world perspective, or else his Wits rating plummets to 1 for the next hour.

Spirit of the Resurrection (Advocate)

Some inquisitors are divinely invested with the power to control the ebb and flow of life force within themselves and others. Those with this Endowment can cure the sick and the lame simply by laying a kiss upon the patient's forehead; more spectacularly, they may even use the power of life itself to boil away the infernal essence of the damned. Seeing the use of this Endowment in action among the living often gives pause to those who would belittle the Knights of Acre as "mere soldiers."

System: The Zeal aspect of this power allows the inquisitor to draw strength from a demon's pain. After the inquisitor wounds the creature, the player

rolls Perception + Zeal (difficulty 6) and the target resists by rolling Stamina (also difficulty 6—Cainites may add Fortitude to this roll). For each success the player achieves in excess of the target's successes, the inquisitor regains a point of Conviction (up to the limit of his Zeal). If the character regains even a single point of Conviction in this way, the target loses one point of temporary Willpower.

By calling upon his reserves of Faith, an inquisitor with this Endowment may also choose to kiss away the wounds of the living. The player rolls Conscience + Faith (difficulty 6) and spends a variable number of Conviction points, allowing her character to heal one level of lethal damage or two levels of bashing damage per point spent. Only living beings may benefit from this application.

The Wisdom aspect of this power allows the character to know his foe intimately — so intimately, in fact, that many Knights require a period of cleansing prayer after applying this power to servants of the Adversary. The character must touch the target, and the player spends a Conviction point and rolls Perception + Wisdom (difficulty 7). For each success, the Knight learns one fact about the target, usually an unpleasant one — its sins, its appetites, its unholy powers... occasionally even its God-given vulnerabilities. If the player rolls three or more successes, she may opt to learn only one fact, but may specify what her character learns.

Auto da sé (dudge)

This potent Blessing is one of the reasons why supernatural creatures have good reason to fear the truly dedicated warriors among the Knights of Acre. It allows an inquisitor to square off against his opponent in melee combat, focusing his virtue and his strength in preparation for what he hopes will be the final, telling blow of the duel. Frighteningly enough, this moment of calm before the strike does indeed seem to herald the beginning of the end with alarming regularity.

System: The Zeal application of this power requires the player to spend a point of Conviction and roll Perception + Zeal (difficulty 6). If this roll is successful, the character may add his Zeal rating as bonus damage dice to his next attack, whether close combat or ranged. In addition, this damage is always considered aggravated.

The Faith application of this power allows the Knight to channel the power of God through his very body, calling down the Heavens in a true act of Faith. The player expends as much Conviction as

she wishes (minimum of three points) and rolls Charisma + Faith (difficulty 10 – the number of Conviction points spent, minimum difficulty 4). If the roll is successful, the character quite simply performs a miracle. The exact form this takes is up to God (and the Storyteller) but it is always beneficial to the inquisitor and his comrades. Perhaps the inquisitors are all instantly healed or granted extra Conviction or Willpower, or perhaps every demon present is immediately struck by a burning shaft of light. Whatever the result, the Knight who calls down this power is spent and can take no action for the remainder of the scene.

While the Knights are able warriors, the Wisdom application of the Auto da Fé shows their capability as tacticians as well. The player spends one Conviction point and rolls Perception + Wisdom (difficulty 7). If successful, the Knight knows the exact layout of his current "battlefield," be it an actual field, a forest, or a building's interior. He knows the location of every enemy therein (this only functions on actual "soldiers" - a building might contain any number of servants, but this power won't register them, although a soldier disguised as a servant would become apparent) and their strength relative to his own (supernatural creatures often appear stronger, for example). This perception lasts for only a moment, but the Knight may use the power multiples times to check on the movement of his enemies. Once the power has been used once, the Knights receives a bonus to his initiative rating equal to the number of successes on the initial roll (for example, if the player rolls three successes, she also adds three to the Knight's initiative for the remainder of the battle).

Legacies

The House of Murnau wields powers of detection that most other inquisitors would envy, if they didn't know the price of such awareness. Legacy Endowments allow the Murnau the power to perceive and eventually direct the forces of Hell — and this does little for their reputation.

Other inquisitors may choose to purchase Legacies, but doing so *always* requires a roll to see if a new Curse is acquired. If a Curse is indeed levied, it must come from the Maledictio category.

forbidden Wisdom (Acolyte)

The House of Murnau has been beholden to terrible mysteries and secrets for generations. Even the youngest of them has a relationship with corruption, whether that relationship is one of repulsion... or understanding.

System: The Faith aspect of Forbidden Wisdom is the one the House is most famous for — the ability to smell corruption. Supernatural creatures of all stripes simply reek to the Murnau. The exact scents vary from person to person; the player is free to personalize her character's exact manifestation of the curse. In game terms, any supernatural creature (including ghouls) triggers these senses. However, the presence of the smell does not necessarily equate the presence of an abomination — a Murnau might smell decaying flesh around the supernatural, but she still smells that odor in a charnel house as well. This power is in constant use, no matter whether the character wishes it to be or not. High concentrations of evil might raise the difficulties of certain rolls, simply due to the distraction the stench presents (Storyteller's discretion).

A Murnau character who uses the Wisdom application of this power may detect more mundane corruption, allowing her to detect the cloying odor of lies. The player rolls Perception + Wisdom (difficulty 7) and spends a point of Conviction. Success allows the character to judge the veracity of one spoken statement. Note that this power detects only deliberate lies — if a target is making a statement she believes to be true, the Murnau won't know any differently.

The Zeal facet of this power makes the character noticeable and frightening to servants of Satan. Supernatural creatures feel uneasy in her presence, although they won't necessarily know why. In game terms, the player adds her character's Zeal rating to all Intimidation rolls against the supernatural. However, this power makes for poor negotiations with the enemy — any dice pool meant to positively interact with a supernatural being (including convincing it to repent) *loses* an number of dice equal to the character's Zeal. This power is permanent and cannot be switched off.

Moblesse Oblige (Acolyte)

Despite its otherworldly problems, the House of Murnau is still a noble house, and this means its members look on others as their charges. However, the curse taints everything, and even the house's feudal vows feel that taint. This power allows the Murnau to bring his arcane heritage to bear while relating to others.

System: The Faith application of this power allows the character to lend strength to his fellows in

the form of Conviction. The character must touch his intended target, and the player rolls Charisma + Faith (difficulty 7). For each success, the character may donate one point of Conviction to the target. Note that the Murnau has no way to know whether doing so will make the target Callous (unless he first uses the Advocate-level Legacy Wreathed in Shadows to determine this), and the Storyteller should not allow the players to discuss the number of points thus donated.

Whereas the Wisdom application of Forbidden Wisdom allows the Murnau to detect lies, that application of Noblesse Oblige lets the inquisitor know his target's heart. If the target is a hypocrite or a generally untrustworthy person, the inquisitor can smell it before the target ever says a word. The system for this power is identical to the Wisdom facet of Forbidden Wisdom — the player rolls Perception + Wisdom (difficulty 7) and spends a point of Conviction — save that it lasts for a scene and may be used on anyone the inquisitor approaches, rather than on one specific target. Anyone the Murnau meets is then marked as either trustworthy or not. At the Storyteller's discretion, more successes may indicate more detailed information.

A Zealous member of the House of Murnau can inspire and drive his fellows, simply by learning how to speak with them to best motivate them. The player rolls Manipulation + Zeal (difficulty 6) and spends a point of Conviction. For the remainder of the scene, the character enjoys a –2 to all Social difficulties. This power has no effect on supernatural creatures.

Wreathedin Shadows (Advocate)

As the Murnau grows more powerful, he descends deeper in the morass of his own heritage. While he might find power and knowledge there, he may also find damnation. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" is a common refrain for such inquisitors....

System: The Faith facet of this power actually allows a Murnau to mitigate another inquisitor's Callousness. The player spends a point of Conviction and rolls Manipulation + Faith (difficulty of the target's current Conviction). If successful, the target is granted a reprieve from his Impulse for one scene. However, if the target is still Callous at the end of the scene, both he and the Murnau character lose a point of Willpower — this power is an opportunity to put oneself right, not merely a stopgap. (Note that unless the Murnau also has a Wisdom rating, he won't

necessarily *know* whether an inquisitor is Callous, and must simply guess when this power is necessary. Using this power on a non-Callous inquisitor has no effect.)

The Wisdom function of Wreathed in Shadows grants the inquisitor knowledge of the target's core principles and driving goals. When used on a werewolf, for example, the inquisitor sees a being seething with rage and brutal hatred. When used on a Cainite, that Cainite's Aura is magnified (meaning that a vampire on the Road of Heaven may appear more holy than some inquisitors...). If the Murnau uses this power on another inquisitor, he immediately knows that inquisitor's proximity to Callousness (that is, his player knows how many points of Conviction away from Callousness that character is). Regardless, the character receives information roughly corresponding to the Auspex power Soulsight (although it does not detect whether the target is alive or dead). This aspect of Wreathed in Shadows requires the player to spend a Conviction point and roll Perception + Wisdom (difficulty 6).

Finally, the Zeal-based power permits the Murnau to absorb the Conviction of those around him. When praying with a Flock, the inquisitor may choose to automatically gain Conviction equal to the Flock rating, as well as rolling dice. For example, an inquisitor with four dots in the Flock Background can automatically gain four points of Conviction, and the player may roll the usual four dice to gain more. Unlike the usual method of prayer, however, this power can push the character into Callousness. Also, it renders that Flock useless to any other inquisitor for the remainder of the day, as it leaves emotionally wrung out all lay folk who pray with the character during use of this power.

Mirror of Evil (Advocate)

While the power that experienced Murnau inquisitors can wield is certainly potent, many observers mutter that is indicates more familiarity with the enemy than entirely comforting. With this Endowment, the character gains the ability to meet supernatural opposition on even ground, armed with strength and knowledge.

System: Whereas any inquisitor may attempt to resist the mental and emotional manipulations of the enemy, a Faithful inquisitor with this Endowment may attempt to dampen the effects of such powers over an entire area (the character's Willpower in yards). The player spends a Conviction point and rolls Conscience + Faith (difficulty 7), opposed by the roll for the power

in question (at its normal difficulty). If the player's successes equal or exceed the creature's, the power fails to take effect. This Blessing functions on any power that would affect the senses or mind, including Presence, Dominate, Dementation or certain applications of Obtenebration. However, the inquisitor may take no other action in a turn when he uses this power.

A character who bolsters his Wisdom with this power finds himself possessed of knowledge that he couldn't possibly have. Murnau often refer to such knowledge as divinely inspired, but other sources are occasionally suggested. The player may roll Perception + Wisdom (difficulty 7) to learn information about a particular creature. For example, focusing this power on a vampire might grant the character knowledge about a weakness (including a clan weakness), a strength (general information about a Discipline — "It can command the minds of men") or a quirk (something particular to that vampire — "It prefers to feed on virgins"). This power works equally well on mortal men as on hellspawn.

The Zeal aspect of Mirror of Evil is in some ways the most impressive — and the most horrifying. The inquisitor may augment his Attributes increasing to match those of his opponent. For example, if he faces a werewolf with Strength 7, his own Strength leaps to that level as well. The player must spend a point of Conviction for each Attribute to be affected and roll Wits + Zeal (difficulty of the character's own Piety). An individual Attribute may never rise higher than the character's Willpower, and never higher than the target's Attribute. This power is not subtle; a nimbus of heat and smoke surrounds the inquisitor when he activates it, making the Murnau who use it *very* cautious about doing so in public, lest they be mistaken for the beings they face.

arcana (Judge)

Whereas the lower-level Legacies allow a Murnau toperceive and, to a point, direct the powers of hellspawn, Arcana allows *control* over such powers. Using this Endowment is often a risk to a character's Piety, but for those Murnau strong enough in the faith to control it Arcana is a mighty boon.

System: The Faith-based application of Arcana allows the character to reflect a supernatural power back upon the user. A fireball thrown from a sorcerer's hands ricochets off the Murnau's body, flying straight back at the (probably very surprised) caster, and inflicts its normal damage, even if the caster would normally be immune. This is likewise the case for mental powers (meaning a vampire attempting to Entrance the Murnau is now beholden to the inquisitor) and more base,

physical powers (a Potence-laden punch inflicts its damage on the attacker). However, if no supernatural power is used, then this power does not function — a mage that simply stabs the inquisitor will not find the dagger in his own chest. To activate this power, the player spends two points of Conviction and rolls Intelligence + Faith (difficulty of the creature's Willpower). No other action is possible in a turn when the character uses this power — it requires his complete attention, and focuses only on powers directed at him (though he may interpose himself in the path of an attack and use the power).

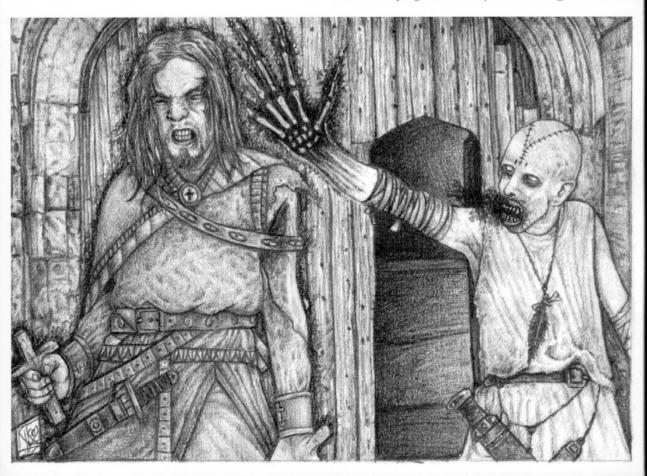
The Wisdom aspect of this power allows the character to invade the very minds of hellspawn, either masking his presence (Wits) or inducing visions of Hell itself (Charisma). The player spends a Conviction point and rolls either Wits or Charisma + Wisdom, depending on which use of this power she wishes to activate. If the character attempts to mask her presence from the supernatural, the difficulty is seven. If successful, the character vanishes from the view of any supernatural being in the area and can be detected only by a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) that results in more successes than the player rolled. If the inquisitor wishes to induce visions of Hell, the difficulty

is equal to the target's Willpower. Success causes the target to quake in terror (losing one die from all pools per success), and more than four successes requires the target to spend a Willpower point or flee in terror.

The Zeal facet of Arcana grants the inquisitor the ability to deny a creature of Hell from using its Satanspawned power. The player rolls Strength + Zeal (difficulty 8) and spends a Conviction point. For each success, the target loses one point of an appropriate fuel Trait (blood for vampires, Quintessence for mages, Gnosis or Rage for werewolves, etc). If the Trait reaches zero, or if the Storyteller does not have the appropriate rules for the creature, the creature loses Willpower instead. The creature's loss is apparent to all in the area — vampires subjected to this power often exhibit stigmata-like wounds, or bleed from the eyes, whereas sorcerers' skin becomes luminous as their arcane energies flee them.

Psalms

Psalms are powerful manifestations of the Word, funneled through the unwavering timbre of the inquisitor's voice. By means of these Endowments, the inquisitor may bring the Lord's message to faithful and heretical alike, and with it His judgment. Many Psalms are geared toward



assisting in interrogation, using the inquisitor's voice to cause subjects to buckle under the pressure (in true Inquisition style); others simply induce listeners to reveal truths about themselves despite their best efforts to the contrary. The Sisters of St. John use these glorious and sometimes frightful hymns to draw forth confessions from supernatural beings and heretics, or to coax the truth to the surface in a reluctant confessor, which is often just as efficacious. Inquisitors blessed with these Endowments take the words of Ruth literally, striving with every breath to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord."

Gospel (Acolyte)

This basic Endowment grants the Sisters great skill at debate and oration, as well, if necessary, as interrogation. While the prowess they bring to such activities is often nothing short of inspirational, they humbly suggest that anyone of faith could achieve such effect.

System: Note: All applications of Gospel are effective only so long as the character tells the truth. Any deliberate lie, no matter how small, negates the effect. Although the three separate aspects of the Endowment can and do work cooperatively, the effects of multiple invocations of each are not cumulative.

The Faith aspect of Gospel simply makes the character more persuasive and approachable. The player rolls Manipulation + Faith (difficulty 6). If this roll is successful, all Social rolls are at a –1 difficulty for the remainder of the scene.

If the character employs the Wisdom application of this Endowment, the player may roll Wits + Wisdom (difficulty 6), with success indicating that he receives two bonus dice to any roll involving Etiquette, Empathy or Subterfuge for the remainder of the scene.

If the Zeal effect is used, the player rolls Charisma + Zeal (difficulty 6), with success granting two bonus dice to any roll involving Intimidation, Interrogation or Leadership for the remainder of the scene.

fiat Lur (Acolyte)

Echoing the words of the Father, the inquisitor declaims, "Let there be light!" and a soft nimbus of white light appears around her, spreading outward thereafter and bathing everything around her in its radiance. The power of this holy light illuminates supernatural creatures for what they are and may even cause them pain. Oftentimes, one can tell just how truly devout (or simply how powerful) an inquisitor may be by the telltale shine of this power. A



fledgling might produce only a dim glow, whereas a truly potent inquisitor fills the entire area with a blinding brilliance.

System: After the character speaks the words, the player spends a Conviction point and rolls Perception + Faith (difficulty 6). The Faith-based effect of this power reveals all supernatural creatures within range, as the power of the light distinguishes them from the surrounding mortals. Note that the power imparts no further information, merely who is "normal" and who is not, but anyone who can see the light is also privy to the information it provides, including members of the Flock (who will probably run upon seeing the beasts in their midst). Abominations with concealment or identity-protecting abilities must engage in an opposed roll, accumulating more successes than the inquisitor in order to remain hidden. This use of the power lasts for one turn only.

If the character possesses dots in Wisdom, she may use Fiat Lux to provide enough light to read by, to a radius of her Wisdom in yards. This requires the player to spend one Conviction point and lasts for one scene (although the character may terminate it at any time).

If the Zeal effect is employed, the player may roll spend a Conviction point and roll Courage + Zeal (difficulty 7), with each success inflicting a lethal wound level on all vampires (and any other creature with a particular vulnerability to sunlight) within a number of yards equal to the character's Zeal rating.

Chorale (Advocate)

"Wherever two or more are gathered in my name," reads the Gospel, "there I am among them." The Sisters of St. John know well the power of community. With this Endowment, the Sister may chant or sing and add the voices of her fellows to the hymn, drawing strength, knowledge or protection from the song.

System: All Chorale effects grow stronger for each other devout mortal (defined as someone with at least one dot in a Superior Virtue) assisting the leader in her recitation, usually adding one die to the initial roll and increasing each power's range or area of effects.

The Faith effect of this Endowment allows everyone participating in the leader's chant or song to draw strength from the sound of one another's faith. The "lead" inquisitor's player spends one Conviction point and rolls Performance + Faith (difficulty 7). If successful in this roll, each participant is allowed to roll Conscience + Faith (difficulty 8) at the conclusion of the chant/hymn;

success on this roll allows that character to regain a single point of temporary Willpower.

The Wisdom effect is usable *only* when the inquisitor has at least two other devout mortals assisting him. All participants gather together in a circle, facing one another around a given area or object. As they begin to chant or sing, the player spends a point of Conviction and rolls Intelligence + Wisdom (difficulty 7), with success indicating that some piece of information about the site/object appears in the air between them. The more successes acquired on the roll, the clearer or more useful the divine image will be. Even with many successes, however, Storytellers are encouraged to be cryptic in relating what Heaven reveals to them on the subject. If any member of the group also has the Holy Sight (see p. 135), the difficulty on the roll drops by one.

The Zeal-based function keeps malevolent entities at bay for as long as the character(s) chants or sings. The player rolls Courage + Zeal (difficulty 6) and adds one die for each devout mortal participating. The number of successes equals the number of successes a supernatural creature must exceed in a Stamina roll in order to enter the perimeter created by this barrier. Such creatures are held at bay by a yard per point of Zeal the character possesses; each additional devout chanter/singer adds one yard to this total. If a creature fails to penetrate this holy barrier on the first try, he must spend a Willpower point to try again. Creatures caught within the barrier when the power is invoked must roll Stamina immediately; success indicates that they may remain where they are, while a failure forces them to retreat to the edge of the barrier. Creatures who are not held at bay, however, suffer intense pain, suffering one level of lethal damage per turn while they remain with the chant/song's area of effect (this damage may be soaked, if the target is able to soak such damage). Forcing a creature into a corner with this power, thus forcing it to enter the barrier's perimeter, ends the barrier effect (but does not negate the pain). Needless to say, any creature that is painfully forced into within arm's reach of the inquisitor will probably try to silence the offending voice any way it can.

Hosanna (Advocate)

By exulting in the greater glory of his Lord and Savior, the inquisitor may elevate his soul to the Kingdom of Heaven, at least on some small level. Inquisitors with this Endowment use the tones of their voices to capture the spiritual "wavelength" of the Song of Heaven, using its power to further the Glory of God.

System: The Faith-based effect of this Endowment allows the inquisitor to attune himself to the

tone of another's faith, thereby allowing him lend a portion of his own to a soul in need. The player rolls Perception + Faith (difficulty 6) to pick up the vibration of a nearby person's soul. Success allows the character to put herself in tune with what she hears and, by chanting or singing a rousing hymn in praise of God, to lend the subject however much Willpower the inquisitor's player desires, even if it raises the subject's total higher than his permanent rating. These donated points of Willpower are transient, lasting the recipient for only one scene. After this time, the pool of temporary Willpower fades and the gifted character may no longer gain access to it.

Having dots in Wisdom allows the inquisitor to use his voice as a means by which he may communicate spiritually to another of the blessed (anyone possessing a dot in a Superior Virtue). The player spends a point of Conviction and rolls Manipulation + Wisdom at a variable difficulty, depending upon the distance of the receiver of the message; someone down the hall from the character would be a 4, while someone praying in the chapel of a castle in another country would be a 9 or 10, if possible at all. This form of communication is limited and expensive, with each invocation allowing only a single brief message (roughly the number of words the character could utter with one breath) and requiring another point of Conviction (though not another roll). The advantage, however, is that such a message is conveyed entirely through the spirit — the words he speaks do not have to be the ones he communicates in his message. In fact, most of the time the inquisitor quietly quotes from the book of Psalms while sending out spiritual missives of this sort. This communication is one-way unless, of course, the recipient of the message likewise possesses this Endowment.

The Zeal application of this Endowment surprises all those who look upon the Sisters of St. John as meek, visionary nuns. The glorious exultation created by the effect is beautiful to hear but can shatter nearly any solid material. The player spends a Conviction point and rolls Charisma + Zeal at a variable difficulty, determined by the strength of the material she is attempting to affect:

Targeted Material	Difficulty
Glass	6
Straw or thatched roof	7
Ceramic, adobe or thin wood	8
Hard or reinforced wood	9
Stone or brick	10

Although the noise she makes fills the entire area with sound, the character actually targets only one structure or object at a time with this power. For each success on the roll, the character inflicts a "health level" of damage to a targeted object. The Storyteller must determine how much of this punishment a given object can withstand before being completely destroyed. This power curiously has no effect on the flesh of living creatures. Creatures that do not live, however, are equally susceptible to the devastating vibrations created by this enunciation. Treat the bodies of most vampires, for example, as "hard wood" for the purposes of rolling damage against them with this power (although high levels of Fortitude may raise the difficulty a bit). Such damage is considered lethal and may be soaked normally.

Oratorio (Judge)

Although one of the most potent abilities an inquisitor on the path of Psalms may ever develop, this fearsome power is rarely viewed as a "blessing" by those who witness its chilling effects. It allows the inquisitor to raise his voice in song, and in so doing to fill all who hear it with the brilliant radiance of his faith. While this can be a heavenly recital to some, for others it is a nightmare made of sound. Either way, few bear witness to the song and come away unshaken.

System: To use the Faith application of this power, the inquisitor begins to sing any Catholic hymn in praise of the Lord. Her player spends two Conviction and rolls Charisma + Faith (difficulty 6). The character may maintain this divine song for one turn per success rolled, and its effects can be heard (and thus felt) at a range equal to five yards per success. Every creature within this area (including animals) that does not possess at least one dot in a Superior Virtue must immediately roll Willpower against a difficulty equal to the inquisitor's Piety. All who fail are transfixed by her song, unable to move of their own volition until such time as the inquisitor stops singing. Such beings may roll Willpower every turn to break free of the song's hypnotic effects, but must spend a Willpower point to for each such attempt.

The Wisdom effect of this powerful Endowment forces anyone who hears it — monster, mortal or even inquisitor — to confront his own sins. The player rolls Manipulation + Wisdom (difficulty 7) and spends one point of Conviction. For each success, anyone hearing the song whose soul is burdened by sin (Storyteller's discretion, but this certainly includes supernatural beings and Callous inquisi-

tors) suffers a +1 to all difficulties for as long as the song persists, plus one turn.

The Zeal effect forces all supernatural beings within range to actually join the inquisitor in praising the Lord in song. This requires the player to spend a point of Conviction and roll the character's Charisma + Zeal (difficulty 6, opposed by a Willpower roll from each creature within earshot). If the creature scores fewer successes than the inquisitor, the demon joins the hymn. However, making such a creature voice this holy utterance, and thereby sharing bodily in the inquisitor's faith, is agony itself. For so long as the creature is forced to sing, it suffers one level of aggravated damage per turn, as its lungs, ears and vocal chords burn with the fire of the Lord. Only by overpowering the urge to sing (using the rules above) and fleeing the area entirely may one of the enemy find surcease of this compulsion.

The Boly art

The Holy Art is to the Inquisition what the clergy are to the congregation. Endowments may provide the bulk of inquisitors with individual abilities, empowering them to serve the Lord in their own ways, but the Art thus empowers the entire sect as a whole. It provides a backbone of regimented and highly ritualized support from which all inquisitors, from across all the orders, may draw strength. Most practitioners typically leave harsh fieldwork (such as combat) to those better suited to such pursuits, delighting instead in their role as equippers and supporters of the cause.

The Holy Art itself is divided into different paths. The three paths of study most common in the Inquisition were mystically modeled after the Holy Trinity. Each draws on the strength shown by and imparted to Man from a different aspect of the Trinity, using the lessons shown therein as a basis for theurgical power. All paths are strict progressions of study which yield a set number of predetermined effects, thus making them easier to learn and develop than other types of Blessings. Nonetheless, it takes a specific character of inquisitor to master the rigid mental and spiritual regimen dictated by the Holy Art, and among all the inquisitor orders, the Red Monks have demonstrated the best aptitude and the determination required to do so. The Knights of Acre bring up a close second, however, and can even claim foundation of one of the paths on their own. Each of these paths require the character to invoke that facet of the Trinity in some way; some suggestions are noted under the descriptions of each path. Progression in the Holy Art is limited in the same way that vampiric path magic is; a character chooses a primary path when he learns his first dot of the Holy Art. No other path may equal or exceed that path. Red Order characters may choose any path as their primary path (as the Holy Art is their order specialty). House Murnau and Oculi Dei characters must take Sophia Patris as their primary path, Sisters of St. John must take Boni Spiritus, and Knights of Acre must take Sedulitas Filius.

Sophia Patris

Probably the most exclusive of the theurgic arts, this path is more commonly known to other practitioners as the Path of Father's Wisdom. It allows the practitioner to reveal truths about others and even about the enemy — but an inquisitor must be careful, lest those truths cost him his sanity. This path is commonly invoked by speaking a prayer aloud, by locking eyes with a target, or by anointing one's forehead with oil. All Sophia Patris powers require the player to roll Perception + Sophia Patris; the difficulty of this roll varies according to the power in question.

· Pry Open the Wlines Gye

By taking a moment to reflect upon another's demeanor and overall countenance, the inquisitor may attempt to peer into the mind of his subject, and once therein, bear silent witness to the individual's thoughts and desires of the moment.

System: Standard roll; difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. If this roll is successful, the character receives a glimpse of what the individual is thinking about, envisioning or remembering at that given moment. A failure means the character cannot use this power again on the same target until a full day has passed. A botch on this roll puts the inquisitor's own mind at risk, opening it up to the interest of dark forces and causing him to roll on the Curse Acquisition table.

• • Unwavering Vision

God knows all, and while no practitioner of the Holy Art can claim such omniscience, those skilled in *Sophia Patris* may look at a creature and learn how it interacts with humanity at large. The revelations thus gained, however, are usually unpleasant at best.

System: On a successful roll (difficulty of the target's Willpower or Road for Cainites) the scrutinizing character receives a glimpse of the target creature's relationship with mankind. For each success scored, the character sees a vision of the most recent significant encounter the target creature had

with a mortal. Thus, with two successes the practitioner would see the target's two most recent interactions with mortals. This power may reveal an attack, such as a feeding, or even a particularly impassioned meeting between the target and another. Ultimately, the Storyteller decides what vision is imparted and how murky or distinct the event in question may be. This power can be used only to good effect on a given subject once per scene.

· · · Unearth

This potent ability allows the practitioner to see into the past of the site at which the character currently stands. His visions can be keyed according to time ("What transpired here two days ago?"), by connection to a person or object ("Reveal what occurred when the child was taken.") or in connection with an event ("Show me the murder as it happened!").

System: Standard roll; difficulty 7. For each success, the character may view five minutes of time as it unfolded at that location and at the time specified. Ultimately, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of what information is revealed and how.

Unearth may be used safely only once per scene; additional invocations of this power raise the difficulty by one for each use. A botch requires a roll on the Curse Acquisition table.

• • • • Lifting the Veil of Lies

An inquisitor who has mastered this level of *Sophia Patris* becomes, in essence, a human lie detector. Whenever he hears a falsehood, he experiences a distinct and highly unpleasant sensation. The feeling is different from practitioner to practitioner, but it can be anything from a foul smell to a feeling of nausea or even a sharp pain behind the eye.

Furthermore, those with this power gain the ability to share in another's past experiences. If the monk touches a person who has had an encounter with a supernatural entity, he may receive a sudden vision of that person's most recent encounter. If the creature touched is a supernatural being, the practitioner receives an image from that creature's past, either looking back on a past encounter or casting back to a specific moment in time. All such visions are soundless.

System: Lifting the Veil of Lies lasts for a full scene at the cost of one Conviction. When a lie is told in the character's presence, the Storyteller rolls for the character (standard roll; difficulty 6). If the roll succeeds, the falsehood is detected in the aforementioned manner. If the roll fails (or if the statement is true), the character detects nothing out of the ordinary.

To receive visions of the past, the character must physically touch the creature involved; then his player rolls Perception + Sophia Patris (difficulty 7). If the roll succeeds, the character is blessed with a vision. In the case of a supernatural subject, the player may stipulate a memory associated with a particular person, place or thing. Alternatively, the character may witness a creature's memory of a specific time — a day, hour or even a single moment that occurred in the creature's past. However, narrowing the search too much (Storyteller's discretion) raises the difficulty by one or more.

· · · · · Revelation

The plateau of achievement for one on the path of the Father's Wisdom, this remarkable power allows the practitioner to reveal all supernatural creatures in his vicinity for the abominations they are. All members of the Flock are then free to judge them as they like.

System: The player makes the standard roll (difficulty 8) and spends two Conviction. The number of successes determines how far from the character the revelation extends.

One success
Two successes
Three successes
Four successes
To-foot radius
50-foot radius
100-foot radius
500-foot radius
500-foot radius

This power reveals all supernatural beings in the area with the most horrific aspect of their existences, seemingly superimposed atop whatever method they are using to disguise themselves as normal mortals. A vampire appears as a blood-lusting horror, while a werewolf adopts a mien like a snarling man-beast. Creatures do not actually change in any way, they simply look different to mortal onlookers. This superimposed flash is momentary, but is enough to expose the monsters that walk amid the Flock.

This power may only be used once per scene.

Sedulitastilius

Practitioners who study this path soon learn what it truly means to be an inquisitor in the service of man and God. It follows the example of courage shown by Christ in his final hours, and

extrapolates a number of mystical powers out of that code of ethics. The first widely known master of this path was not a Red Monk or even an inquisitor, but a Hospitaler knight who hailed from a castle on the river Litani (just outside Tyre). This knight, a man named Theobald, had fought in the Crusades and had fled as one of the only survivors of the Muslim attack that won the castle from its former residents, the Knights Templar. Although Theobald himself soon vanished, one of his knights errant soon arrived in Acre by way of the battle at Tyre. This knight — Theobald's former squire — brought with him the rudiments of the path handed down to him by his liege. He soon became a focal point of Gauthier de Dampiere's vision for the Inquisition, and thus one of the first Knights of Acre. The path soon spread to all the other orders. To this day, the Knights remain the greatest of the path's practitioners.

Sedulitas Filius is a warrior's path, and as such the invocations required to use it are quick and simple—crossing oneself, a shouted battle cry ("Deus vult!" is popular) or simply clutching a Holy Relic. Unless otherwise noted, the standard roll for this path is Strength + Sedulitas Filius.

• Sunder

When in combat, the facility to empower a weapon is revered with almost divine appreciation. This power gives an existing weapon an energy of its own, allowing it to strike with holy vengeance anything it touches. Normal weapons imbued with such focused power rarely last, due to the strain imposed upon them, but they certainly make each and every attack count.

System: The character imbues a single melee weapon with the power of his virtue. The player must make the standard path roll (difficulty 6) and spend a point of Conviction, and then roll Dexterity + Melee to attack as normal. If the attack hits, the imbued weapon inflicts two additional dice of damage and all damage done by an imbued weapon is considered lethal, regardless of what sort of weapon it is. Attacks made by imbued weapons can harm both material and immaterial beings, and the wielder may risk Conviction on the roll to hit.

• • Censure

Often, the best way to defeat an opponent is to force it to make a foolish mistake. By means of this power, the inquisitor can frustrate a creature into an extremely excitable state by ridiculing it in the name

of all that's holy. He derides his opponent with a barrage of infuriating holy rhetoric, after which the target feels like it can do nothing but attempt to silence the jabbering mortal for his temerity.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Sedulitas Filius (difficulty 6); the target resists by rolling Willpower (difficulty 6). If the character acquires more successes than the target, it immediately loses its composure and rushes forward to attack. The target may spend a Willpower point to resist the compulsion, but such an expenditure is good only for the turn; if the character continues preaching, the target must eventually give in or run away. This power may even force creatures out of hiding, making them voluntarily drop their powers of concealment in order to assail the brazen mortal. Note that this power may not be invoked silently, but rather is both extremely loud and irritating — hence its usefulness.

• • • Gods armor

The Knights of Acre are a remarkably hardy bunch as a rule, and those who are adept with this power are even more so. By invoking God's Armor the practitioner can remain in the fray until he may claim victory, undaunted by all but the most grievous of injuries to his person.

System: All healing times for injuries suffered in the heat of battle are drastically reduced. The character recovers health levels lost to bashing damage at the rate of one every five minutes, while lethal damage is recovered according to the following chart. These rates supersede normal recovery times but are still cumulative (e.g., it takes 14 hours to recover from Injured).

Health Level Recovery Time

Bruised Two hours
Hurt Four hours
Injured Eight hours
Wounded 16 hours
Mauled Two days
Crippled Four days
Incapacitated Ten days

· · · · Rodand Staff

This potent ability allows the practitioner to use his own body as a bulwark against the approach of malevolent entities. The inquisitor makes himself the last line of defense, the rod and staff, as the Psalm says, standing between the innocent and any oncoming threat. Only when he falls for good may the host of Hell advance.

System: The player spends two Conviction points and makes the standard roll (difficulty 6). If the roll is successful, no attacker may circumvent the inquisitor in an attempt to reach others beyond him. He must be faced and defeated in battle before attackers may proceed. Ranged attacks of a mundane nature (such as arrows and crossbow bolts) bounce harmlessly off the character or those under his charge while this power remains in effect. The duration of the effect is determined by the initial roll; he may remain in his guarding stance for 10 minutes per success (but may re-invoke the power at any time, however). This power is typically used in corridors or other narrow lanes, but the power of the effect is such that no matter where he stands, the innocent may take shelter in his shadow, so to speak.

· · · · · Wrath of God

The most overt of effects on a path of overt effects, this mighty power allows the inquisitor, quite literally, to call down the wrath of God against an opponent. The character speaks a word of prayer, gestures, and a bolt of what appears to be white lightning streaks down from the Heavens or from the inquisitor himself, incinerating whatever poor creature has earned his ire.

System: The player spends a point of Conviction and makes the standard roll (difficulty 8). Any successes achieved are added to the character's Strength and rolled in a lethal damage pool (therefore, if the character has a Strength rating of 4 and the player rolls 3 successes to activate the power, it inflicts 7 dice of lethal damage). The maximum range of this effect is the character's Zeal rating in yards. This attack cannot be dodged, though the damage may be soaked, if the target may soak lethal damage. If the inquisitor uses this power to damage one of the Flock (or any human being, for that matter), he must roll to see if he acquires a new Curse.

Boni Spiritus

The Gifts of the Spirit path allows for a wide range of miraculous effects, from driving back the enemy to healing those laid low in the battle against evil. The path's strength stems from the Holy Spirit, and its effects often require simple prayers or gestures — tracing a cross in the air, reciting the rosary, or chanting prayers in unison with those around the caster.

All applications of Boni Spiritus require the player to roll Wits + Boni Spiritus (the difficulties vary and are noted in the individual descriptions below). If the character possesses dots in Faith, the player may



add those dice to the roll as well, but the character may never have more dice in her *Boni Spiritus* pool than her Piety rating.

· Tears of the Martyr

By gazing into the soul of a creature, the character may imprison it briefly, rooting it to the ground where it stands. She holds the thing in her gaze, as tears well up in her eyes and stream down her cheeks. So long as she takes no actions other than tearfully staring, the targeted creature will remain in the spot it currently occupies until such time as she releases it from its guilt.

System: Standard roll; difficulty of target's Stamina +3 or Willpower if the creature has no Stamina rating. For each success, the target is immobilized for one turn. If the character shifts her eyes from the creature for more than a moment during this time, the effect ends early. "Immobilized" creatures may still fight and defend themselves normally, but they cannot move away from the space they currently occupy.

This power does not work on any individual who possesses any dots in a Superior Virtue. The exception to this is if the person is currently possessed or otherwise influenced by supernatural forces; then it is the "host" that is being targeted. This power may be invoked numerous times in succession.

. • Touch of Meace

By simply laying a hand on a target, the inquisitor may soothe pain and anguish, both physical and spiritual. While many inquisitors make use of this power on the battlefield, calming the hearts of the injured, it has its applications in the torture chamber as well. Many an inquisitor has won the confidence — and confession — of a hapless pagan by showing him the peace that the Holy Spirit can bring.

System: Standard roll; difficulty varies. When used on normal human beings, this power reduces wound penalties by one per success. It in no way heals the wounds, however. Touch of Peace also mitigates psychological suffering; a troubled or agitated target feels calm and at peace when the character lays hands on her. If used on a supernatural being, Touch of Peace can actually end frenzy. This requires an opposed roll to the inquisitor's (creature's Willpower, difficulty 7). If the creature scores more successes than the player, its frenzy continues. If not, the frenzy abandons the beast, and it becomes subject to any wounds it might have sustained (see p. 263 of Dark Ages: Vampire for more on frenzy).

Aura of Sanctity

At this stage of the holy path, the theurgist has learned to focus her faith into an instrument of true potency. When this power is activated, the inquisitor may actually inflict damage on any unholy creature in the area. Sometimes this power manifests as a pillar of flame, sometimes as a burst of white light from the character herself. Whatever the particulars, this aura impedes supernatural attacks and damages unholy creatures who come into contact with it.

System: The player spends a Conviction point and makes the standard roll (difficulty 6). Anytime a supernatural creature attempts to attack the character, the difficulty of the attack is increased by one for every success achieved on the player's roll. The nature of the attack is unimportant. Furthermore, any demon, ghost or vampire suffers a lethal wound each turn it remains within the area of the aura's effects. For each success rolled beyond the first, the practitioner may project the aura to include one additional person within its area of effect. Such individuals must remain within (Faith) yards of the character.

The aura persists for one turn per success rolled, and the inquisitor may deny its protection to anyone at any time. No supernatural effect may be used to negate the field. Only by rendering the character unconscious may a creature prematurely end the aura.

• • • • Restoration

The Sisters of St. John have long held a reputation for being able to tend to the sick and wounded with extraordinary success, but other inquisitors who master *Boni Spiritus* also learn to do so. By means of this power, practitioners can perform miracles where body healing is concerned.

System: This power merely transforms lethal wounds into bashing wounds, making it far easier for the wounded to heal of their own accord. The practitioner's player makes the standard roll (difficulty 6, plus one for each wound level, up to a maximum difficulty of 10). If she manages even one success, all wound levels become bashing damage instantly. Truly massive injuries — severed limbs, for example — may raise the difficulty or require the expenditure of Conviction, if they can be healed at all.

This power can be used only once per day on a given person.

•••• Judgment of Beaven

The Red Order, the undisputed masters of the Holy Art, strive to achieve a greater understanding of Heaven and of the balance that exists in the realms between worlds. By the time a theurgist has reached this level of understanding of Heaven's Path, he has begun to grasp the truth of those worlds and may even briefly close the earthly doorways to those same realms. By these means, the character can confine a supernatural creature to the earthly realm, where it may know no escape from its final judgment.

System: The player must spend two Conviction and make the standard roll (difficulty 8). If any successes are rolled, the character seals the material world (as it is known) from all other realms of existence for the remainder of the scene. No supernatural creature may escape the character's presence without leaving conventionally (i.e., walking, running, riding, etc.). In addition, any power sources that originate from another plane or reality, and that feed the physical world in the character's proximity, are severed. This includes powers such as the Obtenebration Discipline or the ability of werewolves to vanish into some hellish "spirit world." Likewise, any supernatural creatures that can enter the physical world are suddenly barred from entering it in the inquisitor's vicinity. They must enter in an area beyond the influence of the power's effects. Otherworldly powers cannot even perceive the physical world where the inquisitor stands.

Only the inquisitor himself can end the effect prematurely. Otherwise, the power persists until the end of the scene — even if the character is killed.

Kitae

Just as the mundane clergy carry out numerous sanctified rites for the lay, such as those performed during each Mass, so too do practitioners of the Holy Art have their own body of treasured ceremonies with which to assist in carrying on the Lord's work. These mystical preparations, collectively known as *Ritae Solemnis*, are meticulously prepared rituals that must be performed under specific circumstances and under exacting procedures. When these demanding guidelines are followed, however, the result is powerful.

Each ritus (the singular of ritae) is rated from one to five in power level. A practitioner must have a rating in his primary path of the Holy Art equal to or greater than the power level of the ritus in order to successfully complete it. In addition, certain material components may be required in order to fully realize the invocation. These required items are noted in the descriptions below; where no such item is listed, assume that the ritus requires only prayer

and a rosary or crucifix (or some other item of faith) as a focus for the power of the spell.

Characters beginning with a Holy Art rating also begin with one *ritus* per level of Holy Art. In order to learn further *ritae*, the character must first find a teacher to instruct her in all the proper procedures and incantations that the new rite requires. Learning how to correctly perform a new *ritus* (and precisely what the required components may be) can take anywhere from a few weeks to years, depending on how advanced the invocation.

In order to successfully cast one of the *Ritae Solemnis*, the inquisitor's player must succeed on an Intelligence + Holy Art roll (difficulty of 4 + the level of the *ritus*). Generally, only a single success is required on this roll, signifying that no major step in the invocation was carelessly omitted or otherwise mishandled. Unless stated otherwise, all *ritae* take a minimum of ten minutes per level to complete.

Blessed Vigilance (Level One)

This ceremonial spell was devised by the Sisters of St. John to ensure that knights being sent out on missions of protection would not fail their charges by succumbing to drowsiness or other distractions. The power of this *ritus* provides the subject with the energy he requires for the task ahead, alleviating the need for true sleep or rest.

System: The practitioner must lead the subject in a session of prayer; typically this sessions lasts only ten minutes, but some theurgists pray longer just for safety's sake. The player makes the standard roll. If successful, the subject's player rolls Self-Control (difficulty dependent upon how well the ritual was handled and prepared; usually a 6). If the roll succeeds, he may stay awake for a number of days equal to the number of successes he rolled, minimum of one day (even if he fails or botches, he still reaps the benefits for one day). In addition, the character will be hyper-alert and aware throughout that time, granting him a -1 difficulty bonus on all Wits rolls and a +1 to initiative. At the end of this period, the subject will be no more tired than when the ritual first began days before.

Ballow Ground (Level One)

This simple rite probably sees more use than any other among those inquisitors "in the field." Its holy power allows the inquisitor to sanctify (at least temporarily) a structure or other clearly delineated area, thus transforming it into ad hoc Holy Ground. Most traveling inquisitor cells invoke this *ritus* as a

standard part of their evening prayers, before bedding down for the night.

System: The inquisitor performing the incantation must have undisturbed concentration for at least an hour (the minimum time required to complete the hallowing). During this time, she traces the perimeter of the area to be sanctified — brazier of incense in one hand, crucifix in the other — speaking the words that will sanctify the ground. During this time, the player makes the standard roll (difficulty 7). If this roll succeeds, the area is successfully hallowed (it gains an Ambient Faith rating of 1). If the rite is particularly well done, the site retains its blessing even after the inquisitors have moved on (one additional day for every additional success acquired beyond the first).

Boly Rite of Erorcism (Level One)

One of the most sacred practices for which the members of the Inquisition are known is their solemn custom of performing exorcisms on and for members of the Flock. This practice is an invaluable aspect of the fight and is one that allows inquisitors to take that fight to the foe. Through its power, a single practitioner (or group of inquisitors, as is more often the case) may command a spirit residing within a given place or person to leave at once, in the name of the Lord. The Holy Rite of Exorcism is the specialty of the Sisters of St. John. The brothers and sisters of the Red Order are known to be equally adept with this *ritus*, but largely seem to refrain from actually *leading* any such services themselves.

System: This long and involved rite allows an inquisitor (or group of inquisitors) to temporarily or even permanently banish a spirit from a particular place or body. The leading inquisitor must engage in an extended, opposed roll with the spirit in residence. The exorcism requires a standard roll (although the player may add the character's Faith dice, if any, to the roll) with a variable difficulty, determined as follows: The difficulty starts at 10. For every individual who possesses Superior Virtues assisting the inquisitor (maximum of four), the difficulty drops by one; and for every point of Willpower the spirit possess above the inquisitor's Willpower score, the difficulty rises by one (maximum 10). This roll is made at the beginning of every hour during which the rite is taking place and is opposed by a Willpower roll for the spirit (difficulty of the inquisitor's Piety). The practitioner must accumulate a total number of net successes equal to the spirit's Willpower rating before it may compel said spirit to vacate the premises. The exorcism may only continue for a number of hours equal to the Piety score of the lead inquisitor. If the spirit has not been driven out by that point, the exorcism has failed and the would-be exorcist's Conviction pool drops to zero. She must regain at least one point before attempting the exorcism again.

If any of the inquisitor's rolls result in a botch, all net successes are lost, effectively sending the inquisitor back to square one (but the proverbial clock is still ticking). If the spirit's Willpower roll botches, the spirit is immediately driven from the body. The spirit is under no compunction to stay still for an exorcism, of course (which is why most inquisitors restrain their subjects before beginning).

If the exorcism succeeds, the spirit is banished from the victim. If she wishes, the player may spend a *permanent* Willpower point to banish the spirit from the person (and indeed the area) permanently.

Mague Ward (Level Two)

The Dark Medieval world is thick with famine, drought and diseases of all stripes. Those protected by this *ritus* have their resistance supported by a mystical bulwark that wards against illness and contagion. In these times, few rites are so prized as this one.

System: The practitioner gathers together all those she wishes to so engage with this rite (up to a maximum of her Faith + Holy Art). The rite requires a lengthy group prayer and anointing the forehead of each participant with ashes (preferably ashes taken from a plague victim and hallowed by a priest). At the conclusion of the rite, all those involved must roll Willpower (dependent upon how well the rite was conducted; typically a 7). Success indicates that they will be unable to contract illnesses of a mundane sort for a number of days equal to their own successes plus the successes initially acquired by the practitioner.

Sunstone (Level Two)

By means of this rite, an inquisitor may infuse an ordinary rock with the blessing of the Lord's first creation — the Sun. The rock will then absorb a piece of that essence, allowing it to shed sunlight whenever commanded to by its bearer.

System: Standard roll; difficulty 7. The Sunstone is finished when an inquisitor invests it with Conviction — one point for every day the Sunstone is intended to last. The brightness of the stone's radiance is governed and limited by the virtue of its bearer. When an inquisitor desires his Sunstone to activate, he grasps it tight within his palm (and his player rolls Piety, difficulty 6). If this roll is success-

ful, the stone begins to glow with the light of the sun, illuminating the area (as well as damaging the flesh of vampires) for the remainder of the scene. The actual brightness of the stone's light (and, thus, any damage it might inflict) is determined by the success of the roll:

Successes Strength of Light

One Dim (one die of aggravated damage)
Two Bright (two dice of aggravated damage)
Three+ Brilliant (three dice of aggravated damage)

force March (Level Three)

With an organization as widespread as the Church, speeding travel becomes a necessity. This rite allows a group of travelers to settle in for their journey, ignoring fatigue and most ground conditions in the process.

System: Those who will be affected by the ritual must gather together at sunrise, each kneeling in supplication before God. After a short prayer, the group rises and faces the practitioner, who then greets each participant personally and asks for safe travel in the name of Saint Christopher. When the ritus is complete, each member of the traveling party will be able to move at three times her normal land speed, covering up to 40 miles per day over smooth ground. Even on rough terrain, land speed is doubled. The effects of this ceremony fade after a number of days equal to the practitioner's Zeal + Holy Art.

fortunes of War (Level four)

Forewarned is forearmed, or so say the members of the Inquisition. Through this hallowed rite, a practitioner can bless a group of armed combatants on their way to fight the foe. By reading the soul of each member, the inquisitor may determine which virtue will be required most in the upcoming trials and travails, and by investing a portion of her own divine spark in each warrior she may help him build his confidence in that trait.

System: During the course of this hour-long ceremony of prayer and confession, the practitioner must invest a point of her own personal Conviction into each warrior she wishes to guide to self-improvement; therefore, the maximum number of participants in any one invocation of this rite is 10. If the player succeeds on the activation roll (difficulty 7), each individual involved must have a Courage roll made (difficulty 7) to face his fears and inequities. If this roll succeeds, the participant receives a –1 difficulty to all rolls involving one of his Virtues or Superior Virtues (participant's choice;

commonly Courage or Zeal, as this *ritus* is normally performed before going into battle). This bonus lasts for a number of days equal to the theurgist's successes, or until the individual next fails a roll involving the modified Trait, whichever occurs first. This *ritus* can be performed only once per story.

The forge of God (Level five)

Unlike most *ritae*, this powerful incantation is more of an extended process than a single rite. The effect of this rite allows the practitioner to work closely with a smithy during the creation of a melee weapon and thereby infuse a "stamp of the divine" into the process. The weapon is then given or handed down to a knight who has repeatedly demonstrated his worthiness.

HOLY ARMAMENTS

Blessed weapons are by no means common — the number of theurgists in all of Christendom who know the Forge of God ritus could probably be totaled on two hands. However, such weapons do find their way into the hands of inquisitors across Europe, commonly the Knights of Acre. These weapons all have various special properties. When constructing such a weapon, either with the Forge of God ritus or simply with the Holy Relics Background, the player may choose properties from the following list.

- Inflicts aggravated damage upon demons and other supernatural beings.
- Adds one to one of the owner's Superior Virtues (may be purchased multiple times — this does not grant the wielder access to other facets of Endowments).
- Will never break in the owner's hands.
- Owner always knows the weapon's location.
- Weapon hums or glows softly in the presence of danger.
- Inflicts 2 dice of extra damage.
- Increases the owner's Stamina by one when in righteous combat.

These are by no means the only possibilities, but they should serve as good examples. When using the Forge of God to build such a weapon, the crafter chooses one property for every two successes on the *ritus* roll.

System: The casting time of this *ritus* depends entirely on the item being crafted. A good rule of thumb is to double the standard amount of time necessary to craft a fine specimen of that sort of weapon. All the work pays off, however, as the end result is a powerfully strong specimen of its type, possessed of certain special properties (see sidebar). The player rolls for the ritual (standard roll, difficulty 7) to determine these special properties. The creation of the weapon is thus "sealed" and stamped with an imprint of the would-be owner's immortal soul (costing the future owner 10 Conviction in the process; these may come from the character's banked reserves). This effectively binds him to the weapon, allowing none but the owner to call upon its power.

Holy Ground

Some places become the focus of considerable faith—the sites of miracles, massive rituals or divine occurrences. Many of these places are located in and around churches and cathedrals, or upon the resting places of saints (or their relics). These places have innate Faith ratings of their own, reflecting their holy power. This type of locale-specific Faith is called Ambient Faith. For some grounds, their Ambient Faith affects only a small, particular area (near an altar or reliquary, for example), whereas others radiate Faith over a wide region, sometimes miles in diameter, as in the case of certain sites in the Holy Land.

Holy ground has a number of different effects. Some pertain to those supernatural creatures who would dare blaspheme such territory, while others relate to inquisitors and inquisitors alone. These effects are as follows:

• Vampires must make a Willpower roll (against a difficulty of the area's Ambient Faith rating, although the Aura of the Road of Heaven applies) in order to enter Holy Ground. Success means the undead abomination can enter the place but will feel extremely uncomfortable (one success means severe discomfort; three, mild discomfort; and five or more, no ill effects). Each morning at dawn, the vampire's number of successes decreases by one, leading to increasing discomfort and an eventual need to leave the site. Mortals can notice this discomfort with a Perception + Empathy roll (at a difficulty equal to the vampire's Willpower).

Failure on the Willpower roll results in physical pain for vampires if they enter the holy site. They suffer one level of bashing damage per scene. A botch results in one level of lethal damage, and requires the vampire to spend a Willpower point each turn to remain in the area (all such damage may be soaked). The pain increases as long as he remains, requiring a Courage roll (difficulty 7) on the third and subsequent turns. Failure means the creature enters Rötschreck. A botch on the Willpower roll means he bursts into flames, suffering three levels of aggravated damage per turn and requiring an immediate Courage roll (difficulty 8), or else the creature must flee in terror. The flames can be extinguished normally, but all other effects remain.

- Holy Ground limits a number of vampire powers as well. All blood point requirements for Disciplines double while the undead remains on holy ground, and the difficulties for Auspex, Chimerstry and all perception-affecting Disciplines increase by two.
- All Superior Virtue ratings are increased by one while on Holy Ground, and the difficulty of any roll involving Superior Virtues (including Virtue-based Blessings) is decreased by two. This change, however, does not grant inquisitors access to facets

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Force a vampire to flee in terror
Force a spirit to flee in terror
Permanently expel a spirit from a place
Force a minor demon to flee in terror
Force a major demon to flee in terror
Permanently expel a demon from a place
Ward against Dominate and Presence
(adds the character's Faith to all difficulties)
Banish the effects of vampiric Disciplines
Sever a blood oath
Inflict Faith dice of aggravated damage
on a demon, spirit or vampire

Difficulty

Vampire's Willpower + 4
Spirit's Willpower
8
6
9

10

Vampire's Willpower 10

Target's Willpower

of Blessings they would not normally have, *unless* the Ambient Faith rating is 6 or more.

- Inquisitors regain Conviction by praying within holy sites. See p. 160 for details.
- An inquisitor can exorcise malevolent entities from holy ground. His player rolls Charisma + Faith (recalling that Faith increases by one on holy ground), with a difficulty based on the desired effect, given on the table below. These difficulty ratings assume the character has access to the appropriate trappings of faith (a Bible, a crucifix, candles, bells, salt, water or other appropriate items). If these props are not available, increase the listed difficulty by one.

Holy Kelics

Holy Relics are items filled with divine power, usually associated with a saint or other important person from Christian history. Two of the greatest relics in Christendom are the Holy Grail, the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper and that caught his blood at the crucifixion, and the linen cloth in which he was buried (the Shroud of Turin). The Spear of Longinus — otherwise known as the Spear of Destiny — which pierced Christ's side at the crucifixion is also a mighty relic, along with pieces and splinters of the True Cross to which Christ was nailed, as well as its accompanying nails.

Relics of heavenly power are effectively broken up into two broad categories, although other less well-represented categories are certainly possible, if not overtly prevalent. Nearly all divinely invested objects fall under Church auspices as either Artifacts or Anointings. The former are those objects that are unique and are typically found in the care of only the most devout or worthy. Artifacts are objects of great value and permanence. Indeed, should such a treasure be lost to heathen hands, it becomes a region-wide (or greater) mission of the utmost urgency to find and recover the lost item.

Anointings, on the other hand, are not typically permanent and are found in much larger quantities. These oils, perfumes, salves and the like are administered to the needy within the clergy and congregation, or given out to questing inquisitors on missions of great importance. Some are designed to accelerate healing or to bolster the user's courage in the face of the Adversary, but most are crafted simply for the purpose of purifying the recipient's soul, returning him to the grace of God and readying him for whatever daunting tasks may lie ahead. The tradition of preparing Anointings is a ritualized and

time-honored one — truly an art in its own right and there is no one correct "formula" for investing such carefully prepared concoctions with the power of the divine. It takes a master herbalist with access to well-protected volumes of Church lore to create even the most common Anointings, and the rarest of these precious fluids are known only to a select devout few. Members of the Red Order, whose hoary scholars claim the deepest understanding of the old ways, most often oversee the creation of Anointings. Of all the orders, however, the Knights of Acre have the most familiarity with and access to relics in general, and a number of their far-flung fortresses house veritable caches of these blessed items, protected and prepared by aged veterans of the order in an ancient and tireless vigil.

Artifacts

Many artifacts are bones, locks of hair or other parts of a saint's body, and they carry a portion of that saint's faith within them. These items are often collected by the Church, placed in gilded and jeweled caskets (called reliquaries), and revered by the faithful. Their reverence helps to maintain and even increase an artifact's potency over time. Other artifacts are minor things: A pilgrim's badge or staff, a holy bishop's ring and so forth.

Charlatans peddle numerous fake artifacts, which common folk buy to ward off evil; an impossible number of shards supposedly taken from the True Cross are offered for sale, along with bones collected from criminals or even animals and passed off as those of saints. Ironically, these false idols can sometimes acquire a measure of their own Faith, if enough worshipers believe they are genuine. The faith of believers empowers the item over time.

Holy relics kept in a particular place (tomb, church, etc.) over a long period of time may hallow the ground (see Holy Ground, above). This makes places holding many relics quite uncomfortable environs for vampires and other damned creatures of the night.

Many artifacts also have distinctive powers. As every artifact is unique, it is difficult to attempt to categorize their wide variety of possible effects. What follows are some examples of the better-known Church artifacts and their divine capabilities.

The Letter of Mark

This ancient scroll is rumored to have been possessed by none other than St. Mark himself, the apostle who brought Christianity to Africa.

According to legend, it is the very paper that Mark carried with him on his journey across Asia Minor, into Rome and back. It was used as a declaration of intent by the wandering apostle, a written testament of the Word that was shown to those whom Mark encountered in his travels. Some say it even held the power to make believers out of heretics — supposedly on sight.

Somehow, the letter ended up in Cyprus, where Mark was known to have visited in his travels. There it remained, even long after Mark had departed. According to knightly history, a battalion of Knights Templar who had been stationed on Cyprus during the Crusades finally recovered it. Although the knights took it with them when they left Cyprus, the letter's current whereabouts are unknown. It is presumed, however, that with the knightly orders the letter has remained, one sparkling jewel in the crown of the collection guarded by the veteran soldiers of the Knights of Acre ever since.

The Sword of St. James

This weapon was supposedly a unique artifact of great power and faith, one which earned a grand reputation that ranks alongside the myth of Excalibur and the tale of the Sword of Charlemagne. According to legend, the sword was crafted on earth but was sanctified in Heaven, thus granting Heaven's power to any devout leader who wielded it. The stories claim it was carried by none other than St. James himself at one point, and did eventually fall into the hands of the mortal who would one day go on to unite the lay of the Flock under the Inquisition's cause. If asked, few can recall the precise whereabouts of the sword, but many assume it has remained with the Oculi Dei's vaunted leader, Rodrigue de Navarre.

The sword's greatest secret is that it is not one, but a score or more of individually unique items. The sword's legend is swirled about specifically to give further weight to the cause of the Eyes of God, as well as the small but fervent band of dedicated witch-hunters from which they spawned. Each ranking leader within the order is rumored to possess one of these blades, and tales of its appearances and exploits circulate freely to this day — a fact that secretly pleases the so-called leadership of the Oculi Dei. If the tales are true (and many of them are not), the sword's (or rather, swords') abilities include smiting demonic abominations into nothingness, cloaking the wielder's passing and delivering him from harm, as well.

anointings

The more commonly found Holy Relics are known as Anointings and include a wide variety of herbal and alchemical preparations. Advanced practitioners of the Holy Art work together to marry medicine and faith in a number of different media. and the end result is a collection of salves, oils, ointments and even incenses that have been blessed with the power of the divine. Most of these preparations contain relatively minor endowment and are typically used for easing others' pain, cleansing the soul and assisting in the completion of various rites and ceremonies. Some, however, are truly powerful items in their own right and are guarded by the sect just as carefully as are Artifacts. The following examples provide a look at the typical origin and effects of each.

Attar of the Damask Rose

This relatively commonplace anointing sees much use among the healers and caregivers of the Sisters of St. John. It is a light bouquet made from the essential oil of the rosa damascena, a rare flower brought from Persia back to France by the crusading knights who were enraptured by its virtues. The attar itself is made by extracting a yellow-green oil from the petals of the most fragrant specimens in a collection of damask roses. These roses are finicky, however, and the ritus caster must be the one to prepare the flowers himself. After picking the roses at the first light of dawn, he must work fast, having then only a matter of hours in which to finish all the elements required. For the prepared practitioner, this should be more than enough time to collect all the ingredients and prepare the attar that will become the focus of the rite's energy.

The resulting concoction is one part perfume, one part sleep aid, and one part medicinal oil. Damask rose petals are astringent (meaning they cause bodily tissues to contract) and are good for incorporating into healing salves. Generally, damask rose petals are used in tonics that help to cure mouth sores, sore throats, and stomach disorders, but this particular Anointing is potent enough to cure any ill. The blessed attar is also a fine perfume, the mundane version of which has been an Egyptian favorite since Cleopatra's time. Such a perfume is delightful indeed, making the skin supple and clear while enticing the passions with its rich fragrance.

System: After the attar is prepared, the resulting infusion retains its potency for one week per level of



Conviction invested within. The primary purposes of the attar are to assist in healing and to ease the fatigues of travel. Vials are requested by leaders of various inquisition groups to be used as astringents for their men and, among some of the sect's more anxious bishops, as a sleep aid. The attar's potency stems from highly localized application, so if one desires it to aid in sleep he must dab a few drops atop the eyelids; to heal a wound, one merely applies the oil to the damaged area. And when simply used as a sweet-smelling fragrance, the attar is applied once at each wrist and then pressed once against the back of the neck.

The sleep assistance effect reduces any penalties the character is currently acting under due to fatigue or sleep deprivation (Storyteller's discretion) and permits the recipient to get a good night's rest. Wounds treated with the oil have their recovery times sped up by two levels on the wound recovery chart. If the subject was no more badly damaged than Hurt, the wounds close in moments. One vial is typically good for three separate applications of the attar. Although it has been forbidden for inquisitors to use the sacred attar for merely cosmetic purposes, there remain a number of quietly pleasant-smelling ladies among the Sisters of St. John and elsewhere within the orders' ranks. This is partly due to the fact that one's effective Appearance score is raised by one dot whenever one is wearing the attar, and primarily to the fact that the attar becomes quite psychologically addictive when used regularly. Creating the Attar of the Damask Rose is a level one ritus of the Holy Art.

Chrism of the Blessed Myroblite

When the life of a true saint ends, the body does not truly "die," the Church says. Rather, the spirit of the saint ascends to Heaven (much as the Savior Himself is said to have done), leaving the shell of the body behind as an empty vessel. According to the Church, true saints are often determined by what happens to their bodies at this time. The body of a true saint does not rot or decompose per se, but rather remains in a perfectly unmarred state and exudes a sweet-smelling oil called chrism. One who passes on in this way is called a myroblite and is said to have thus proved her sainthood by this display.

The Chrism of the Blessed Myroblite is the only Church-sanctioned usage of this sacred excretion (at least officially), and even this Anointing's existence is a secret in the Inquisition, given out on a "need to know" basis only. The anointing is a me-

THE BALM OF GILEAD

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his ancient and one-of-a-kind Anoint ing is rumored to have been created from the sweet-smelling oil that the body of Christ exuded when his body was first brought down from the True Cross. According to legend, this divine chrism was collected by Christ's faithful disciple Joseph of Arimathea in a small, tear-shaped vial and sequestered among his belongings in the years until his death. Before 1215, it was commonly believed that the vial had fallen into the hands of an order of Cistercian monks around the dawn of the 12th century, though few can say for sure where or how this event occurred. With the Cistercians it supposedly remained, right up until the close of the Fourth Lateran Council, whereupon it was revealed that the order no longer possessed the vial, if they had ever possessed it at all. Since then, the Balm's whereabouts - indeed, its very existence — have been called into question by critically minded members of the organization the world over. The Knights of Acre in particular have taken a decidedly keen interest in locating the lost vial ever since the infamous post-Council revelation.

If it truly does exist, this wondrous balm is quite literally a vessel for the power of the divine, as well as the one and only receptacle for the last remains of the body of Christ. As such, its inherent Faith (if one were to quantify such things) would be astronomical, and its possible effects on the world of men, especially in the hands of a truly devout inquisitor, are nigh inconceivable. According to legend, one touch of this balm could restore a mortal's lost faith, drive away all demonic taint from an entire domain, or even irrevocably free one of the undead from the Curse of Caine — or from his accursed existence completely. Needless to say, a single drop can be more than enough to alter the face of any Dark Ages: Inquisitor chronicle, and it is this power above all others which demands that the Balm of Gilead be handled with the utmost careful regard.

ticulously prepared oil that priests in the Inquisition use to achieve a number of divine effects.

System: When applied to the skin of a recently deceased person, the Chrism will preserve the body for an indefinite period of time, allowing it to be

buried at leisure or even put on display by the priests. When the oil is rubbed on the wounds of one of the living, it glows brightly, glistening like wet diamonds in the sun. The wound proceeds to close instantly, regardless of the source of the damage. The average amount contained within one anointing (about one vial's worth) is enough to smear over six different small wounds, four medium-sized wounds or two large wounds (as a guideline, any wound resulting in the loss of only one health level is deemed small, two health levels medium and three health levels large).

Lastly, the oil bears an extraordinarily strong degree of inherent Faith, and acts as acid to the flesh of all demons and vampires. It also burns away the incorporeal stuff of which evil spirits are made on contact. If the entirety of the anointing is used as a missile weapon on one of the aforementioned creatures, the vial explodes on contact, inflicting 10 dice of aggravated damage. Unless the target has some means of immediately cleansing itself of the oil (an extremely unlikely prospect, particularly in the case of spirits), the chrism will continue to burn, inflicting eight dice of aggravated damage on the following round, and six, four and finally two dice of damage over the next three consecutive turns.

Properly preparing this Anointing is a level four Holy Art *ritus*, and requires access to chrism, which is rare enough in itself.

Curses

Just as Blessings are the powers gifted to the faithful for their continuing endeavors in doing good works, Curses are the alter ego of those same divine offerings. Some view Curses as a simple byproduct of Blessings, the price all inquisitors must pay for being granted the capability to serve the Lord with power and with grace. Others see them as the punishment exacted upon them for trafficking with the forces of darkness — for being guilty by association, so to speak. Whatever the truth of this hotly debated issue, Curses remain an integral part of day-to-day inquisitor life — something with which each servant of God must come to terms in his or her own way.

Like Blessings, Curses are broken up into separate categories, grouped by overall Curse type and effect. There are five such categories found among inquisitors of the Catholic Church: Anathemae, Interdictions, Maledictio, Stigmata and Visitations. Each of these categories includes Curses grouped by the three "stages" of inquisitor development: Acolyte, Advocate, and Judge (just as there are no

Servant-level Endowments, no Servant-level Curses exist). Just as an Acolyte-level Endowment is weaker in power than a Judge-level Endowment, so too is an Acolyte-level Curse less imposing upon the inquisitor than is a Judge-level Curse.

Acquiring New Curses

As stated in Chapter Four, all inquisitors begin with one Acolyte-level Curse from their primary Curse category (if the player chose to take an Endowment, rather than the character's order benefit). The player selects this first Curse as part of his character concept. Storyteller approval is required, of course (particularly in the case of player-invented Curses), but the player is free, at least at this stage of the game, to craft a Curse especially around his character's personality and background. Once this first Stage One Curse has been selected, the character is done with Curses—theoretically. An inquisitor character is never required to gain another Curse from that point on. This, however, rarely plays out to be the case.

The character can and probably will acquire new Curses during play. The two most common causes for a Curse to be levied stem from player botches and attempts on the part of the inquisitor to understand divine mysteries for which she is not ready.

Each time the player botches a Superior Virtue roll or a Conscience roll to avoid losing Piety, he must roll to see if his character garners a new Curse. Botching a roll for a Virtue that is not primary to the character's order is dangerous, but rarely catastrophically so. If the botch was on a primary Superior Virtue roll, however, then the consequences are oftentimes more dire (this dichotomy is reflected on the table below). An inquisitor's primary Virtue represents the driving moral and spiritual focus for a member of each given order, and meeting with disastrous failure where this Trait is concerned cannot but shake the character's soul to its very foundations.

The second most common way of acquiring new Curses goes hand-in-hand with Blessings. Some ambitious inquisitors attempt to glimpse too much of the divine in too short a time. Such individuals trade a portion of their soul, or perhaps a portion of their grip on reality, in exchange for the power to better take the Fight to the foe. When a character learns a Blessing that is above and beyond his ken as an inquisitor (that is, of a higher stage of development than the character currently occupies), he acquires a new Curse equal to the level of the forbidden Blessing. No roll is required; the inquisitor simply

RSES

Net Roll	Result
0 or less	No new Curse acquired. Exhilarated by the mercy the Lord has shown him, the
	character gains a point of Conviction.
1 – 3	No new Curse acquired. The character is safe for now.
4-6	No new Curse acquired, but the character loses two points of Conviction as his soul
	shudders with the weight of his "near miss."
7-8	New Stage One Curse acquired. Curse determined by situation.
9 – 10	New Stage Two Curse acquired. Curse determined by situation.
11+	New Stage Three Curse acquired. Curse determined by situation.
Modifiers	
	to the family if the character is Callery at the time of the null

- Add one to the result if the character is Callous at the time of the roll.
- Add one for each non-Stage One Curse the character already possesses.
- Add one if the roll was made due to a botched Primary Virtue roll.
- Add one if the character is trying to develop an Endowment in a category in which he does not already possess one.
- Add one if a non-Murnau character attempts to learn a Legacy. This includes characters who are
 members of the House by marriage or employment but do not carry the Murnau family curse.
- Subtract one if the character has at least one dot in all Superior Virtues.
- Subtract one for each Superior Virtue rating of 5.
- Subtract one if the roll was made due to a botched non-Primary Virtue roll.

Example of Acquiring Curses

n investigation goes badly, and Red Brother Francis and his cell flee into a forest to escape the demon chasing them. During a brief stop to rest, Francis' player decides that the group would stand a much better chance of survival if Francis could bring the Water to Wine Benediction to bear. Water to Wine is a Judge-level Endowment, which means it would cost Francis' player, Susan, 35 Conviction. Susan has 30 banked and 6 currently — just enough. Francis goes off to pray for deliverance.

If Francis is an Acolyte-level inquisitor, he *cannot* develop Water to Wine, as it is more than one stage higher than his current stage.

If Francis is an Advocate-level inquisitor, he may develop the Benediction, but immediately gains a Judge-level Curse.

If Francis is a Judge-level inquisitor, he may develop Water to Wine, but his player must immediately roll on the Curse Acquisition table to see if he acquires a new Curse from his rapid development. If this is Francis' first Benediction, his player must add one to the roll. Otherwise, no modifiers apply.

acquires the Curse as an additional cost of learning the new power.

Also, if a character gains a new Endowment (not an Orison) during game play, the player must immediately roll to see if the character gains a new Curse. Attempting to view too much of God's Glory in too short a time marks the character, regardless of her intentions. Endowments may be safely learned only over a period of downtime, where she can pray for insight gradually. However, safety isn't always an option for inquisitors. (As a reminder, if a non-Murnau inquisitor attempts to learn a Legacy Endowment, a Curse roll is *always* required, regardless of inquisitor's stage or whether the Endowment is learned during play.)

Whenever the player must check to see if her character acquires a new Curse, the player rolls one die and compares the result to the table below, after applying any necessary modifiers.

falling to the Adversary

Besides the terrible and often crippling effects of living under these afflictions and restrictions, in-

quisitors face another, more serious drawback to amassing multiple Curses. First, whether by divine design or simply cruel fate, the acquisition of Curses is a slippery slope. After a character has acquired his first two or three, Curses will begin to pile up more quickly thereafter; in short, the more Curses one already possesses, the more he is likely to acquire in the future. And it doesn't stop there....

If an inquisitor ever acquires as many or more total Curse stages than he has combined dots of permanent Piety and Superior Virtues, he succumbs to hatred, madness and myopia, entering a state known as Cocytus. In this state, the character has given up any pretense of sanctity or even morality, becoming simply an engine for hatred, torture and revenge. Inquisitors in this state are considered lost to their own Impulse, and rarely if ever does such an inquisitor return from the abyss.

Note that it is Curse *stages* and not simply Curses that one takes into account; a Judge-level Curse is three times more devastating to the character's sense of purity and self-control than is an Acolyte-level Curse. Thus, if a character has one each of the three levels of Curses, he has a total of six Curse stages. He must therefore have at least seven dots worth of aggregate Piety and/or Superior Virtues to remain in control. Although it takes a bit of arithmetic to calculate, this game mechanic serves to allow players to keep constant track of how far down the slippery slope they have fallen — and just how close the tips of their very souls are to the clutches of despair, or worse yet, of the Adversary himself.

When an inquisitor is truly lost to his own Impulse, the effects are as terrifying as they are devastating to the character's soul. For all intents and purposes, the character's Nature has become his Impulse — permanently. He has truly committed to walking this callous path, and he must now live by the decision. Only by acting in the interests of his Impulse, thereby validating his decision, may the character regain Willpower. This, in turn, makes it even more difficult to head back once one has started down this path. In addition, those who have succumbed to Cocytus have finally (or will indubitably) draw the attentions of those who wish to use such fallen inquisitors as tools of their own design. At the very least, such an existence will make it increasingly more difficult for the inquisitor to keep his soul's transgression a secret from his peers for very long.

Above and beyond these matters, however, lies the ubiquitous theme of the downward spiral, that which pervades the life of every character who has fallen to Cocytus. For these lost inquisitors, the very trait that previously defined their existences — Conviction — has become their worst enemy. For in Conviction lies further degradation, and only by shedding Conviction and thereby unburdening his soul of its suffocating hatred, fear and ignorance may a character find the long and desperate path that may one day save him from damnation. For those lost to Cocytus, the path to sanctity is walked in reverse. Rather than banking accumulated Conviction in order to raise one's Blessings, inquisitors in this state must apply all the strength their weary spirits can muster toward the task of eventually regaining their own grace. Conviction is still banked, but it is done so with the intent of eventually raising Superior Virtues only. Every time a fallen inquisitor character spends Conviction for any purpose other than gaining a Superior Virtue dot (or for saving it for such), he likewise drains an equal amount of Conviction from his "bank."

Suppose, for example, a player has banked 7 Conviction in his drive to raise Faith, his character (suffering from Cocytus) having spent much of his time indoors in solemn prayer. Before the character can reach the next revelation (that is, accrue the necessary Conviction to raise the Superior Virtue), however, he runs afoul of a werewolf. During the battle, he spends two Conviction in his efforts to slay the beast. Since the character is in Cocytus, however, the two Conviction he spends are deducted not only from his current Conviction total but from the banked total as well, leaving the "bank" at 5 points.

Curses and Order

Just as each order of inquisitors has a category of Blessings which it commonly exhibits, so too does each order bear a parallel affinity for a given type of mystical affliction. Just as members of the House of Murnau long been noted for the horrific manifestations of their family's Curse, so too have the Sisters of St. John come to be known for their strange and often inexplicable visions. Also like Blessings, Curses are tied to the order for which they are known, but are not exclusive to its membership. Inquisitors from any and every order can easily acquire Curses from any and every category.

Order comes into play whenever an inquisitor acquires his first Curse of a given stage. As stated in Chapter Three, an inquisitor's very first Curse (a Stage One Curse, acquired when he first advances to the Acolyte stage) must come from his order's Curse category. Then, when it comes time for an inquisitor to acquire his first Stage Two Curse (as well as his

first Stage Three Curse), that Curse must also be selected or assigned from that character's Primary Curse category. Once the first Curse of a new Stage has been acquired, however, this restriction no longer applies; only the first such Curse of a given stage needs to be order-specific.

anathemae

Although its effects aren't nearly so spectacular as those of some other Curse categories, this collection of bizarre afflictions — the special afflictions of the order known as the Eyes of God — is often seen as the most puzzling, and therefore the most frightening. Many inquisitors come to fear the order with which they are associated, simply because they cannot grasp the message or "intent" behind these strange Curses' allocation. Many of this category's individual afflictions take no outward shape whatsoever, and this fact perhaps more than any other makes other inquisitors quite nervous.

Anathemae do not have the physical distinctiveness of Stigmata, for example, nor do they cause the radical shift in behavior that accompanies Interdictions. Although they are most often compared to Visitations, the two are vastly different in the longterm effects they seem to have on those they afflicted; whereas Visitations tend to damage the mind given enough time, what makes Anathemae most intriguing is the toll they take on the soul. Due to their very nature, these Curses tend slowly but surely to ostracize and alienate the inquisitor from those most precious to him - the Flock. Given enough time (and enough Curses), the frustrated inquisitor begins to feel truly separated from his own kind. This, in turn, opens the door wide to the cold comfort of Callousness which, in turn, leads to yet more Curses.

Lambot god (Acolyte)

After sitting idly by, watching as mortal after mortal falls victim to the predations of the Adversary and its earthly minions, the inquisitor begins to grow detached from the horror to which he bears repeated witness. Jaded by suffering, the inquisitor starts viewing the Flock not as a collection of individuals who need vigilance and protection, but as a single unit—quite literally, as a "flock." He begins to take the long view toward his mission, concentrating on what is best for humanity at large, and in so doing closing his heart to the specific humanity surrounding each individual story he encounters.

System: The inquisitor is considered Callous if his Conviction is *equal* to or higher than his Piety

rating, rather than simply higher than his Piety rating. This Curse has little effect on Callous inquisitors, save to ensure that they stay that way.

Scent of Byacinth (Acolyte)

The inquisitor exudes an impossibly faint smell, one that subliminally fills the minds of those nearby with a deep and pervading sense of loneliness, loss and regret. This supernatural pheromone drives away most ordinary mortals — the very Flock the character strives to protect — and actively draws unwanted attention to the inquisitor from the hoary host of Hell itself.

System: The mystical scent exuded by the character is extremely subtle, affecting all but the most acutely sensitive on a purely subconscious level. Mundane mortals react to the character with fear and an indefinable sense of mistrust, and all rolls involving social interaction with said mortals (or at least those possessed of a sense of smell) are made at a +1 difficulty. Intimidation rolls do not receive this penalty, but they don't get any particular bonus, either. Abominations, on the other hand, are actively drawn — equally subconsciously — to the mystical aroma, giving those with the ability to track by scent (such as werewolves) a –2 modifier to all difficulties on any such rolls.

Silent Vigil (Advocate)

Due to the things he is forced to witness time and time again, the inquisitor is overcome by bouts of self-doubt and despair so sudden and so overwhelming that he cannot communicate in any meaningful way until they pass.

System: Whenever the character witnesses an act of utter cruelty (Storyteller discretion), or else personally observes the death or dismemberment of a member of the Flock, the player must immediately succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) or the character is rendered mute, unable to utter any meaningful sound of his own volition. This death of communication extends beyond speech, preventing the character even from writing or otherwise sending messages of any kind. The Curse's stupefying effects persist until the end of the scene.

Unclean (Advocate)

"A prophet is never welcome in his own country," Scripture says, and a character suffering this Curse embodies the notion. Any stranger who lays eyes on the character sees the worst type of person he can imagine — a Crusader might see a Saracen, a man terrified of disease sees a leper, and so forth.

System: Whenever the character meets a stranger, the player must roll Appearance + Expression (difficulty 6). The more successes the player rolls, the worse the reactions to her character. These reactions may range from immediate distrust (one success) to spitting and throwing stones (three successes) to being immediately attacked or driven away (five successes). This effect can be overcome if the character converses with a stranger, learns his name, and introduces himself — but few people will be willing to sit down with such an unclean wretch.

false Witness (Judge)

The inquisitor has grown so paranoid of the possibility of demons operating within his midst that he ceases trusting others almost entirely. Every claim made before him is questioned, and every recounted tale presumed to be a fabrication, embedded in the minds of the weak by no less than the Adversary himself. Such afflicted inquisitors slowly lose the capacity for both interpersonal discernment and guile, as their own instincts about the methods and motivations of men fade and eventually disappear entirely.

System: The character legitimately cannot distinguish fact from fiction, nor do his "lie detecting" abilities function at even a fraction of the efficiency of which they had once been capable. To a character struck with this Curse, every statement made to him by a witness to an external event is either a lie or most likely a lie, and even the inquisitor himself cannot tell the difference. This Curse thus makes it that much more difficult for the character to conceal his own secret truths when he must. The doubtstricken character must acquire substantial evidence before he is convinced of another's word, and will still probably hold secret doubts thereafter. He suffers a loss of three dice on all Subterfuge rolls, and all attempts by the character to use Blessings that determine the veracity of another's words fail automatically.

Interdictions

This broad category of spiritual and behavioral Curses has long been associated with the Knightly Orders to which these sorts of restrictions, taboos and requirements have always been part and parcel. Interdictions are spiritual mandates of a sort, pressing upon the afflicted inquisitor the need to abide by a certain code of ethics and/or standards, above and beyond those already imposed upon him by dint of his established allegiances or declarations. A negli-

gent build-up of Interdictions can and will ultimately limit the inquisitor's behavior to such a degree that he can no longer function as a useful member of the Inquisition at large. Such proud but pitiful "lost warriors" serve no other daily purpose but the maintenance and fulfillment of their own Interdiction-imposed activities and prohibitions. Come to this, some fallen inquisitors even voluntarily end their own lives (and thus sin) rather than continue living such unendurably rigid existences... unless, of course, one of their Interdictions forbids them from doing so.

Solemn Oath (Acolyte)

The inquisitor has taken a sacred vow of some kind, witnessed by a higher-up within the Church (a bishop, at least) and thereby sanctified by God. Any vow of the standard variety is acceptable, be it one of chastity, honesty, poverty, silence, etc. This Curse goes above and beyond any normal vow — breaking an ordinary vow might be a grievous sin, but God takes notice of broken Interdictions.

System: There is no system for this Curse. The inquisitor simply abides by the promise he has made to God or suffers the consequences (see Violation sidebar).

Suffer the Little Children (Acolyte)

The inquisitor has personally vowed or been condemned never to harm true innocents, including and especially young children. Although it appears an honorable one on the surface, this Curse may end up getting an inquisitor into some serious trouble. After all, of the Adversary's many guises, the face of an innocent is surely his most favored....

System: Again, this Curse has no specific consequence. If the character allows a child or another innocent to come to harm when he could reasonably have prevented it, he is considered to have violated his Interdiction.

Call of Duty (Advocate)

The inquisitor has been cursed with a frustratingly rigid sense of obligation to the lay. He has vowed to tend the Flock to the best of his ability (and with nearly every waking moment), and may deny a fellow Christian in need only in the rarest of circumstances. This Curse is especially common among former members of the various military orders that make up the Knights of Acre.

System: Any time the character is directly called upon by a fellow believer for aid, he must attempt to be of assistance, regardless of his current activities.

VIOLATION

nd so one may ask, "What becomes of an inquisitor who violates the conditions of an Interdiction?" It is an important question, because the calling card of most Interdictions lies in the very fact that they are indeed *violable*. If one simply *could not* break the vow he had been compelled to take, then it would truly be much less of a burden upon him in the long run. Acceptance of his inviolable situation would probably follow quite easily, if such were the case. No, the true insidiousness of these Curses lies in the fact that their administration rests, by and large, in the inquisitor's own hands.

When an inquisitor violates an Interdiction, the Storyteller must look at two factors, each one equally important in determining the whole of the violation: First, was the Interdiction violated intentionally, or did a combination of unfortunate factors propel the poor knight down the road to violation? Second, how serious was the transgression? Was it a slight offense, noticed by none other than God and the inquisitor himself? Or was it a serious breach, putting the lives of innocents at risk and blatantly flouting the will of God — or, perhaps, giving strength to the Adversary?

From there, it is a simple matter of the Storyteller deciding how best to "punish" the offender. And make no mistake — punishment is precisely what is in order here. In some cases, the inquisitor's own conscience will be enough, as he frets over his careless slip throughout the sleepless nights that follow the initial transgression. If the Storyteller opts to go this more narrative route, a game mechanic "back-up" is suggested; a system-based reminder to keep the player focused on his regretstricken character. These could include such things as penalties to all related Virtue rolls for a designated period of time, or a temporary loss of Conviction (restored after the same period of atonement). Whatever the case, a roll to avoid losing Piety is almost surely in order. In other cases, punishment will be dictated by the character's specific situation. If a knight's superior catches him breaking his vow of chastity, for example, he might flog the sinful inquisitor or even reduce him in station — perhaps both. Dark Ages: Inquisitor is very much a game of temptation and damnation and, given the rather gruesome tolls exacted by some of the other Curses, Storytellers are encouraged to be as forgiving as the inquisitors themselves, which is to say, not very forgiving at all.

He is honor-bound to help to the best of his ability, and may decline only if presented with clear evidence of the falsehood of the request (such as in the case of someone pretending to be a Christian in order to obtain aid). Inquisitors with this Curse often find themselves unable to accomplish many of their own goals, due to the tight constraints imposed upon their time by their own conscience.

Endess Penitence (Advocate)

The character feels himself to be unworthy of the food he eats, the power he wields, and even the breath he draws. No amount of scourging or prayer makes the feeling fade — only in doing the Lord's work does he ever feel comfortable.

System: The character's Nature immediately changes to Penitent or Fanatic upon receiving this Curse. He cannot regain Conviction through prayer, *only* through victory or risking Conviction.

Pain of the flock (Judge)

This potent Interdiction forges a deep and abiding connection between the inquisitor and those he is sworn to protect — the followers of Christ. Whenever the afflicted inquisitor observes a Christian

being physically hurt, he feels an empathetic tug of anguish, as if sensing the poor soul's pain as it cries out. He may even succumb to this pain himself, if he witnesses enough unmitigated suffering without putting a stop to it.

System: Anytime the cursed inquisitor witnesses one of the flock being physically harmed by another, he must immediately make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). Failing this roll causes the character to suffer "sympathy pain" in tune with the subject's suffering. For example, if the inquisitor witnessed a mortal's hand being crushed in a vise, he too would feel a terrible pain spread through the muscle and bone of his own hand. Although the inquisitor suffers no real damage, he is just as stunned by the pain as is the actual victim. Each time thereafter that the inquisitor watches the subject suffer an attack that results in health level loss (without trying to put a stop to it), the character must make the roll again. Spending a Willpower point will allow the character to steel himself against what he is being forced to watch, but this expenditure is good only for the subject in question, and even then only for the remainder of the scene. After this time, he must



spend another Willpower point or be forced once again to feel the subject's pain and suffering.

For each Willpower roll failed, the inquisitor feels as though he had taken an illusory health level of damage, applying an equivalent penalty to all his dice pools. Thus, if the character fails a total of four Willpower rolls in a scene due to this Curse, he will suffer a – 2 penalty to all rolls he makes thereafter (from being "Mauled"), even though he is physically unhurt. The character may erase these illusory wound penalties through prayer, at the rate of one per hour; otherwise, they disappear at sunrise the following day.

Note that this Curse applies only to good Christians — the Flock the inquisitor is sworn to protect. Supernatural creatures and infidels can harm one another in his presence all day long without triggering the slightest bit of sympathetic discomfort.

Maledictio

The imposing and often frightfully efficient inquisitors of the House of Murnau are often given the widest berth by members of the other orders. Aside from their curious lineage, the foremost reason for this reputation lies in the unearthly and often mystifying afflictions for which these individuals are known. These Curses, collectively called Maledictio, represent the oddest of the odd in the realm of inquisitor misfortune. They are certainly the most esoteric of all Curses, running the widest gamut of possible effects.

Despite their prestige within the Inquisition, however, Murnau are often met with considerable fear by other inquisitors (as well as the laity), and they often run great risk of meeting untimely ends at the hands of their own congregation. The odd occurrences surrounding an inquisitor afflicted with Maledictio ensure one of two immediate reactions from the Flock, neither of which is very good for the cause at large — that he will either be regarded as a saint himself, or be pursued as one of the very abominations he is sworn to unearth and destroy. Given this fact, it is no wonder that many inquisitors of House Murnau are loath to leave the company of their fellows for very long.

allure of Gentle Bades (Acolyte)

As has been said, the House of Murnau has a noted reputation among inquisitor orders — one that comes from a number of sources, most of which are unsettling in nature. This Curse, often called simply "the Allure," is one of the most common

among Murnau and, truth be told, is one of the main reasons for their widespread notoriety.

An inquisitor cursed with the Allure becomes something of a magnet to weaker-willed members of the Flock, many of whom see him as the earthly voice of God himself, sent to deliver the masses from the oppressive yoke of damnation, ignorance and ruin. Such mortals hang on every word uttered by the inquisitor and often follow him wherever he goes, preaching the gospel of his righteousness and grace. Such attention is rarely a boon, however, and many inquisitors "gifted" with the Allure soon find themselves praying for succor from the incessant and often unnerving adulation of the Flock. Some are even martyred for their role as (albeit unwilling) idols to the poor and downtrodden.

System: Inquisitors with the Allure stand out in a crowd of mortals, making concealment all but impossible. Only by mystically shielding the inquisitor from sight (with an appropriate Blessing) can the character hope to move among the Flock unmolested or even unnoticed. All rolls involving Stealth receive a +2 difficulty.

Company of Wolves (Acolyte)

The inquisitor has a particularly powerful aura where God's lesser creations are concerned, resulting in a tendency to attract the (usually) unwanted attention of certain members of the animal kingdom. This aura is in no way under the inquisitor's control, and he must find ways to manage his "followers" on his own. If left unchecked, the inquisitor's popularity may well result in serious problems for folk in his proximity.

System: Typically, the character finds himself the subject of fascination for a particular species of animal. This preference comes from nothing so much as a kinship they feel with the character; thus, one may be able to tell a great deal about an inquisitor from the type of animal he tends to attract. This species preference, however, can change depending on the inquisitor's geographic location, or even his mood. In other words, an inquisitor who attracts wolves cannot simply move to a desert climate and think himself free of his Curse. Once at his new locale (indeed, even once he has embarked along the road there), he finds he has become the center of worship for a new and different species, though the personality kinship is still likely to be present. In the earlier situation, for example, the traveling character might find himself the icon of all jackals in the new area, instead of wolves. The animals approach the character as closely as possible, but never acts uncharacteristically; that is, they still hunt prey and flee from attackers. Characters using the Noah's Favor Orison on such animals feel only an odd sense of patience, as though the creatures are waiting for something....

Devil's Bargain (Advocate)

One of the most curious (as well as infamous) of Maledictio, the nefarious arrangement known as the Devil's Bargain forces the afflicted inquisitor to test his luck daily against otherworldly forces — a spiritual gamble, as it were, the result of which will lead the inquisitor either to ruin or to reward at each and every turn. Although a lucky inquisitor may find his fortunes surprisingly salutary on occasion, the source of his good luck is nonetheless a Curse, and sooner or later odds are bound to catch up with him, forcing him to pay the price for his earlier gains.

System: Every game session, the Storyteller sets aside a pool of bonus dice that are offered up to the inquisitor for use with any roll, divisible by any means the character desires and usable at any time during game play. This pool is equal to the character's highest Superior Virtue rating. These dice, however, are truly a devil's bargain: If the player fails to make a success with any bestowed die, he must immediately expend a point of either Willpower or Conviction for each failure, as the Curse comes to claim its due. Thus, the higher the character's Superior Virtue, the more dice he may call upon for extra power, and thus, the more rope he is given with which to potentially hang himself.

The crux of this Curse rests in the fact that the character cannot opt to ignore these bonus dice entirely. At the end of any given session, any unused bonus dice "spend themselves," resulting in the immediate loss of an equal amount of Conviction and/or Willpower. Thus must the character face down his or her demons each and every day. Note, however, that a legitimate success gained with a bonus die is just as good as any other.

Mark of the Beast (Advocate)

This simple little Curse has been the death of more than one member of House Murnau, and the order has become increasingly concerned with its appearance among their number in recent years. Upon acquiring this Curse, the inquisitor develops any one of a number of subtle but nonetheless troubling physical deformities. Common growths include (in order of increasing rarity) a third nipple,

slightly red-tinged irises, mysterious blood-etched tattoos, or even a small pair of bony bumps set just above the eye ridge. It is important to note that none of these protrusions are truly obvious or even overt in many cases; most can be (and often are) explained away as birthmarks or unfortunate scars. Needless to say, the discovery of some of these growths is likely to stir up trouble, and many Murnau quickly come up with ways of disguising or otherwise diverting attention away from their marks, simply as a survival tactic. Some even resort to self-mutilation in order to hide their unfortunate taints.

System: In addition to the obvious dangers involved in being an inquisitor walking around with a third nipple, the changes wrought by this Curse (whatever the specifics are) result in a permanent reduction of the character's Appearance score by one. (Obviously, this applies only if the viewer is capable of seeing or otherwise sensing the deformity.) Although self-mutilation and various mystical remedies can mar and even remove the growth for a while, such measures are temporary at best and the growth always returns, given time. Terrifyingly enough, this Curse is often encountered multiple times on the same individual, and a number of Murnau possess Mark of the Beast as their only Advocate-level Curse — regardless of how many Advocate-level Curses they may have acquired.

Personal Adversary (Judge)

Upon the acquisition of this Curse, the inquisitor suddenly becomes plagued by the machinations of a tiny, shadowy imp — often called a Yattering. This new companion haunts the poor soul day and night thereafter, giving him criminally bad advice, messing about in her things and generally making life miserable for her. An inquisitor's Yattering is invisible, intangible and inaudible — nonexistent in every way to everyone but the inquisitor herself, and no amount of cajoling or conniving will get the little beast to go away before he is ready. No two Yatterings are quite the same, and many tend to bear features similar to the inquisitor to whom they have been "assigned."

System: The Storyteller is free to make this little terror as annoying or as accommodating as he wishes, with two simple but important caveats: First, the Yattering is there to challenge and to test the inquisitor, not to aid her; the imp is not forbidden from assisting his "charge" per se, but its help is never free. Second, the Yattering must leave the inquisitor alone during the hours between sunrise and sunset;

he may appear and even speak to the inquisitor at any time, to be sure, but he cannot actively involve himself in the inquisitor's affairs until nightfall. But after that, the gloves are off, and Storytellers are encouraged to be as fiendish as they feel will add to the overall enjoyment of the game and/or the furtherance of the story.

Common Yatterings stand about two feet tall, possess features similar to those of the inquisitor and are capable of taking any action of which the character himself is capable. This connection ends at powers, however: Yatterings possess no holy Blessings. They do, however, often have their own collections of odd quirks and abilities, the number of which is quite curiously dependent upon the potency of the inquisitor to whom they are attached (the Yattering of a powerful and respected elder in the sect would have access to a wide array of minor effects). Note, however, that no Yattering is capable of causing direct damage to any living creature, no matter how powerful the little imp is.

Stigmata

For decades now the definitive marks of the mysterious Red Order, this collection of physical afflictions bears the dubious distinction of carrying the burden of all inquisitor Curses, as far as the Flock is concerned. When mortals think of the "curses" borne by all servants of God in the Inquisition, they conjure images of bloody brows, holey palms and the like. In short, they think of the Stigmata (as they know them) — the wound marks and sufferings of the Passion of Christ.

In truth, the Stigmata — as an inquisitor Curse - are rarely found outside the Red Order. In fact, these afflictions are so deeply tied to the order that many question their true origins. Some believe that these Curses are nothing less than divine retribution, stemming from some secret, forbidden relationship the order maintains with the Adversary himself. The Red Monks themselves decry this postulation vehemently, maintaining that suffering from these afflictions is the surest sign of the depth of the order's holiness — as it is with all proper saints and martyrs. In the end, few can argue the severity of these Curses and even fewer would trade their own misfortunes for the terrible sentences pronounced upon the members of the order. But learned scholars outside the order do wonder why wounds that bear no resemblance to the wounds of Christ appear just as often in the order....

Boiled in Spame (acolyte)

The inquisitor develops a series of grotesque boils all over his body, making movement and fine manipulation of objects a tiresome and painful prospect indeed. This series of growths follows no pattern, although most who develop this Curse tend to amass the bulk of them on the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet. Some pop of their own accord and seep pus freely thereafter, whereas others simply swell to agonizing dimensions without offering the slightest surcease from the discomfort they cause.

System: The presence of the noxious collection of pustules hampers the character's activity, imposing a difficulty penalty of +1 to all Dexterity rolls involving fast movement or fine manipulation. In addition, the character's effective Appearance rating is lowered by one point at all times that any such boils are visibly apparent.

Laskedin Judgment (Acolyte)

Upon acquisition of this Curse, the inquisitor's back becomes a latticework of crisscrossed marks, as though he had recently been the subject of a terrible caning or whipping. Only by leaving these marks exposed to the air may the poor soul find any sort of relief from the terrible pain they cause him.

System: The agony caused by the lashes is (understandably) distracting to the character, imposing a constant level of discomfort on his tortured form. Each time the character wishes to exert himself physically (such as to swing a sword), he suffers a –2 dice penalty to his dice pool. However, his player may roll Stamina (difficulty 7) to mitigate the effects of this pain on his performance, with each success reducing the penalty by one. Each such roll applies to all physical actions taken for the remainder of the scene.

Crownedby Thorns (Advocate)

Like Christ on the cross, the inquisitor suffers from a ring of small puncture wounds stretching from the forehead around to the back of his head. This circle of lesions marks the individual as someone unusual (to say the least), making casual interaction difficult as long as they remain unconcealed. In addition, the head wounds periodically erupt in active blood flow, obscuring the inquisitor's vision and terrifying all those around him.

System: Unless the character takes pains to conceal the ring of scars (beneath a turban, for example), all Social rolls are made at a +2 difficulty due to their startling effect on all those around him.

Additionally, these tiny wounds reopen whenever the character is faced with spiritual defeat. Whenever the player fails a roll on which he has risked Conviction, the wounds open to send blood down his face and into his eyes. For the remainder of the scene, or until the wounds heal (whichever happens first), the character suffers a +2 difficulty to all vision-based Perception rolls. If this happens during combat, the character suffers a -2 to his initiative rating for the remainder of the scene.

Marked by the Cross (Advocate)

The inquisitor's wrists (or palms in some cases) and ankles all develop an identical rounded, patchwork scar. These scars become active wounds whenever the inquisitor's moral resolve fails him.

System: Whenever the character fails any roll involving his primary Superior Virtue, all four scars suddenly open and begin to bleed profusely. Unlike some other Stigmata bloodlettings, this occurrence is extremely painful and the character cannot grip items or even walk properly until the effect subsides and the wounds close. Each turn in which the character tries to handle an object (even lifting a cross) or to move any faster than a slow hobble, the player must succeed on a Stamina + Faith roll (difficulty 6). Otherwise, the character immediately loses a health level (this damage is considered bashing). The effect persists for the remainder of the scene or until the wounds are healed, whichever occurs first.

Speared by Destiny (Judge)

This vicious Curse, the most grievous of Stigmata, causes the inquisitor's side to split open in a painful echo of the impalement of Christ. This wound, which never closes, serves as a constant reminder to the accursed of Jesus' final moments on the cross. As with other Stigmata, this gaping wound flows slowly but steadily, until it gradually stains the individual's clothing and anything else with which it is in contact with a thin, watery blood.

System: Once this Curse is acquired, the character immediately drops to the Injured health level as his side tears open with the force of a mighty spear strike. This loss is permanent and cannot be healed by normal means; mystical arts (including certain Blessings) may temporarily heal these lost health levels, but the wound nonetheless reopens every afternoon at three o'clock. Although the wound flows freely at all times, the blood loss is mystical in

nature and does not result in any further loss of life for the accursed character.

Visitations

The Sisters of St. John are often noted for their mysterious and often awe inspiring visions, trances and imaginings. They are widely regarded as the oracles and seers of the Inquisition, but many secretly wonder whether the Sisters are being exposed to visions better left unseen. A common impression among those outside the order is that there is a causal relationship between Curses and madness, that the acquisition of the enigmatic Sisters' Curses leads directly to mental instability. Although this statement may be true after a fashion, it is not entirely accurate. In fact, for the Sisters of St. John, madness is a means of actually *escaping* the worst effects of their order's frightful afflictions.

Book of Revelations (Acolyte)

Each night while the inquisitor sleeps, a new image of Judgment Day fills her restless mind, driving all peace and respite from her nighttime rest. Only through sheer force of will do the strongest Sisters manage to avert the worst effects of these visions to rise rested the morning after. Despite their relentless dread, many Sisters view these terrible insights as the price they must pay to fulfill their role in the final conflict with the Adversary.

System: Each morning when the character awakens, her player must roll Willpower (difficulty 6) to determine how well the inquisitor rested the night before. If she fails this roll, the character earns a difficulty modifier of +3 to all rolls involving a Mental Attribute attempted throughout the following day. For each success gained on the roll, however, this penalty is reduced by one. Thus, with three successes the Sister has rested well enough to function normally.

The Gloaming (Acolyte)

The gloaming is the twilight of the day, the period between the darkness and the light. It's the magical time between the ending of the day's long work and the entrance into the magical world that lies at the edge of mundane. The gloaming symbolizes the intertwining of forces that gives life to the power of imagination. Among the Sisters of St. John, the term is also used to refer to the brief period of unease between worlds that occurs as the tranquil light of day gives way to nightfall. For a Sister to be caught "in the gloaming" is to be likewise caught between two worlds — as the earthly

world of light loses power and the world of spirit and shadow takes hold.

System: At dusk on every day of her life, at the precise moment when the sun dips below the horizon, the inquisitor has a chance to become caught in the gloaming. The player must immediately roll Willpower (difficulty 7). If roll succeeds, she slips into a sort of spiritual trance as her worldly essence becomes one with the spiritual. Until night has fully fallen (for the next hour or so), she is completely unaware of her physical surroundings, concentrating instead on the world of magic and spirits. Only the causation of actual physical pain will snap her drifting essence back to reality.

It is important to note that the Gloaming is not merely a transcendental state of mind but an actual supernatural shift. While her senses roam this other world, the character can and will be receptive to the overtures and communications of ghosts. She can see them move, hear their cries and even communicate with them (albeit on a primal, empathetic level). Unfortunately, she also becomes visible to malevolent spirits as well, and any who wish her harm are free to do so while she is trapped in this state; moreover, most Sisters lack the occult knowledge required to do anything to resist such assaults actively. Nonetheless, many believe the experience to be well worth its cost. Such Sisters view the gloaming as no Curse at all, but rather as a blessing from beyond.

Curse of the Scribe (Advocate)

This curious Curse turns the afflicted inquisitor into an automatic writer, a person who enters deep trances and scribbles various and sundry eldritch etchings upon walls, floors or even upon her own skin — whatever is handy — until such time as the spirits she is channeling are finished speaking through her.

System: Where and when the accursed character enters an automatic writing trance is largely up to Storyteller discretion, but as a general rule, the mental state of the inquisitor plays the most pivotal role. Extreme emotional states tend to open the character's mind and soul to the whims of nearby spirits more easily than when she is simply engaged in normal activity. At times when the mind is relaxed and at ease, or when it is unusually agitated or unsteady, spirits have the best chance to open the strongest connections with a mortal host. (a character in the gloaming — see above — likewise stands a good chance). At these times, the Storyteller may



call for the player to make a Willpower roll with a variable difficulty (usually determined by a combination of factors, including but not limited to the strength of the intruding spirit). Add a difficulty modifier of +2 to this roll (maximum 10) if the character is Callous at the time. If this roll succeeds, the character may opt to stop the trance before it even starts; she steels her will against the call of the spirits, denying them access to her body for a time. If the roll fails, however, she immediately enters a trance and begins free writing with whatever implements are handy. Although automatic writing trances are mercifully short (most of the time), there is no stopping a trance once it has begun, short of knocking the inquisitor unconscious or driving away the spirit in residence.

Glossolalia (Advocate)

For some Sisters, the connections they occasionally forge with the spirit world are often left open, like conversations in which the listener has drifted off to sleep but the speaker speaks on, unawares. In cases such as this, the inquisitor often then becomes the conduit for all manner of messages from the other side, and cannot even control when or how she will be forced to relate them.

System: At times when the character is emotionally agitated, or whenever she is in an area where spirits are particularly active, the Storyteller may call upon her player to make a Willpower roll (variable difficulty, as with Curse of the Scribe above). If the player fails this roll, the character immediately begins babbling uncontrollably in ancient and indecipherable languages, often to the exclusion of all else. Rarely is the character aware of her surround-

ings while this happens, and many who view such an occurrence often believe at first that she is possessed (which isn't very far from the truth). This rambling supernatural rant persists until the end of the scene, or until the character is rendered unconscious, whichever occurs first.

Spirit Tithe (Judge)

This Curse imposes a heavy duty on the inquisitor for all interactions she must make with creatures not of this earth, taxing her spiritual reserves with the intensity of the communion. For those Sisters who are particularly involved in the Fight, this can mean a serious drain on their physical and mental reserves, or for some even death.

System: Anytime the character makes contact with a demon, ghost, spirit or other unearthly creature by any means, be it through touch, a Blessing or even through another Curse, the player must immediately roll Piety (difficulty 8); failure taxes the character's soul one Willpower point. Thankfully, this roll (and possible expenditure) need be made only once for each creature encountered. In addition, this roll needs to be made only if there is direct contact with the abomination; she must touch it or otherwise be affected by it somehow (or vice versa) over the course of the encounter. Such an expenditure lasts for the scene. If by some chance she goes on to encounter directly another abomination in the next scene, her player will have to make the roll again. And if for some reason the Willpower point cannot be spent, the character must give up a portion of her own life essence to complete the connection, resulting in the loss of a health level (which is considered bashing damage, but it cannot be soaked).



Honothave time to be subtle.

The two children, giggling and playing, blushing and panting in the grass together, must give of themselves for me. I circle high above them, my wings aching,

the great hunger inside me crying out for their souls.

I could make them mine and leave them alive, of course. They are both old enough to make such decisions, and even if they weren't, when the boy has his way (and the girl is only moments away from acquiescing, I sense) they have full hold over their own souls. But I don't have the energy to assume a form that wouldn't horrify them. I swoop lower, and the girl rolls over on her back and lets the boy lift her skirts.

Suddenly, I feel the urge to linger.

Much to do, once I've fed and rested. I need to find another host — I had to sacrifice my last body to escape that damned inquisitor. Brother Giordano Nicola d'Arzenta, do not think I have forgotten you! But I could not stand before you and so many others, not in the breaking light of dawn.

Even demons fear the points of swords, at times. Even demons can die.

I consider perching and waiting for them to finish, but then I decide otherwise. The boy, atop his lover, thrusts his hips forward and I feel her change as her virgin blood stains her dress. She is no longer a child. Even now her blood changes, her taste changes, her very soul changes. The boy changes too, of course, but it isn't nearly so pronounced for men. Men take nothing new upon themselves when they enter the act of love for the first time, but women do. And they remember. They remember pain and love and longing, and they remember it forever. A woman's first lover shapes her forever. This girl was fortunate; her first lover is considerate, if a bit clumsy.

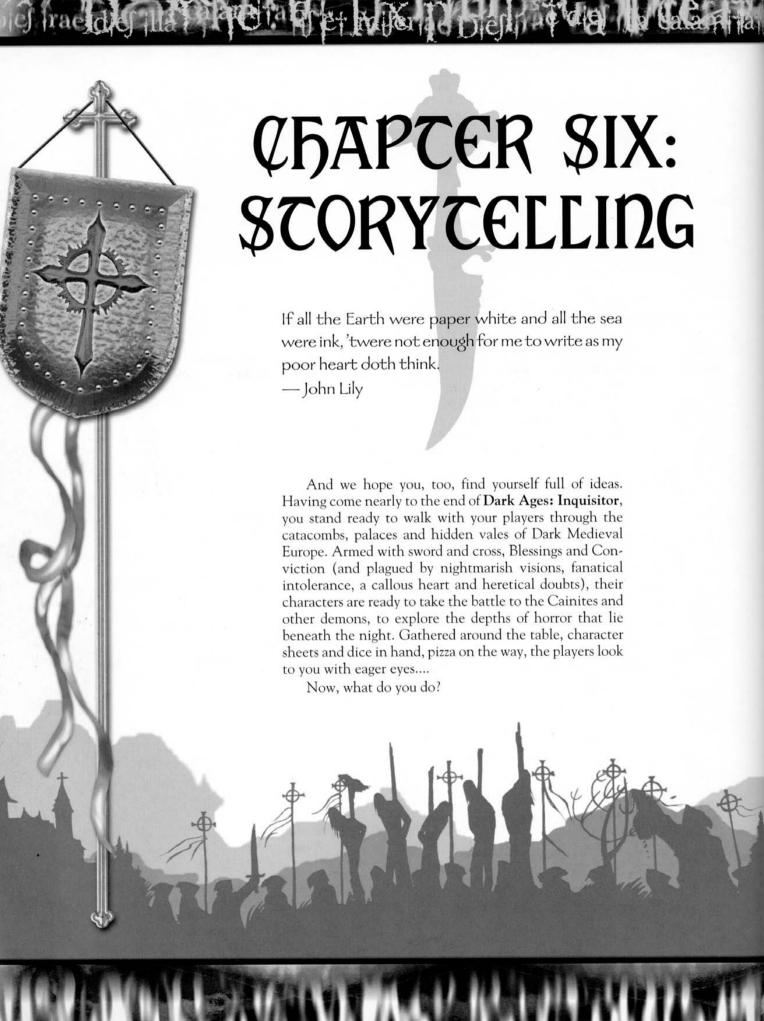
Her good fortune makes little difference, of course.

I swoop in and pull the boy up from his lover's grasp. My teeth crush his skull before he knows what happened. The woman screams. She attempts to pray, but cannot find the words. She still bleeds, slightly, and I can smell it, even with the boy's life coursing down my throat, I can smell it. I haven't had a virgin in so long, and I've never taken a girl so soon after her deflowering. Were I human, I would become aroused. The sensation of hunger is not dissimilar, and I can feel hunger.

I drop the boy's body and wipe his precious blood from my mouth. Tomorrow someone will find their bodies and I dearly hope it is Brother Giordano, on his way back from Compostela, the self-righteous bastard. Pilgrims? They know nothing of leaps of faith.

I land, and the girl screams loud and long. What would this do to her perceptions of love and lust, I wonder, if I let her live?

It hardly matters. I won't.



This chapter helps answer that question. It contains advice for the Storyteller on how to create new tales centered on the Inquisition and provides tools to use when weaving these exciting stories. Beginning with a general treatment of the roles of the Storyteller and the players, it moves to specific discussions of the techniques used to construct a chronicle and the art of storytelling a game of horror set at a more human scale. It ends with three sample story ideas to jump-start your own chronicles.

Use these tools well, and you in turn will provide your players with the instruments they need to help create a chronicle that not only entertains, but one you will all remember fondly long after it is over.

firm Ground

All strong structures are built atop firm foundations, and the same is true of a **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** chronicle. Storytellers will benefit from a brief discussion of the basic roles of the Storyteller herself, her troupe of players, and those things that make the shared creation of stories special, as opposed to just rolling dice.

The Storyteller

The Storyteller has several key roles in the game. While the players need merely consider their characters, the Storyteller must look after an entire world. It may at first seem daunting to be the characters' five senses, the interpreter of physical reality in the chronicle and the voice of everyone they meet, but, broken into its constituent parts, the challenge becomes less fear-some and more exciting.

Giving life (or unlife) to everyone the characters meet during the chronicle is one of the true joys of storytelling. Just change a voice, invent a signature phrase, or affect a different mannerism — one simple change is often all that's needed — and the Storyteller breathes reality and depth into any encounter, from the village charcoal-maker to a Lasombra elder. This is when storytelling is the most rewarding for the Storyteller, the time when she can enter the story directly and join in the play. Dialogue between Storyteller characters and the troupe's characters helps bring the players into the story that much more, and helps them see the characters with whom they interact as people, rather than as "Storyteller characters." If those characters become even slightly real to the players, anything that happens to or with them elicits a response and keeps them motivated (which is ultimately what you want as Storyteller).

The Storyteller is also the players' window to the world of the chronicle. She describes all they see, hear, smell, touch and taste. The feel of moss on a church wall, the smell of a rotting corpse and the sounds of the flickering torch flames that illuminate it — it is the Storyteller's special responsibility to convey this information to the players so they can more easily suspend their disbelief. In **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, the Storyteller's challenge is to describe the world the characters inhabit while maintaining the sense of mystery and dread that must accompany any foray into the Dark Medieval night.

In a sense, the Storyteller is supreme, for she determines and establishes the physical and metaphysical laws of the characters' world. Will fire inevitably drive off vampires, or will this be subjected to a throw of the dice, as modified by the character's abilities? Are the visions of the Sisters of St. John genuine Holy Sight or the colorful preludes to a future of madness? By establishing which rules in this book stand, change or are eliminated altogether, the Storyteller decides what is "real." The same is true for rulings made during the session. The Storyteller is obligated to be fair and consistent in her decisions, of course, lest the players feel that she is simply on a power trip and has no interest in building a chronicle about their characters.

Finally, the Storyteller must be an author and architect. She plots the general course of the chronicle and devises the schemes of the characters she controls, their hopes, desires and fears. The Storyteller charts the chronicle's sequence of events and its overall goal. She might feel an almost-overwhelming urge to make sure the players stick to her brilliant plot, but she should resist this urge. If the players come up with a brilliant scheme to foil or even destroy the Baali Methuselah before the Storyteller had planned for it, let it work. Forcing players' characters down a narrow, predetermined path is a sure way to make them feel insignificant when they are supposed to be central to the story.

So, while she creates the overall direction of the chronicle, the Storyteller needs to develop that fine sense of balance that lets her tell the tale she wishes, but allow the players to direct it, too. Taking heed of the advice in this chapter and putting it to practice is a good start.

The Troupe

Listen to what they are telling you; take it into account when designing a chronicle. In the end, the purpose of a game of **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** is that

everyone have fun creating a memorable story together. If all they do is march through your grand drama with no contributions of their own, they might as well have stayed home and watched a movie. Players come together to have some of their own needs met, whether it's to vicariously explore a horrific setting, solve puzzles or simply to enjoy helping create a satisfying story. Part of your job is to recognize those needs and see that, in some measure, they are met.

Giving them everything would be too easy, however. Chronicles without any challenges to overcome are dull and, if the characters don't run the risk of defeat, then victory feels hollow. Where would be the fun if the head of the Crimson Curia surrendered without a struggle and handed over the names of all the vampires of Rome? The game would quickly grow boring and the Storyteller would have to rapidly escalate the rewards just to maintain the troupe's interest. That can only last so long, though, before the players aren't impressed by killing their 50th Methuselah and want to play something else.

So, give them what they want, but make them work for it. Remember, the Inquisition's foes do all they can to avoid the pyre or the stake. Mortal heretics lie, dissemble, rebel or flee, while Cainites and their ghouls do all they can in the name of self-preservation. They stymie the inquisitors any chance they can get. They use blackmail, seduction, corruption, political influence and outright violence to defeat the characters. Toss whatever obstacles you can in the troupe's way; make them challenging but not insurmountable. Neophyte inquisitors taking on an elder vampire should expect to have their heads handed to them. Find the sweet spot between challenge and reward, however, and you are well on your way to the greatest compliment a Storyteller can receive: A troupe eager to come back for the next session.

a Tale Well Told

In a Dark Ages: Inquisitor chronicle, Story-teller and troupe come together to create a story and, by incorporating universal themes and symbols, you can give yours a satisfying depth and texture. Take the dramas you see in everyday life, whether on television, in the newspapers or even in person, and use those elements that are their essence to give a ring of truth or believability to your characters and plots. The Cathar the inquisitors put to the question in a village could be no more than a spear-carrier, there to say his lines and then walk off or die — or you could take the time to think why he became a

heretic. Was he disgusted by the corruption of the local priests? Did one of them slake his lust with the poor man's wife? Or was faith a motivating factor in his turn to heresy? The modern corporate executive who misleads shareholders while robbing the company blind serves as a model for a bishop who uses his see merely to enrich himself. Use what you perceive around you and you give your players something to hook onto, something that helps them comprehend and relate to this alien world you are showing them.

Take advantage of the timeless themes of mythology and the great dramas, too. There is a reason these stories resonate down to the present day — they illustrate themes we all know (or want to believe) are true. The overweening hubris of Oedipus, the love beyond death Isis felt for Osiris, the blindness to predicted disaster that led the Trojans to ignore Cassandra, the towering ambitions of Lady Macbeth — these and other mythic constants are your tools. Use them to lend substance to your chronicles. Is the character's superior in the Order of St. Theodosius falling victim to pride, delving into forbidden secrets in the belief that only he can stop the werewolf menace? Is the Prince of Ancona consumed by a jealousy worthy of Othello, unjustly suspecting his childe of being seduced by a priest of the Cainite Heresy? Is he thus willing to risk contact with the Inquisition and possible destruction to expose his rivals and win back — or have revenge upon — the object of his desire? Use of the classic tropes that make a memorable myth or tale can make your chronicles memorable, too.

Chronicle

Designing a Dark Ages: Inquisitor chronicle may seem at first an overwhelming task. Where do you start? How much should you detail in advance? Is this a chronicle that deals with grand plots and high drama over a span of years, or does it cover the events in one small barony at Christmas? Will the characters be solely focused on rooting out the demonic menace, or will they also face more mundane problems of Church corruption or mortal heresy? What will you do to maintain the mood of the story over many sessions? Thinking about these and so many more questions can leave a Storyteller dizzy. The material that follows breaks creating a chronicle down into easily digestible chunks and gives advice to set you on the right path.

first Considerations

Before you set pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, before you decide whether the Count Vorlach is a werewolf or if your main theme will be the test of religious faith, you must attend to some basics first. Take care of these before you do your detailed design work, and you will find the rest of your tasks much easier.

Talk With the Mayers

Dark Medieval chronicles touch upon themes and subjects that can elicit strong reactions in players and Storytellers alike. Religion, sexuality, ethnicity, history and politics are all topics that people may be sensitive to, even if they don't realize it until confronted with them. Think of things near and dear to you and how you react when they are challenged or attacked, or someone made a remark you felt was insensitive. Did someone make an off-handed quip about homosexuals, not knowing that a dear relative of yours was gay? Did you get defensive? Or did you tell an "Italian joke" not knowing the Italian-American woman with you had heard them a million times and was sick to death of them? Did the intensity of her reaction startle you?

By centering the chronicle on mortals and their beliefs and institutions, Dark Ages: Inquisitor has the potential to touch upon very sensitive topics. By its very nature as a historical horror game, it deals with corruption, venality and hideous secrets behind things we hold dear. To succeed at inspiring horror in the players, however, it must touch something they themselves can relate to. Investigating rumors of a cult of Cainite Heretics on the Marseilles waterfront, the Murnau inquisitor discovers street children being raped as part of an initiation into the cult. What if the player or someone close to him was the victim of childhood abuse? Attending Mass in Zurich, a Knight of Acre realizes that the communion chalice is filled with blood and that the priest is preaching that Christ was a vampire. What if the player is a devout Catholic?

More so than other games, a horror chronicle requires forethought and mutual consent and understanding to work well. Before designing the story, talk to your players. Find out what their boundaries are. Some won't mind. They are there to explore the depths of darkness, to get that rush of adrenaline we all feel when faced with something dangerous and evil. Details heighten his experience, giving him something dramatic to struggle against or be tempted by. With a player like this, you can probably push the envelope and use graphic elements of horror in the chronicle.

With others, however, perhaps the majority, there are lines you should be careful not to cross. For

these people, the best horror is hinted at and left "off-camera." The shadows playing on the wall as Bela Lugosi skins Boris Karloff alive in The Black Cat are enough for them; they don't need to see the actual vivisection. This is why the Storyteller must talk with her players first, to find out their comfort levels, which themes are best handled indirectly or even not at all. Do this beforehand and you may save yourself from a disastrous evening.

There is another reason to talk with your players, too. You may have conceived of a chronicle that deals with a long, subtle investigation of devil worship set against the background of the crusades in Spain. Combat will be rare, and negotiations and tests of religious faith will predominate. Then, when the game begins and you meet the characters for the first time — your players have all created combat monsters looking to stake anything that moves.

Not good.

Instead, take the time to find out what sort of chronicle the players want. What types of characters and plots most excite them? Be sure to add some of these elements to the chronicle. If you still want to explore those themes you had in mind, then suggest a few changes to the characters so they won't be completely out of place in play. Checking with your players first will help you design a chronicle satisfying to all — yourself and your troupe.

Scope: Mace, Time and Power

Before the chronicle opens, you need to decide its scope. How large an area will it cover? How much time will pass until it reaches its conclusion — if it ever does? Will the characters be mainly at a low level of power, dealing with ghouls, heretical townsmen, and relatively weak Cainites? Or will they be among the mightiest in their orders, preparing for the day when they trap a Lasombra Methuselah in his lair? These are questions solely in the Storyteller's domain, and you should answer them at the start of your design work. Each option has its benefits and unique features.

Restricting your chronicle to a small geographical area allows you to design the chronicle's setting in some detail, giving flesh to more of its inhabitants, mortal or otherwise, and taking advantage of its history and legends. Players become more interested in the setting because their characters are more closely tied to it. It may even be the inquisitors' home. The Storyteller can devise an intricate web of relationships and plots, and her players will come to know the places and people of this corner of Dark Medieval Europe in a much more

intimate way than happens in chronicles with a grand sweep. For chronicles at this scale, the local church is more fitting than the grand cathedral, while the forlorn tower on the ridge housing a noble family sunk into decay works better than the vast palace filled with hellspawn.

On the other hand, chronicles with a grand sweep are dramatic because of the vastly different locales they encompass. A story that moves from the spice-scented streets of Jerusalem to the foggy highlands of Scotland on a quest for the Holy Grail is memorable because of the rich variety of images it conjures. Such places are also more appropriate for chronicles that deal with grand themes or plots, because the Storyteller must paint each location with broad brush-strokes. From quests to recover a holy relic to a continent-spanning crusade to redeem the soul of the Church by unraveling the Cainite Heresy wherever it is found, epic themes are well suited to an epic scale.

The Storyteller should also consider scale of time in her chronicle. A story spanning a single season or year works well with a chronicle set in a limited area, and the tight focus in space and time helps build the tension rapidly. As in a good short story, subplots and distractions are kept to a minimum as the tale will soon be coming to a climax. Chronicles limited to a very short time should have no distractions, but those chronicling a few years can have a small number to provide variety and some complexity. The end in either case, when it comes, should tie up loose ends and provide a definite result and closure — either success or failure.

Open-ended chronicles have no definite end in mind. They follow the evolution of the characters, their successes and failures, triumphs and tragedies, over years and even decades. While goals major and minor may be accomplished (or missed), the game itself never comes to a conclusion. New characters replace those who have died or retired, while more powerful enemies fill the shoes of old, defeated foes. Although the open-ended chronicle allows for the development of intricate relationships, plots, and side-stories, a wise Storyteller will have a climax in reserve, lest her game break down in boredom as "more of the same."

Scope of power is a special consideration for **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** Storytellers. New Storytellers may be eager to throw the biggest and scariest opponents in the system at the characters, just because they're such exciting foes. Remember that, for all their holy powers, for all their True Faith and

Conviction, the characters are still mortal in a land filled with predators. Scale the foes appropriately, limiting the game at first to challenges that will be difficult, but not insurmountable. Once you have a better feeling for Storytelling mortal inquisitors, then turn up the power.

focus

Set aside for a moment all those thoughts you've had about your chronicle. Forget about plots and schemes, ignore questions of scope and mood, don't even think of designing the ghoul cardinal. Ask yourself this: What is this chronicle about? What is its focus? It's not about the hunt for the creatures of the night, nor is it focused on dark tales of the corruption of Rome. The focus of the chronicle isn't anything you've created at all.

The focus is people, imaginary and real.

The chronicle you design and share with your players (and, in turn, let them redesign) is about them and their characters — all else is secondary, just window-dressing. The spotlight of the story should center on the characters. When the Cainite Prince of León feels threatened by the characters, his reactions should somehow touch on them, reminding them of their centrality. Stories should take advantage of their strengths and weaknesses, involving them by using hooks in their backgrounds. Don't make them mere observers or extras to Storyteller characters: If the Count of Champagne holds court to hear charges of witchcraft, have him involve the characters as active participants. If all the characters do is stand and watch others do exciting things while they get to hold the horses, the chronicle will be a short one, indeed.

The players and their characters are the focus of the game. While their characters take center stage in Dark Medieval Europe, the players themselves have center stage in your living room. Although your title is "Storyteller," don't hog the limelight, and don't let your characters overshadow theirs. You may have created a powerful Murnau who is important to the story, but don't let her make the players and their beloved characters superfluous — let them propose plans and take action! Don't make her so powerful and competent that the players are left wondering why their characters are even there. Share the stage with your players, even learn to stay in a supporting role, and your chronicle will prosper for it.

Theme

If the stories we tell are to be more than just a series of meaningless encounters, they need some-

thing to bind them together, like a sauce binds and blends the flavors a dish. That binding ingredient is the theme. A theme is a common thread, a specific idea that runs through the background of your chronicle. It gives a sense of unity to all that occurs over its course. Themes work best when you are subtle with them, letting the players discover what they are and drawing their own conclusions about their meaning. One of the advantages of themes is they allow you as Storyteller to maintain some control over the chronicle and its direction, without being ham-fisted about it.

Themes are not difficult to conceive. Simply look at the world around you and ask yourself what common threads you can draw between events. The medieval mind saw patterns in everything, even in events we would call random. You can do the same to give a sense of meaning and consistency to your chronicles. Many of the themes appropriate to other Dark Ages games work well with Dark Ages: Inquisitor. Does power without accountability corrupt? When you have power that sets you apart from other mortals, are you still human or do you, too, begin to look on other mortals as cattle? Can faith light the way from temptation?

While myriad themes can be put to good use in **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, there are a few that are especially appropriate. Look them over and feel free to use those that appeal to you, singly or woven together in a complex tale.

Defenders of the faith and the faithful

Murnau, Eye of God, Red Brother, Sister of St. John and Knight of Acre — five different orders, yet all wear the mantle of the secret Inquisition. They are the secret army that defends Christendom from dangers far worse than heresy and venal priests. When the Cainite Heresy corrupts a diocese, it is the shadow Inquisition that must root it out and suppress knowledge of the truth. When the internecine struggles among magi of the Hermetic Houses take lives and corrupt souls that, by right, belong to God alone, the inquisitors not only must protect the innocent, but they must do all they can to destroy the sorcerous menace.

But, there is a price to pay for being a kind of medieval action-hero. As part of an order, inquisitors have duties and responsibilities that require them to risk life, limb and soul to defend the Church and its flock — and to lose everything, if necessary. The Knight of Acre may die defending a sacred chapel from marauding werewolves or the Sister of

St. John may lose her mind seeking the key to the mysteries concealed within the perilous chapel of the Cainite Heresy. Even if the odds are overwhelming, their duty is clear: To protect and defend, no matter the cost.

Chronicles revolving around a Defenders theme will confront the characters with situations in which fulfilling their duty exacts a price and involves situations of sacrificing self for the protection of others. Like law enforcement personnel in our own time, their methods may make them unappreciated and even hated by those they protect. Why does this happen? Think about the foes the Inquisition faces: Vampires, werewolves, sorcerers, faeries and demons — and their mortal allies. An inquisitor might easily convince himself to use ruthless methods against ruthless foes: secret trials, the sudden pounding on the door, trusted friends and family turned into informants, even torture and, in extreme cases, summary executions. Although the threat posed by the Adversary might warrant all this, otherwise innocent people could still come to mistrust the inquisitors because they themselves fear being caught in the net. Inquisitors can make mistakes, and in their zeal to do God's work, they run the risk of hardening their hearts to God's children.

Devil's Choice

Everything we do in life involves choice. We see a minor crime committed: Do we intervene or walk on? The traffic light turns yellow as we near the intersection: Do we play it safe or speed up to get through, risking an accident? Its very prevalence makes choice a handy tool in the Storyteller's kit.

The necessity of choice confronts inquisitors every day and night, and their choices are more significant because of the great power they wield. An inquisitor can bring charges in ecclesiastical courts against anyone, should she believe the evidence warrants it, potentially ruining lives even if the accused is found innocent. How will the characters use their choices? Will they use power responsibly and with restraint, or will they abuse it, arrogating to themselves a prerogative of judgment that rightly belongs to God? What choices do they make in their relationship to the Church and their fellow inquisitors? Do they enthusiastically cooperate, swallow their discomfort and go along, or rebel against what they see as abuse of power? And when they meet a devoutly Christian vampire, what choice do they make then?

The special role of the inquisitor calls to mind a special kind of choice: The "Devil's choice,"

where no alternative is desirable, yet one must choose. A chronicle revolving around the Devil's choice will often face the inquisitors with the prospect of hurting or destroying something dear in the pursuit of a greater good. Cleansing the local parish of vampire- worshiping dualists might well mean leaving innocent children as orphans, as their parents burn at the stake. Rescuing a relic from Tzimisce hands could mean damning a village to destruction when the Fiends take their revenge. Let the players make the choices, and let their characters know the consequences.

Just don't overdo it. If every choice causes the players emotional agony, they may eventually choose to do nothing, since that's the least painful option. Use the Devil's choice wisely and sparingly, and it will be much more satisfying.

Trust and Betrayal

Trust is a very powerful theme, and its equally powerful counterpoint is betrayal. Think of your daily life and how many people you trust with matters minor and major: The Post Office to deliver your payments on time; the doctor to make the right diagnosis; and the priest to keep confidence of the confessional. Now think about the trust you give in life and turn it on its head. What happens when it's betrayed? What do you do and how do you feel when you discover a lover has been unfaithful or a co-worker you thought a friend blabs about your hatred of your boss?

Inquisitors deal with issues of trust at all levels. Even they need someone to confide in or rely on. They know much of the horrid truth about the corruption eating at Europe, and it weighs on their souls — can they trust their confessors? The characters must make reports to their superiors, but can they be sure that the functionary in Rome to whom the information eventually goes isn't in league with the Adversary? Even their fellow characters can be objects of trust and betrayal. And trust is a two-way affair, for those around the character must worry about him betraying their trust, too.

Chronicles centering on themes of trust and betrayal will emphasize relationships between the characters and their web of contacts in the world of the chronicle, and with each other. Confront them with situations wherein they have to endanger themselves by trusting another — or have someone place herself in jeopardy by trusting the character. When a Storyteller character commits an act of betrayal, make sure there is a reason for

it, so that the loss of trust is even more poignant. Don't forget that delicious uncertainty that comes from not knowing whether someone will betray you or not. That tension should be a subtext present throughout the chronicle.

faith

The inquisitors don't live in our modern, cynical world. Heaven and Hell, God and the Devil, demons and angels are all living, real things for a resident of 13th century Europe. Even if someone never sees or experiences them directly, he has faith that they do exist. The mortals of Europe also have faith that God will protect them against the creatures of Hell. For inquisitors and certain holy individuals, faith can become a force that provides tangible proof of Heaven's power by defeating the Devil's minions.

A chronicle with a theme of faith will test that faith at every opportunity. Inquisitors should see and hear things that rock their beliefs to the core and lead them to doubt. Has the local priest been committing the sin of incest with his niece? Do the Cathars indeed seem more holy than any Catholic clergy in the area? Have they actually worked miracles that can be ascribed only to God's intervention? How long can an inquisitor continue believe the tenets of his faith when so much he sees confounds or denies them?

Themes of faith are useful in chronicles involving any of the inquisitorial orders. A Knight of Acre may have to face overwhelming odds alone, while a Murnau may doubt that one such as he, bearing tainted blood, can ever hope for salvation. A Red Brother may find his new knowledge weakening his faith in Truth as revealed by Scripture, while a Sister of St. John wonders why a loving God sends her such horrid visions. Even one of the Oculi Dei, passive and withdrawn, can have his faith tested by the horrible things he sees, things God allows to exist.

Tests of faith should be subtle, too. It is through the accumulation of little sins that we are damned, after all. The whispered word from a shadowy contact claiming to reveal hidden truths can be as effective as seeing a dozen bishops participating in the Red Pentecost.

Separation

Inquisitors are a breed apart, and even more so are the members of the shadow Inquisition. Those they protect resent them for the questions they ask, fear them for the powers they wield, and hate them for their ability to condemn on secret evidence — or

even none at all. Though they are part of European society, they are separate, alienated from those with whom they work and live. Rumored to deal with monsters and to risk their souls with infernal knowledge, they are shunned even by their families. They are at war with the slaves of the Adversary, but they are treated with suspicion and wariness by their own — even the Church that they serve.

How must this feel to an inquisitor? A cardinal can possibly go home to his family, but what family would welcome home a Red Brother, whose studies smack of blasphemy? Chronicles emphasizing themes of separation play on this sense of difference. Members of the Inquisition are barely tolerated, once their roles are known, and interactions with Storyteller characters outside the organization should reflect this. How will the inquisitor react to fear in the eyes of her own family? With resentment? She is, after all, doing God's work and risking her life and soul. Will she reach out to break the bonds of fear that separate her from others among God's children? Or will she draw inward, accepting her different nature and bonding more closely to her fellow inquisitors even thinking she is, somehow, superior to mere mortals?

Mood

While theme provides the inner meaning to your chronicle, mood is the personality it shows the outside world. Like choices of clothing and jewelry reveal something of the wearer's personality, mood not only reveals the theme, but casts it in a certain light. A chronicle illustrating the themes of trust and friendship in an atmosphere of physical danger will have a much different feel from one that cloaks them in a mood of somber spirituality. Although themes tend to stay constant or change only infrequently in a chronicle, mood may vary as much or as little as the Storyteller wishes. It is a useful Storyteller tool, helping engage the players in the scene without telling them just how they have to play their characters. Varying the mood also helps refresh the chronicle by giving a change of pace, letting action follow somber investigation, for example, or using black humor as a contrast to a seriously deadly encounter. Try not to change the mood too often, however, lest the players never settle into the story.

Mood is best set indirectly. Reveal it through conversation with Storyteller characters or the description of a scene. Don't tell the players how their characters feel, let them instead pick it up from your clues. Rather than telling them, "The church is in rotten shape, and it depresses you," instead say, "Holes gape in the roof like rents in decaying flesh, letting the rain soak and rot what was once a house of God." They will pick up on the mood of sadness soon enough. The following are some suggested moods to add to your Storyteller's tool kit.

Dighaction

Leaping from rooftop to rooftop in the rain, hoping the tiles underfoot don't come loose before you can catch the fiend; swords against spear and fang, fighting a desperate battle in the halls of the Lateran palace to save the Pope; a bold assault against the castle of the Tremere count to try to stop a ritual before a hideous creature is loosed on the valleys below — such moments set a mood of high action. Action and immediate danger make the blood flow quicker, they bring on the adrenaline rush so many people seek in a roleplaying game. If the players are distracted or at a loss for what to do, an action scene, perhaps an ambush, is the quickest way to regain their attention and restore focus.

High action works best in moderation, as the climax to a plot or subplot in a chronicle. Though a chronicle of nothing but one action scene after another may work for some Storytellers and players, chances are that your players will burn out. Too much high action also changes the nature of **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** from a game of horror to an actionadventure game, albeit with vampires, werewolves and sorcerers. To get the best use out of high action, save it for those times when it will provide a vivid contrast to the more usual mood.

A mood of high action is most appropriate to inquisitors of the House of Murnau and the Knights of Acre, less so to the inquisitors of the Red Order. Sisters of St. John and the Oculi Dei are perhaps least-suited to this mood, though even the most contemplative characters might need to kick down the door now and then.

Bleak and Somber

This is the mood of Gothic horror. Age and decay, ruin and corruption touch everything and everyone. Most of the action takes place at night or in the shadows or, for contrast, in the heat of a blazing sun — whatever best conveys a feeling of oppression and sadness. Think of the images common to the Victorian Gothic writers (or the films based on them) and use those to set the mood: A crumbling castle on a ridge; an ancient, ivy-draped

church; or a village of withdrawn, sullen folk, suspicious of the inquisitors — and who wouldn't be?

A somber mood is fitting when you as Storyteller want to emphasize the loneliness and, perhaps, even the hopelessness of the Inquisition's struggle. A Midsummer visit to the village church, meant to be a time of rejoicing, turns into a nightmare when the beloved old priest is revealed as a heretic — or even a ghoul. All that we hold dear can be corrupted by the enemy, and even the most noble can fall.

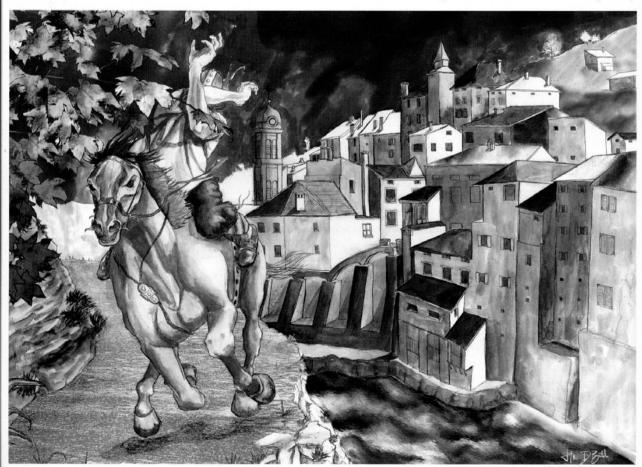
A sad, brooding tone is often the default mood for **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** chronicles. It lends itself to thoughtful chronicles where Storyteller and players can explore the implications and consequences of the roles they choose for their characters. While all character types fit with this mood, the Sisters of St. John, the Red Brothers, and the Oculi Dei are especially well-suited, though the brooding Knight of Acre and the Murnau with her family curse have their place, too.

Dark Comedy and From

It may not seem so at first, but dark humor and its relative, irony, have their roles in horror. Have you ever seen something terrible, yet laughed in spite of yourself? That isn't insensitivity (we hope), but a natural reaction to tension. Laughter is a catharsis that serves to release tension, just like crying or shouting. A trickster faerie, feeling offended by a proud Knight of Acre, might pretend to be his horse. When the Knight mounts him to chase the fleeing Tzimisce, the faerie takes him on a wild ride, bashing him against tree branches and leaping frightening chasms. The disguised faerie stops suddenly at the end, hurling the knight into an open cesspit — within sight of the Cainite's tower, but with much less dignity. You as Storyteller can use dark comedy to provide a needed tension release in your chronicles.

Irony is the sophisticated older sister of dark comedy; it plays on the discord between the expected result of a chain of events and its actual result. The Red Brother who finds himself accused of heresy for the very talents and knowledge that enabled him to defeat a cult of diabolists is an example. Irony often, but not always, has a sense of justice done, a kind of "serves you right" turn of events. Though it provokes rueful chuckling, irony is an effective tool to illustrate many themes.

Chronicles draped in this mood often use Storyteller characters as parodies of famous contemporary



figures, whether to mock them or to highlight a theme. Like high action, however, this shouldn't be overdone, lest it lose its effect. Unless you are presenting a short chronicle meant to be a black comedy for its whole length — and the players understand this — save it instead for moments when it can be used to relieve stress or provide a dramatic turn of events. Be careful, though, that it doesn't degenerate into slapstick, something that will destroy your carefully crafted horror story.

Motand Character Arc

If theme is the soul that gives meaning to a chronicle and mood is the persona it shows the world, then plot is the skeleton that gives the whole thing structure. It is the general course of events that will take place in the chronicle, the actions through which Storyteller characters will try to have their ambitions fulfilled and see them challenged. It provides the Storyteller with a road map of where she wants the chronicle to go and, if prepared right, alternate routes that still lead to the desired place while leaving the players in control of their characters.

Hand in glove with plot is the concept of the character arc. That is, how does the plot affect the character and how does he or she change in reaction to its events? Characters who change over the course of a chronicle are more entertaining than those who don't, because we watch them grow and evolve through each story, often in unexpected ways. Characters who never change, no matter how interesting when created, grow boring because their personalities are static.

"Change" in the character arc means the ways in which the character's emotions and psyche have changed, not their physical nature. That a Murnau suffers from the Mark of the Beast is less important than how he reacts to the physical alteration. Does he become more zealous in his devotion to God's Will, or does he rail against his fate? Does he look on this curse as a punishment for irredeemable failings, thus committing the sin of despair and leaving himself vulnerable to demonic lies?

What a plot and character arc should not be, however, are narrowly defined paths, restricting your players' choices to those you've already made for them. This is their story, too, and they are not just actors there to serve the director's vision. Use the events of your plot as challenges and opportunities for your players to decide how their characters will evolve. Designing a plot for a chronicle means having a fine sense, like Goldilocks, of what is too much,

what is too little, and what is just right. This section covers plot and character arc and provides advice about how to make the best use of them.

Short Story or Novel?

One of the first things you should decide on is the complexity of your chronicle's story. Is it a simple arc, leading to a single, well-defined conclusion? Perhaps, instead, you have in mind a more complex tale with many subplots and intermediate climaxes to pass through before reaching the grand resolution. Knowing this beforehand will give you an idea of the work you need to prepare, as well as letting you give your players an idea of the chronicle's duration: A single session? A few weeks or months? Indefinitely?

The single, simple story arc is the easiest for the beginning Storyteller. It allows her to focus on the basic plot without worrying about side-trips or distractions. If it is the Toreador minstrel's plan to subvert the court of Toulouse, then that is what she concentrates on, not worrying about how the plans of other Storyteller characters she has designed might affect the plot. Should the players have their characters run willy-nilly about looking for trouble, she can subtly lead them back to the story with a hint from an informant, a coincidental event, or even an inquiry from superiors asking for progress reports. What subplots or divergent threads exist are neatly tied up at the end. To do otherwise turns the short chronicle into the longer novel-type.

Short story chronicles also sport few layers between the main foe and the characters. There are few, if any intermediate enemies, and the characters come into conflict with the chief villain soon after the scenario opens. They might not realize immediately she is their antagonist, but they probably meet her near the start, which provides a satisfying closure — presuming they defeat her.

Character arcs in a short chronicle are likewise simple. The characters face one or two moments of crisis or decision, generally at the climax of the chronicle itself. Their choices here lay the foundation for their future development and provide the Storyteller with material to enrich later chronicles. How do they react to the Cathar perfecti whom they were sent to destroy, but who showed more Christian virtue than many of the Church's higher clergy? If their perceptions of their Church change, then future chronicles should play to this and allow the players to explore it further.

More complex chronicles often resemble a novel. While the chronicle is developed with an overall

goal in mind, many intervening goals, and even some unrelated digressions, must be met along the way. The players may not even know what the ultimate goal is until they are well along the plot. For example, if the ultimate goal of chronicle is the salvation of Rome and purging the Papacy of influence from the Crimson Curia, along the way the characters may have to uncover Cainite Heretics among the Cathars in Provence, break into the Abbey of St. Panteleimon to discover links to the Lateran, be distracted by an unrelated encounter with werewolves in Sardinia, and only at the end confront the ghoul who is the Pope's secretary and would himself be Pope. Character arcs in this case will have many events that could be turning points for the characters. They may be a series of smaller ones, the cumulative effect of which is a large change in the character. By the end of the chronicle, the character's goals and feeling could well be dramatically and diametrically opposed to what they were at the beginning.

While the chronicle-as-novel may have many layers of goals and intermediate foes, it does not necessarily have a definite end. It can, and such an ending would again tie up loose ends and answer questions. But it doesn't always have to do so. Defeating one major foe could lead to the discovery of another, greater foe behind him. Who was giving the ghoul in the Lateran his orders? Or unanswered questions could lead to wholly new chronicles, new paths branching from the end of the old. For example, once the ghoul cardinal is defeated, among his papers turn up references to the location of the Holy Grail itself, rumored to be hidden in a castle in the Scottish Highlands.

Once again, the game's afoot.

five Questions

Once you have decided whether the plot will be a short story or an involved novel, you still need to put it all together. The best way to do this is ask yourself the five classic questions of journalism: Who, what, when, where, and why. Answer these (in any order that pleases you) and you will quickly find yourself with a ready-to-run chronicle.

• Who? This is the major antagonist of your chronicle, along with his retainers. To find him, browse books, films or even your daily life until you find someone around whom you would like to build a story. Use the key elements of his personality to build your villain and make him stand out. Is he greedy? Vain? Violent? A suave operator? You needn't

build a full dossier. Rather, pick just the few elements you need to explain his motive and make him stand out.

Try to avoid falling into the "vampire count of the week" trap, facing the characters with one villainous monster after another — after a while, your chronicle will become stale. Depending on the scope of your chronicle (or if this is a smaller chapter of a larger story), "who" in this case could just as easily be a powerful mortal, or even the village shepherd.

• What? This is what Hitchcock called the "the MacGuffin," a device used to provide a reason for things to happen, to create motivation. What it is specifically is almost immaterial, as long as it inspires the villain to set his plot in motion. It can be the Holy Grail, the love of an innocent, vengeance, or a book that unlocks the truth behind the Cainite Heresy. Whatever it is, it is less important than the conflict it creates between characters.

We said, however, "almost immaterial." Though the "what" of your chronicle can be nearly anything fitting to Dark Medieval Europe, you will have better luck motivating your players if the MacGuffin has some meaning for their characters or personal connection to them. A Knight of Acre will be much more motivated if the "what" of the story is Constantine's sword, rather than just another bunch of Bogomils. Whatever you choose, though, make sure it is something your villain and the characters would logically want. Doing otherwise will hurt the suspension of disbelief vital to a successful chronicle (yet another reason why it is so important to know your players and their characters).

• Why? The answer to this question explains the reasons for what is happening and the reasons for everyone's involvement, inquisitors and Storyteller characters alike. It isn't as hard to answer as one might think, once the first two questions have been answered. Why has madness and heresy erupted like a plague in a Breton village? Because demons are invading the dreams of the locals, driving them to sin. The recent death of the old priest was not a heart attack, but murder. The younger priest who poisoned him and took his place has profaned the altar with his presence, giving Hell's minions their opening. Why are the characters there to put things right? The souls of the parishioners are at stake, and they must determine the cause: Simple heresy or something far worse?

Take your time to think about "why," for the answer will be at the core of your story. A good answer will give you a good chronicle, one that sees

the players eagerly leaping in. A weak reason, on the other hand, whether it's simply "orders from above" or a vampire being "nasty for nasty's sake," might well lead your characters to abandon the mission as "not worth the risk." Or worse yet, they'll follow your plot but the players simply won't care. Few things are as painful for a Storyteller as apathetic players.

Where and when are questions you answered when deciding on the chronicle's scope. Decide on a local chronicle or one with a grand sweep, and whether it covers a short period of time or much longer. Although the answers you give to the three questions above may be the same in each case, different answers to "where" and "when" will substantially the feel of your story.

Structures

You have some last decisions to make when designing your chronicle. How tightly structured will it be? Will it follow a fairly defined path to its goal, or will the characters have a choice of routes to get there? In the next few paragraphs, we discuss two main types, a hybrid and the design considerations important to each.

The Directed Chronicle

We cautioned you earlier to leave your players "room to roam," to avoid constricting their options too tightly, lest they feel like puppets. There is, however, a way to provide a more tightly plotted chronicle that still makes the players feel that their characters have some influence on the world. This involves using a chain of preordained events, things that will happen regardless of the characters' actions. Used correctly, it has the advantage of giving the players the impression that the world of the chronicle moves of its own accord. This reinforces the idea that Storyteller characters have motives and desires of their own and don't just sit around, waiting for the inquisitors to act, thus enhancing the feeling of danger by allowing the Storyteller to quicken the pace as needed. Used in this manner, the directed chronicle enhances the story's depth and believability. The players retain their sense of influence by using the information learned in each scene to put together what needs to be done to defeat the antagonist at the end.

The danger in this is doing it badly. Remember, part of the joy of a storytelling game is the thrill of feeling significant and central to the story. Plot the events too tightly, and the players will instead be left with the feeling that their characters' actions don't

matter. You must be ready, as Storyteller, to revise or completely discard your plans if the players begin taking an enthusiastic, active role in the chronicle's development.

Many Roads, One Rome

Another technique is the "many roads" approach, in which each scene contains information or clues that point to the next scene. This design is more suited to investigative or thoughtful chronicles in which the characters spend time examining, researching, and talking more than fighting — though nothing prevents finding a clue among the ashes of a burned heretic.

The "many roads" structure has advantages for both the players and the Storyteller. The Storyteller can use its flexibility to leave several ways for the same clue to reach the characters. If they miss it at one point, the can gain the same information through a similar or even the same clue planted elsewhere. Picture it as a spider's web with all the crisscrossing threads leading to the beast at the center. For example, if, in the chronicle, the characters need to be pointed toward a sorcerous cult as the source of a series of murders in Paris, the Storyteller has several options. Perhaps they ask a contact all the wrong questions, or even manage to get him killed somehow before he can pass along the clue (players can be very creative that way). The Storyteller can still pass along the information via other means: another contact, subtle clues left in artwork at the city's university or even visions sent to a Sister of St. John. Done with a deft touch, the players will never know you are guiding them toward a desired end.

For the players, this technique preserves their sense of freedom and importance to the story. Allowing them to choose their path lets them set the pace and test their abilities. There is a downside, however. If the Storyteller is truly laissez-faire or the clues too obtuse, the players may dawdle and become lost following a dead-end. Eventually they will lose interest, frustrated at not making any progress. Another problem comes from making the clues or links too easy: If every dying utterance is a neon sign flashing "go here," the benefits of the "many roads" method is lost. The players will feel themselves lead down a garden path, with no real choices. Instead, give them a puzzle or two, a conundrum to chew on and speculate about. Their choices will give you places to plant complementary clues that help them put the pieces together. In other words, keep it simple but not too simple.

Combined Methods

The best approach is to combine the good elements of both, using each when appropriate. Limit pre-planned events to crucial, dramatic moments, and use the "Many Roads" technique to give the players several ways to reach these events. This still presents a world in which events can take place outside the players' control, sustaining its sense of believability. At the same time, the players still have their sense of control and freedom — even if the Storyteller has the end all planned out.

Telling a Tale

At long last, you've finished the design of your chronicle. Having chosen your theme and mood, decided on your scope and structure, and talked to your players beforehand, you're ready to go. The antagonists have their motives, the characters their reasons for being there, and the MacGuffin is set in place.

At the end, you're still in the middle. There is still the telling of the tale yet to do. This section discusses some facets of the actual running of **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, and provides advice on making your sessions a success.

Preludes

Inquisitors do not appear from nowhere, wholly formed and ready to combat demons. People, even inquisitors, are the products of their pasts — their experiences shape the beliefs, hopes, and personalities that they possess at the time of the chronicle. To better understand a character, where he's come from and where he may be going, the first game session for each player should be what is called a "prelude."

A prelude is a more entertaining way to create a character's past. While it is sufficient to state "Bruno of Hamburg is a Red Brother. His early life left him sickly, and he pursues forbidden knowledge to strengthen himself as well as battle the minions of Hell. His personal sin is pride," it is much more satisfying to briefly roleplay Bruno's early life. The end result will be a character much more fully fleshedout, and might even lead to changes in the original concept.

The question-and-answer session is one good way to play the prelude. Once the Storyteller has looked over the character sheet and familiarized herself with the character's concept, she asks questions to pose the player with choices. The answers explain how the character came to be who and where she is "today." The pace can be slow and

interactive, allowing for discussion and exploration of elements that interest either the player or the Storyteller. On the other hand, it can be handled like an interrogation, done at a rapid-fire pace that allows the player little time to think. This plays to the idea that the first reaction is often the most honest and can perhaps lead to unexpected results. Whatever method you choose, use it for all the players, to guarantee fairness. Encourage players to write down any salient details about their characters, especially if using the "hot seat" method of preludes — losing a good plot hook because both the player and the Storyteller forgot an anecdote related during the prelude is frustrating.

At times in the prelude, you may want to stop to roleplay a scene in some detail. Perhaps it represents a traumatic time in the inquisitor's life: The loss of her mother, for example, or the first horrific contact with the supernatural. If the player has stated that her character was framed by a scheming younger brother, who then managed to have him disinherited, you might want to roleplay the scene where father and sons confront one another. The end is foreordained: The character is disowned and sent to the Church, where he is later inducted into the Inquisition. But the emotions generated when roleplaying this scene will make the character much more vivid as they live in memory.

One of the key points in a prelude, and one that should certainly be roleplayed, is how the character came to join the shadow Inquisition. It is one of the most crucial points in a character's life. Was the character already an inquisitor, perhaps a Dominican working against the Cathars in the south of France? How was he recruited? Did he survive some encounter with the forces of Hell and come to the notice of one of the orders? Has the character even seen a demonic creature yet?

While most preludes are played one-on-one between the Storyteller and the player, there is no reason not to involve the other players in the roleplayed scenes, at least. As storytelling is a shared exercise, having the other players participate brings additional perspectives and gives them something to do while waiting for their own prelude. As long as the players themselves are mature and can handle having extensive out-of-character knowledge about other characters (and knowing others have the same knowledge about their own), group participation in a prelude can be as memorable as the chronicle itself.

Dramatic Macing

During the session itself, the Storyteller needs to concern herself with pacing — how fast things are moving. If the game moves too slowly, the players' attention will wander as they lose interest. If it moves too fast, and they will either lose track of the plot or think they are being railroaded. With practice, you can develop the sensitivity needed to keep your session paced right.

Keep in mind that all things in a chronicle or scene — encounters, events, or even acts of God — should serve to move the story forward to its climax. Anything that doesn't is a distraction that detracts from the sense of horror you are trying to build and weakens the players' involvement. Even if you are the most hands-off Storyteller in the world, use the tone of your voice, your descriptions, and your roleplaying to build the tension, using it as a force to urge the players to the climax.

But a pace that builds steadily and unrelentingly toward the grand finale can't sustain itself, except in the shortest of chronicles. Players need to relax a bit, to catch their breath. The best way to use tension and pacing in your chronicle is to borrow a pattern from popular literature and movies: Tension, crisis, relaxation. The Eye of God has been keeping watch over activities at a particular warehouse in Munich, owned by agents of the Ventrue prince. Noticing a door ajar, he investigates to find the ghoul overseer murdered, his blood still fresh and steaming on the flagstones. Perhaps the killer is still nearby. As the character investigates, he hears footsteps nearby. The tension builds as each stalks the other, until the murderer leaps from a loft, claws and fangs bared the crisis. Either way the battle ends, with death or flight, the tension is released and the player can relax... for a moment.

This kind of dramatic pacing is like white-water rafting: Traveling down a river, excitement builds as you head for the rapids, reaching a crescendo just before entering them. A few moments of adrenaline rush and even terror follow, and then peace again as you reach calm waters. This pattern can serve to pace a single scene, as in the example above, or an entire chronicle. A repeating cycle of tension-crisis-relaxation, each peak a bit higher than the last and each period of relaxation a bit shorter, can give a rhythm that helps you build the excitement you want to see at the finale.



Character Advancement and Interludes

From a player's perspective, the development of his character is one of the most interesting facets of participating in a chronicle. To take this imaginary persona from prelude to its (one hopes) glorious end is something like watching one's child develop. Pride, excitement, love, fear, disappointment and even anger come into play.

Chapter Four showed you the mechanics of character advancement. Your job as Storyteller is to take those mechanics and weave them into the story. You should do so in a way that emphasizes the central focus of the chronicle: the characters and their role in the Dark Medieval world. Done well, the mechanics will recede into the background and the process of character development will contribute to the depth of the chronicle itself. This section gives you advice on how to do this.

One handy tool in the Storyteller's kit is the concept of downtime. Downtime comprises those moments between episodes of a chronicle when the characters aren't actively doing something related to the main story. It includes those activities that a character would perform when not "on the case." A Murnau might tend to family matters, a Knight of Acre could enter a period of reflection and retreat and an Eye of God may want to pursue lines of research that have yet to bear fruit. Downtime activities help preserve the illusion that the characters live in a world that moves around them and exists outside the events of the chronicle. Remember, too, that because a character may develop Endowments safely only during downtime, it becomes important to allow the characters some breathing time between stories.

As a Storyteller tool, downtime is an opportunity to explore the characters' advancement and to make it something more than adding another dot or writing down a new Blessing. The Storyteller can take advantage of downtime by running a form of prelude — call it an interlude — in which she and the player roleplay the character's progress. In chronicles in which the Storyteller decides what Blessing or Curse the character receives, the interlude allows the player to discover how his character has changed and to react to it in a more genuine manner.

For example, Sister Agnetha of the Sisters of St. John, has retired to a convent near York for a brief period to reflect on her recent experiences and pray for God's mercy. Her player tells the Storyteller that she has decided to seek a new Blessing, rather than increase a Superior Virtue. She spends the requisite Conviction and the Storyteller tells her to come into

another room, where they will play out Sister Agnetha's discovery of her new Blessing. She tells the player that Agnetha is walking a road to the convent late one evening, on her way back from duty at a refuge for lepers. On a particularly isolated stretch, a werewolf on the hunt confronts her. Whether Agnetha stays or flees, the Storyteller has already decided the beast will catch her and try to kill her. While running the conflict, the first time it wounds the nun, the werewolf howls in agony at the touch of her blood and flees in fear. The Storyteller then tells the player that Sister Agnetha now has the Sanguine Hymn Orison and asks her how her character reacts to the realization. The experience of the interlude has left Sister Agnetha a much more fleshedout character than she would be otherwise.

The Storyteller can use the interlude technique to examine all the changes that occur to a character: An award of Conviction might mean a character has become Callous and vulnerable to his Impulse. The Storyteller can use the interlude to give the player a first taste of the character's new feelings before the next major events of the chronicle. She can do the same with new Curses, strengthened Virtues, and growing (or waning) Piety. The Storyteller can run the interlude on a separate night in a one-on-one session with the player, or she might even take advantage of the Internet to conduct it via email or chat, to avoid taking away from the time when the troupe is gathered as a whole. However it is done, the downtime interlude is a handy device for making a purely mechanical process a vivid part of the story.

Suggested Chronicles

To help you get started as a Dark Ages: Inquisitor Storyteller, we have provided a few chronicle outlines to get your creative juices flowing. Each also discusses theme and mood, the types of characters most suited to it and how to get the characters involved. These are by no means the only kinds of stories to be told about the secret Inquisition and its people, but serve as examples. Should you wish to run these chronicles, you can easily flesh them out with details appropriate to your own vision.

A Greater Love

Overview: This chronicle takes place in the village of Santa Amanda and its environs. The village is nestled in an Alpine valley high in the mountains between Italy and Dalmatia, near a route used by invaders in ancient times. A Serbian Tzimisce,

the Voivode Radovan Istvic, wants to seize the village and its church to have his revenge on a lover who betrayed him centuries before. He is stymied by the faith of the local priest, and feels that the priest keeps him from his goal and must therefore be removed. This chronicle takes place in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Themes: Love turned to hatred. Love dedicated to a higher purpose. The self-destructiveness inherent in a desire for revenge. Faith versus orthodoxy. Self-sacrifice.

Moods: Foreboding, a building sense of menace and isolation as the village is cut off by snowstorms. This can be highlighted by its contrast to the festive preparations of the villagers for Christmas.

Background: Late in the fourth century, while Theodosius reigned in Rome and Bishop St. Ambrose preached in Milan, a German Arian Ventrue named Ulfila met and fell in love with a Carpocratian Tzimisce warlord, Radovan Istvic. Like almost all human emotions played at by Cainites, it was a twisted mockery of real love. Yet it lasted for many years as Ulfila helped her lover build his domain in the hinterlands of what was then Pannonia.

Radovan's schemes eventually came into conflict with Ventrue lords among the Goths, one of whom was Ulfila's sire. Supremely arrogant, the Tzimisce lead his retainers and szlachta war ghouls into battle, only to be betrayed at its height by Ulfila herself. She had made a bargain with her sire, wanting to rule as voivode herself, rather than as Radovan's consort. Radovan was staked and left for the sun. Unbeknownst to his betrayer, a loyal ghoul found his master Radovan and dragged him to the safety of a cave. But the damage and shock to Radovan was great, and he fell into a centuries-long torpor.

Ulfila herself was not to enjoy her new domains for long, as she herself was betrayed — by her own sire, no less. Placed under a blood hunt and forced to flee, Ulfila led a wretched existence until she found herself near Ravenna where she heard a Christian holy man preaching to a crowd of unconverted pagans. His words moved her like none had ever done before in life or unlife, and, the next night, she revealed herself to him and begged his forgiveness. Far from recoiling in fear, the holy man blessed her and renamed her Amanda, "the loved one." Though she remained Arian, his blessing filled her with the zeal of the Holy Spirit and he sent her on her way, charged to preach the Word of God and do good works until the Lord saw fit to release her.

HERESY

eresy plays important parts in the back ground of this story, as two of the key actors in the drama are adherents of ancient heresies. Presented here are brief explanations of each; Storytellers wanting more information are referred to Cainite Heresy.

- Arianism: Developed by Deacon Arius in Egypt in the early fourth century AD, Arianism taught that God was perfect, eternal and unchangeable. For Jesus to have been his son, he would have to have been himself unchangeable yet the Bible relates that He grew and changed. Therefore, He could not have been God Incarnate, but some sort of inferior being or lesser god. While suppressed by the Christian Church within the Roman Empire, Arianism appealed to German invaders, because it had the feel of polytheism and was thus more palatable to former pagans being asked to embrace the new faith. By the time of "A Greater Love," Arianism has died out.
- Carpocratianism and the Cainite Heresy: Originating in the second century AD, this dualist heresy taught that the material world was evil and the God of the Old Testament was an evil being named "Ialdabaoth," an enemy to the true God, the god of the spiritual world. Carpocrates' particular contribution was the idea that only by breaking all the Old Testament's laws and showing superiority over the physical world could man escape the material prison and be reunited with the purity of God. Murder, cannibalism, demon summoning and other sins were part of their rituals. Their depravity appealed to the Tzimisce, some of whom appeared to Carpocrates and his followers as "angels of God," there to lead them on the path to enlightenment. From here it was but a small step for some of these vampires to become themselves objects of worship for mortal heretics, who were convinced the Cainites were spiritual beings bringing salvation — the heart of the Cainite Heresy.

Ulfila, now Amanda, thus wandered Italy and the Provence to preach the Word as a penitent. Eventually, she came to a village in the mountains beyond Venice that was threatened by demons. She saved the villagers and settled among them as a holy nun, dwelling in a grotto in the nearby hills. Subsist-

ing on the blood of animals, she became known for performing miracles. As the years passed, she grew tired and entered torpor, where she has remained to the present day. In time, the villagers built a church to honor her and, when she was canonized in the ninth century, changed the name of the village and moved her remains to the church crypts. In the time since, the village has often prospered because of pilgrim's donations and what they believe is the intercession of their saint with God. (In reality, she reaches out from torpor to exert a peaceful, protective influence over the valley. Occasionally it has been effective in diverting threats, which helps fuel the saint's legend.)

Radovan arose from his own torpor shortly after the fall of Constantinople, his one thought to exact revenge on the one who betrayed him. But the world had changed much in over 800 years and it took time to reorient himself. He could not build a new power base in what was now called Serbia, for he had enemies there who would not hesitate to destroy him (properly this time). Drawing on his experiences with the Carpocratians centuries before, Radovan presented himself as an angel of God to gullible peasants and made ghouls of a few. With this small band of fanatically loval retainers, he searched for Ulfila and finally traced her to the village of Santa Amanda. While he had heard the stories of her conversion, he disbelieved them, his cynical nature unable to accept the idea of redemption. She must have done as he had, duping the villagers of long ago into believing her a god.

His goal is to seize her remains, bring her out of torpor, then perform the Amaranth on her as the ultimate revenge. He is frustrated, however, by the aura of faith in the village and, especially, at the church under which she is buried. It weakens him and keeps him from entering the church itself. He assumes it is due to the priest, Padre Ottavio, a pious young man. His plan is thus to weaken Ottavio's faith through temptation and doubt and, when this faith is broken, slaughter the villagers and take his revenge. If unimpeded, he will succeed and bring his plans to fruition on the altar of the church itself at midnight, as Christmas Eve becomes Christmas day.

Storyteller Characters: Ulfila/St. Amanda, a 6th generation Ventrue. Radovan Istvic, a 6th generation Tzimisce. Padre Ottavio, priest of St. Amanda's church and a mortal with one dot of Faith. A sensitive man, he has come under the influence of St. Amanda's spirit and is unconsciously adopting her Arianism. Iliana, a wanton village girl seduced



by Radovan and charged with corrupting Padre Ottavio — and the inquisitors, once they arrive. Arnulfo, the largest landowner in the village, whom Radovan has converted to his worship and set to preaching of a "new cult" that will supplant the corrupt Church. Various villagers of Santa Amanda and followers of Radovan to be spear-carriers, victims and frightened mobs.

Involving the Characters: As inquisitors, the characters are charged with the investigation of heresy and protection of doctrine, although the shadow Inquisition usually leaves mundane heresy to the Holy Office. Though their superiors could simply tell them of a report of "demons" in the area of Santa Amanda, that would be obvious and boring. More interesting would be to make this seem a more mundane investigation, unrelated to the supernatural (which should tip the characters off that something is wrong): The inquisitors' contacts in the Holy Office have received reports that the vicar of Santa Amanda has been preaching in sermons that the Savior is inferior to God for having been created, rather than being one and the same. This sounds suspiciously like the long-condemned Arian heresy. Sent to investigate and, if necessary, take corrective measures, they instead find horrible goings-on that point to the far worse threat posed by Radovan. They can also have a more personal connection, perhaps having come from the valley or having kinsmen there.

Characters of all orders have their use in this chronicle. Knights of Acre and Red Brothers will provide needed muscle and arcane knowledge, should Radovan strike violently, either through his minions or in person. A Murnau will be crucial to uncovering the rot of corruption in town, though he may find himself the object of a small following. Sisters of St. John can receive visions of the true nature of the problem, perhaps even from St. Amanda, herself, while Eyes of God may uncover Arnulfo's dealings with the Tzimisce.

Storytelling: This chronicle can be told either as a directed tale with predetermined events or in the "Many Paths" style, allowing the inquisitors to investigate and find their own way. A combination works best, with the inquisitors uncovering the village's growing corruption while investigating Padre Ottavio. Hints in old church records and ancient fresco work point to St. Amanda's true nature and her opposition to Cainite Heretics, perhaps even leading the players to believe that reviving her might be the only way to defeat Radovan.

Use predestined events to quicken the pace and heighten the tension whenever the players seem like they are losing the thread of the plot. Possibilities include a snowstorm that seals off the valley from the outside world (and outside help); an attempted seduction by Iliana that, if it fails, leads to a public charge of rape against one or more of the characters; the drugging and taking of Padre Ottavio by Arnulfo to a ceremony of black worship, where his faith will be assaulted; and an angry, frightened mob that the characters will have to handle sensitively, if they do not wish to turn the town against the Church.

Resolutions: Myriad endings are possible here. Ideally, the inquisitors save the village and defeat Radovan's plans. Perhaps the most dramatic ending would involve a last stand at the church on Christmas Eve, with the inquisitors and those few villagers who remained faithful holding out against the final assault of Radovan, his ghouls and the corrupted townsfolk. A desperate gamble illustrating the theme of higher love and self-sacrifice would see an inquisitor using his blood to revive St. Amanda (assuming they realize the truth about her), possibly at the cost of his own life. Strong in her faith, the revived Cainite saint would have little problem disposing of her former lover. As with all endings that are just beginnings in disguise, the players would then be left to deal with the implications for their characters of knowing a vampire could also be favored of God.

Suffer the Children

Overview: More than 20 years after the disastrous "Children's Crusade," mendicant wanderers are proclaiming another "crusade of the Innocents to free Jerusalem from the heathen." Bearing forged but genuine-looking letters of authorization and remission of sin, these recruiters are traveling the back roads of Provence and Savoy seeking parents eager to see their children into Heaven (where they will no longer have to be fed). Investigating the letters and the fate of the children already gone, the inquisitors discover a cult of infernalists that has corrupted the Church in Genoa. They may also find themselves unwitting allies of the Lasombra whose influence over the port city is threatened.

Themes: The corruption of innocence. Vanity and greed.

Moods: Anxiety. Fear for others. Pressure to save the innocent from a terrible fate.

Background: In 1212 a pair of young men gathered thousands of children to lead them on a Crusade to liberate the Holy Land. The Crusade attracted

thousands of naïve faithful from across France and Italy. This Children's Crusade eventually reached the port of Brindisi, where merchants sold a number of the children as slaves to the Muslims, while many more died of hunger and exhaustion. Similar sales took place in Marseilles and Genoa, and rumors within the Inquisition tell that vampires were behind them. (They have it partially right. While Ravnos were behind many of those sold as slaves, others were taken by Setites and Baali for horrid rituals known only to them.)

Now, a coven of diabolists led by a Sicilian named Rinaldi wishes to conduct a great demon summoning. The ritual requires a large number of children, some of whom are to have their blood spilled in sacrifice, while the unlucky ones are to find themselves offered to the demon upon his arrival. Rinaldi hopes that the demon will be so pleased by the sacrifice that he will grant the sorcerer magic power sufficient to control Genoa's leaders and rule from the shadows. To gather the number of children he needs would be too dangerous if he were to buy them on the black market or simply kidnap them — the Genoese authorities would surely crush him like a beetle beneath a cartwheel. Another threat to his schemes comes from the powerful d'Agostino family of merchants, which, Rinaldi has discovered, has several Lasombra vampires and ghouls among its kin. Even if he evaded the attentions of the Genoese government, discovery by the d'Agostinos would be a disaster.

Needing a cover to hide his operations till his moment came, he hit on the idea of another Children's Crusade. It was easy to win the loyalty of the Archbishop's secretary, a man lusting for power and resentful of being passed over for promotion. It was even easier for him, on Rinaldi's orders, to play on the growing senility of the Archbishop himself to convince him there was a papal order for a new Crusade. Rinaldi's plan is to flood Genoa with homeless children. He counts on the greed of the d'Agostinos and their merchant allies to provide them with ships for the Crusade — ships that will instead bear their cargo to Tunis and Alexandria to be sold. From among this mass of runaways, he will skim off the most promising to use as sacrifices. By limiting the Archbishop's messengers to the backcountry of Genoa and nearby Provence, he hopes to prevent an investigation from Rome before he has what he needs. To divert attention from himself, he will plant evidence to implicate the d'Agostinos in the hope that a conflict with the Church will weaken them.

Storyteller Characters: Rinaldi, an accomplished Infernalist. He has a demonic familiar of minor power as his bodyguard and a magic wand that allows him to wrack a victim with excruciating pain. Two or three other diabolists, his assistants and magicians of minor power. (see Dark Ages: Vampire, p. 296) Tibalt d'Alessi, secretary to the Archbishop. He has signed an oath in blood to Rinaldi's demonic masters and sold his soul to Hell because the Sicilian has promised him he would succeed as Archbishop. He has magical power equal to one of Rinaldi's assistants. Archbishop Augusto Moro, a corrupt man slipping into senility. Rinaldi has provided Tibalt the means to gratify the Archbishop's every petty lust, thus ensuring the old fool's cooperation. Roberto d'Agostino, a 7th generation Lasombra, Prince of Genoa, and titular head of the d'Agostino family operations in Genoa during the time that the matriarch, Maria, is in Acre. Naïve, inexperienced and tempted by the money to be made selling the children, he does not see the trap he is leading the family into. Various illiterate mendicants bearing fake letters. Innocent children with the blind faith that Providence will protect them.

Involving the Characters: Characters can enter the chronicle in any number of ways. The Prince of Marseilles, Saint Regis (see Dark Ages Europe), was tricked by Ravnos Cainites, fell into temptation and sinned greatly during the Children's Crusade, murdering many children and making ghouls of others. Now, hearing rumors of another Crusade and children who have abandoned their villages to go to Genoa, he fears the same Sybarites who tricked him before are behind this, too. Though he cannot deal with inquisitors directly, he walks the Road of Heaven and cannot ignore it, either. He uses his contacts among the Monks of the Abbey of St. Victor to plant rumors of diabolism in Genoa, hoping to draw the inquisitors that way.

Another possibility has the inquisitors themselves in the area, returning from farther away after investigating unrelated events. A wandering holy man comes to the town they are in and begins to preach the new crusade. When the inquisitors demand to see proof, they are shown the documents, which they can with effort establish as fakes. But the recruitment has already been under way for some time, and children have left for Genoa. Aware of what happened before, they rush to the port to save whom they can.

This is a chronicle best suited to orders with a bent towards action and direct investigation: Knights of Acre, Murnau, and Oculi Dei. Theodosians will be indispensable to deal with Rinaldi's sorceries. Sisters of St. John might be of little use early on but could well be essential in the hunt for the coven.

Storytelling: "Suffer the Children" is a "web of clues" chronicle as the characters spend their time sorting through the complexities of Genoese politics mortal and Cainite — to find out who authorized the fake calls for crusade and what happened to the missing children. There will be plenty of opportunities for political roleplaying encounters if, as they should, the inquisitors question the Archbishop. Exposing Tibalt might even mean a battle in the Archbishop's palace with the troops of His Excellency. From Tibalt, whether through roleplay, torture or combat, one thread will lead to the d'Agostinos, a thread planted by Rinaldi to distract inquisitors. Through their legitimate fronts (they aren't stupid enough to let inquisitors near their ghouls or Cainites), they will show they are legitimate businessmen. The "crusaders" have their ships — paid for by the Archbishop and donations from the pious — and are sent on their way in good order. What happens after they sail is none of the concern of House d'Agostino. Investigations on the streets and along the docks bring much the same information. In addition, inquiries among the child-crusaders themselves reveals that some have gone missing after reaching Genoa.

Though Storyteller-devised events are fewer here than in "A Greater Love," they have their place as the chronicle draws near its climax. Genoese politics are volatile and Rinaldi will use this to his advantage to frustrate the Inquisitors. Perhaps, after an initial meeting with the Archbishop, Tibalt arranges for an "anti-clerical" riot that just happens to catch the inquisitors, leaving them in hiding or simply injured. One certain event comes after (and if) Tibalt is exposed and the players learn of the missing children. To mislead the inquisitors, Rinaldi and his assistants take several children to a d'Agostino warehouse, where they torture and kill them, hanging them like meat in a butcher's stall. His plan is to focus blame on the d'Agostinos, perhaps even exposing them as Cainites and leading to fullscale inquisition in Genoa, after which, he will pick up the pieces.

Resolutions: The inquisitors can do little to save those already sent to sea or sacrificed by the infernalists in preparation for the great ritual. The former are on their way to slavery or worse, the latter

are dead. The most they can hope to do is put a stop to this latest "crusade" and save those not yet lost. It is possible they will locate Rinaldi's laboratory, in which case his demonic servant and mortal assistants will fight to give him time to escape — and perhaps come back to torment the characters again. The inquisitors' efforts will also bring them to the attention of the Magisters who rule House d'Agostino. While no alliance between inquisitors and vampires is likely, the manipulative Lasombra may well watch the characters from the shadows to use them as puppets in the future. Should the characters fail utterly to stop the diabolists' plan, perhaps even abet it by wounding the Lasombra, Rinaldi will merely watch and wait, until the moment is right for his dark ritual and he summons Hell to Genoa.

The Long and Lonely Road

Overview: After a powerful sorcerer destroys the Council of Faith in Bremen, the characters' cell is ordered to transport the foul Satanist to Brunswick for trial (and probable execution). The trip puts the characters in the wilderness, miles from help, with no one around for company except each other... and the thing they must transport. Along the way, the sorcerer tempts them with offers of power, attacks them with spells and summons help from the wolfmen of the German forests.

Themes: Temptation. Danger. Courage. Loneliness.

Mood: Forlorn, depressing travel. Dirt roads at night. Ravens, wolves and other animals associated with death and the wilderness.

Background: A man arrived on a boat from Trondheim recently, carrying only a dagger and a wooden staff carved with odd runes. He stepped off the boat into Bremen and immediately ran afoul of the town's guards, one of whom recognized him as an outlaw. The guards attempted to subdue him. Rather than submit quietly, the mage slew them using hell-borne sorcery. It took the intervention of the local chapter of the Inquisition — and the sacrifice of most of them, including several who served on the Council of Faith — to subdue the man.

The sorcerer — one Averki Skogarmadur by name, though the characters won't know that to begin with — is on the run for crimes ranging from theft to murder to maleficium. As he was captured in commission of two of those crimes, the outcome of his trial is a forgone conclusion. However, the Inquisition wants to make an example of him (and, although the characters aren't told so directly, the



Red Order wants to learn something of his magic so they know how to counter it in future). However, everyone who would be capable of performing this trial in Bremen is dead, and the closest Council of Faith is Brunswick — quite some distance away. With the sorcerer incapacitated, the Inquisition wishes to get him out of Bremen immediately, before he either finds a way to escape or someone kills him in advance of his making a proper confession.

Averki is imprisoned in a special carriage — it was specially built for the purpose of carrying monsters, and its walls can withstand a great deal of punishment. Only one window (set into the door) looks into it, and that window is barred with iron. The door is chained and locked (the character with the highest rating in the Rank Background gets the key). Nevertheless, all this cannot prevent him from using his magic. He plans to wait until the group reaches the forests, then call for help from the protectors of the woods, the werewolves. The characters will then have to decide whether to fight the wolf-men, try to escape with Averki (who will do everything in his considerable power to slow their progress), kill him and flee (which is easier said than done), or leave him behind (which should weigh on their consciences forever).

Storyteller Characters: The most important Storyteller character, of course, is Averki Skogarmadur himself. Averki is a member of a society of mages called the Valdaermen, runecrafters from the hoary lands northward. While he is powerful and dangerous even without his magic, by the time the characters meet him he is weak and spent, and he must take some time to gather his strength before attempting to escape.

If you have access to Dark Ages: Mage, feel free to create Averki as a character, complete with appropriate magical Traits. If you do not, however, don't feel bound to represent him or his Fellowship "accurately" — this is, after all, an Inquisitor game. Averki should be presented as an enemy. Stress the feelings the inquisitors experience around him — Averki makes anyone in his general vicinity feel forlorn and empty, as though they are miles from home. Ravens follow him, always at a distance, but ever-present. Even when the ravens are quiet, a careful listener can hear their cries.

Averki was dressed in furs when he stepped off the boat, but he has been stripped to a loincloth. The characters can easily observe fresh runes carved into his hands, arms, chest, and even his forehead. These runes (and the act of carving them) are what allow Averki to activate his magic, and he will do his best over the journey to trick the characters into passing him a stick, a knife, a spoon or any other item he could conceivably use to cut himself. If he does manage to draw blood, he inscribes runes on the carriage walls. Possible spells he could cast include increasing his physical Attributes, causing the characters' weapons to malfunction or turn in their hands, learning anything they consider secret, and summoning help from animals (including werewolves — see below).

The mage speaks German and his native Icelandic, but he does not understand any other languages. He will pretend not to know German until he is ready to communicate with the characters.

Involving the Characters: The most obvious method of involvement is simply to assume the characters are an established cell, possibly assigned to Bremen or the area, and are simply given this assignment. Another possibility is that they were actually present when Averki destroyed the Council of Faith, but this isn't recommended — for one thing, the Storyteller would have her hands full in such a battle making sure the characters don't kill Averki (although she could simply narrate the fight). For another, Averki is a much more frightening opponent if the characters don't know what he's capable of doing. Rumors might speak of him changing into a wolf or a bear, or summoning up snowstorms — and if the weather gets colder or the characters hear howls....

It's important to stress that the Inquisition wants Averki to reach Brunswick alive. If, of course, it becomes a matter of self-defense, the characters' superiors will understand, but they stand a better chance of advancement and praise if their charge doesn't die en route.

This story can work well with nearly any mix of characters, but House Murnau are especially appropriate, given the region. A Murnau character might be able to provide the group with a way-station along the road. Knights of Acre are likewise good character choices, since the Inquisition already knows that Averki is a dangerous man. The Inquisition might also send along an Oculi Dei spy in the guise of a coachman or servant — but remember that Averki can divine secrets by casting runes.

Storytelling: "The Long and Lonely Road" works best as a single story, either as part of a longer chronicle or a one-shot. The tone of the game can change dramatically, depending on how the characters decide to act. If they treat their prisoner well, he might not call for help from werewolves immediately but attempt to convince the characters to let him go. If they are abusive, he might toy with them first, spitting their darkest secrets at them and summoning ravens to bedevil them as they sleep.

The road to Brunswick might encompass other events, too. Suppose the characters pass through a village where heresy or pagan teachings have taken hold? Leaving such people to their ignorance is a grievous sin — but can they take the time to teach them? Feel free, too, to seed hints about what awaits the group — wolf howls, perhaps the body of a boar, mutilated beyond the capacity of any beast, and Averki's fiendish laughter as the full moon rises high can all serve as foreshadowing to the confrontation with the werewolves.

This story is fairly linear — the characters have one straight path to follow, without a lot of possible permutations. Pacing is critical in a story like this; too many "random encounters" along the road and the story will feel endless. Try to get the characters talking to Averki. See if you can make the players see him as a person. Give him an agenda — why was he in Bremen to begin with? Why didn't he just flee when the guards assaulted him? Is he guilty of the charges against him? Does he care? For his part, Averki attempts to persuade the inquisitors to leave their faith and accompany him back to Iceland. He especially targets women, whom he perceives as having no power in the Church but as being well-respected in his own faith.

Resolutions: This story can end any number of ways. The characters might succeed in bringing Averki to Brunswick, where he is put on trial and probably executed. He might well escape into the forest, in which case the characters are quite probably sent right back to Bremen to bolster the Inquisition's new Council of Faith and guard against another attack by the mad Scandinavian wizard. If they kill Averki sans trial, they might still face retribution from other parties — Averki's family or allies, the werewolves that he sought help from, etc.



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IDDEX

210

211

211

177

— Lashed in Judgment A Marked by the Cross Annointings 199 Speared by Destiny Aignen le Libraire 72, 90, 97-99 -Visitations 211 Artifacts 198 — Book of Revelations 211 — Curse of the Scribe 212 B —Gloaming, The 211 Blessings 173 -Glossalia 213 Buying New Endowments 173-174 — Spirit Tithe 213 \mathcal{C} n Cainite Heresy 61, 95, 101, 113-114 Disease 165 Callousness 162 $\mathbf{\epsilon}$ Cardinal Marzone 62, 126-126 Character Creation chart 147 Endowments 176 Cocytus 203 — Benedictions 176 Conviction 159 — Divine Liturgy 178 — Regaining Conviction — Gift of Second Sight Council of Faith 123-125 — Heavenly Shepherd Curses XX — I Exult in Thee 178 — Anathemae 204 — Water to Wine 179 — False Witness 205 — Investitures 179 -Lamb of God 204 — Auto da Fé 182 — Scent of Hyacinth 205 -Catechumen 180 —Silent Vigil 205 - Flight of Angels 180 -Unclean 205 — Spirit of the Resurrection 181 Interdictions 205 — Transfiguration of the Flesh 180 -Call of Duty 205 — Legacies 182 Endless Penitence 207 -Arcana 184 Pain of the Flock 207 — Forbidden Wisdom 182 Solemn Oath 206 — Mirror of Evil 184 -Suffer the Little Children - Noblesse Oblige 183 - Maledictio 208 — Wreathed in Shadows 183 — Allure of Gentle Hades 208 — Psalms 185 - Company of Wolves 208 — Chorale 187 — Devil's Bargain 209 — Fiat Lux 186 — Mark of the Beast 209 — Gospel 186 — Personal Adversary 209 — Hosanna 187 —Stigmata 210 -Oratorio 188 - Boiled in Shame 210 Experience Chart 161 — Crowned by Thorns 210

Merits and Flaws 166-169

Oculi Dei 89, 94, 114, 138-139

Moral Compass 174

— The True Innocent 174

- Noah's Favor 174

— Sanguine Hymn 175

— Talespinner 176 - Self-Control 174

- Blessing of Years

Eye of Vigilance

-Conscience 174

Courage 175Hierophant 175

Order of Saint Theodosius 66, 80, 115, 132-133

175

175

Military Orders 75

Orisons

Sister Teresa of Saint John 68, 92-94
Sisters of Saint John 70, 77, 115, 134-135
Superior Virtues 157
— Faith 157
— Wisdom 157
— Zeal 157
Supreme Council 126

T

Terror 163 Thralldom 162 Torture 109-110, 165-166

V

Vampires 113

W

Warlocks 111 Werewolves 111 In this age of Parkness.

Satan's get infests the world. Blood-drinking demons and savage creatures prey on good Christians or lead them to heresy. Even the Holy Mother Church itself teems with devils in man's flesh. But God Almighty has seen fit to choose some to stand against the tide of darkness. With sword and torch in hand, we search out the evil that lurks in the night.

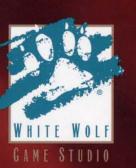
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