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Special Thanks, Summer Convention Season Edition

Dean "Unrelenting" **Burnham**, for two solid weeks of non-stop punishment.

Mike "Stank" **Tinney**, for renting the room that smelled like old lady armpits.

Jess "Correspondence" **Heinig**, for trying desperately to create an airport that came to *him*. Twice.

John "What the Funk?" **Chambers**, for "rescuing" the jukebox from Garth Brooks and the Backstreet Boys.

Conrad "Zoomtard" **Hubbard**, for nearly dying twice and being utterly unaware.

Fred "Naptard" **Yelk**, for calling it quits on the first night but growing progressively more psychotic over the rest of the trip.

Chad "Von Tabs" **Brown**, for pills & thrills & bellyaches.

Brian "Wingman" **Glass**, for being there every second of the two-week journey into the guts of debauchery.

Tim "Whoah" **Avers**, for learning about titty bars the hard way.

Steve "Patience, Grasshopper" **Wieck**, for not ninja-kicking the bejeezus out of those three drunken hooligans battering down his door at half past two.

Spirit Creek, for hosting the GenCon party.

Lost Goth and **Big Daddy Thwak**, for, well, porn.

Their Own Circle of Hell

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM! "Housekeeping! Clean your room?"

Oops

A correction: **Ree Soesbee's** "Additional Material" credit was inadverently left out of **Clanbook: Tremere.**

CLANBOOK: LASOMBRA™

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The Darkness Claims You

Everything belonged to him — but that was a trifle. The thing to know was what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own.
— Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness"

Ten years ago:

I can feel the pulse in my head, louder and faster as more blood spurts from a dozen cuts to drip past my face toward the pile of broken glass below me. My van's emergency flashers reflect black from a thousand corners, at all angles, wherever mirrors came to rest after the collision. The shattered streetlight somewhere above me casts an occasional shower of sparks. I become aware that there's no way out of this. Even if those EMTs made it here within the next— no, I'm going to die.

It happened suddenly. I'd been driving my new van, testing the modifications for hands-only control of a manual transmission. Scary stuff, but I was doing it. Mom and Dad sat in back, disapproving but not quite willing to say so, and managing the sort of conversation we always had on this anniversary. Nothing awkward like, "Are you sure that a cripple should be trying this sort of thing?" or, "Don't you think that ten years of obsessive anger about the accident is enough?"

Dad actually had some interesting stories about recent construction projects and pointed out work his firm had done to the mansions we drove past. I'd decided to take the long way home, meandering around the Arroyo Seco and seeing how many landmarks we could identify from various movies. A lot of Dad's corporate customers lived here, and some had the money to bring his firm in for domestic work. Some of it was just plain strange, too, like the bedroom with the elevator-mounted ceiling that the owner could lower to five feet above the floor for a "cozier" feel. Dad started listing all the building codes that had to be circumvented or bribed past for that one.

Then all the lights went out for two blocks on every side. Not just the streetlights — everything. Porch lights, house lights, even the dashboard security system lights in parked cars. There was total darkness with only the new moon overhead. I started to pull over, hit something slippery and went over a bridge abutment.

All a matter of timing, I suppose. A few seconds earlier and I would have steered into a ten-foot-high noise-reduction wall. It would have hurt, maybe a lot, but then we'd be stopped. A few seconds later and I'd have hit solid 1980s vintage, suicide-discouraging hurricane fence. Likely we'd have careened off that and spun, maybe flipped, but stopped somewhere on the bridge.

There's only a small gap between wall and fence, and I hit it just right.

The van tumbled lengthwise on its way to the roof of the warehouse. That's why I'm here almost upside down, my useless legs dangling overhead while my arms are pinned. If I could raise my right arm, I could touch one of the four glass rods that slammed through the windshield and on into the back. One rod runs through Dad's throat. Two more pierce Mom, one in her right eye and one just below her collarbone. Dad gurgled for a few minutes, but Mom never made a sound. I think death came quickly for them.

So it's just me. I can't open my door. I can shout for help, but there doesn't seem to be anyone around. I can't move to release my harness or disengage the steering column brace or punch in an emergency code on the car phone.

Then the lights come back on, without any preliminary flickering. I can see the whole warehouse spread out below, or perhaps above, me. It's World War II construction. I wrote an article once about the immense durability of "temporary" buildings like this one. Twisted sheets of corrugated aluminum now lie sprawled over long rows of glass. Mirrors, windows, peculiar panes whose function I can't imagine. Exit lights reflect through the debris, reminding me briefly of the moon during a lunar eclipse, dark red and ominous. The whole scene reminds me of something. Paul Klee on a bad day. Some Futurist nightmare. The blood keeps pounding in my head. Stupid education. Smart doesn't help you when you're pinned in an upside-down van. No, Klee wasn't so ham-handed.

I take another look in the rear-view mirror. My parents are right where they were. The car slides down a bit. The seatbelt cuts into my neck and collarbone. Without warning, there's a hand on my shoulder. I can't turn my head, so I have to roll my eyes as best I can to see the slim, neatly manicured fingernails. It's a small, graceful hand, very dark indeed, perhaps African or from New Guinea. A quick check in the mirror shows nobody there. I am hallucinating.

"Andrew."

The voice is clear but soft, almost whispered. Each syllable emerges perfectly formed. I see nothing in the mirror; I feel the hand on my shoulder. The hand has no pulse.

"Andrew, acknowledge me. You hear me."

I say nothing.

"I am not a hallucination. You're dying, and we must speak."

I say nothing.

"Your life is a story you haven't read. Speak with me."

Something about that sounds so... overwrought that I almost laugh, and I speak to the unseen presence. "What story? Are you going to claim to be the architect of my misery? The nemesis who made me suffer for my art? Give me a break. Even oxygen-starved, I expect something better than that."

"That's precisely what I want to tell you."

"What?"

"I mean to tell you that your life has been my hobby for about a decade, and that the time has come for you to decide what to do next. Listen to me." The voice unfolds a steady litany of secrets, things I've never told anyone else: the petty frustrations as well as the great ones, the minor trials along with the massive calamities. The speaker, whose sex I cannot guess, speaks to me about careless doctors and berserk mailmen and arrogant editors and the countless others who've made my life unpleasant. I realize, somewhere along the way, that the voice never pauses for breath.

"And you made it happen?"

"I did what I could."

"Why?"

Laughter. For the first time I feel confident that the voice belongs to a woman. "Do you know the story of Job, Andrew?"

"Of course. God took away everything from him, to prove to Satan that Job was worthy. I hope you're not going to claim to be the angel of the Lord."

"Listen to me." The voice remains soft, but there's a command in it. My mouth snaps closed without any conscious decision on my part. A single nail on that immaculate hand pierces my skin. "Spare me your efforts at humor. I did not select you to be my jester."

I cannot ask the obvious question, but she anticipates it anyhow. "I needed to find out what you were like without the things that define your identity. If I could remove your brain and put it in a jar to experiment upon, I would. I had to cut away the life around your mind, as far as possible, to see how you cope with loss. Your life has been a test. You pass, if you wish."

Now I can speak again. "What do I win? I hope it's a towel. My eyes sting."

"Eternity."

"I said I didn't want to speak with an angel."

"You did. I am not an angel." I can hear a smile in that voice. "Let me show you."

I hear metal scream and break behind me. At first I think that I'm losing my peripheral vision. Then I realize there's tangible blackness beside the car, a column of something like smoke. Floating in the middle of it, I see a woman. She's tall but slim, her face heavily scarred. Her hair ... isn't hair at all, it's layer upon layer of moving shadows, like exfoliating granite or peeling bark. Her arms seem normal enough — I recognize the hand and wrist that rested on my shoulder. Below them, though, a second set of arms pokes through slits in the gray robe she wears. They're mottled black, reminding me slightly of pictures I saw where the experimenters left raw meat outdoors for a year, photographing its changes.

She scares me half to death, not that that's so far a trip just now. I've hallucinated before, and I see absolutely none of the cues that tell me my brain is fabricating the scene. It takes me a moment to realize that she's hanging upside down in that darkness, since we see eye to eye. I feel chains of association at work in my mind, as though some autonomous thought process has gone searching for everything that "darkness" means to me. Memories flicker and flare like the darkness around the woman.

"Andrew," she says through latticed lips. "You see your fears in the darkness, don't you?" She sees my slight nod. "All your life, all anyone's life, these things live beneath your skin. Now they flow out along with your life itself. Learn."

One of those shadow-arms stretches toward me. Its blunt end smashes through the remains of the driver-side window and snakes around in front of me. With one swift motion it wraps around my head, completely covering my eyes. For an instant there's utter, profound nothing. Even the retinal flickers that go on behind closed eyelids disappear; in some sense, the darkness pours in behind my eyes. I can't even take a breath.

The flashes of memory become much more intense. There's no sensory component to them, only states of mind. Anger, at the accident, at the hospital, at my parents, at the government bureaucrats, at the fuckhead doctors who fail to understand what I tell them. Fear, of rejection, of losing my mind as well as my legs, of never writing again, of old age and poverty in this condition. Ambition and pride, for the next great work, to prove wrong all the doctors and doubters, to show my parents the folly of their hopes for me. Depression woven in through it all, the desire

to simply drift away from the body. I see myself as a vessel slopping over with dark passions, lacking anything to be for, filling the emptiness with a long litany of things to be against.

Vision returns. It's cloudy now. Some blood has coagulated around my eyes, and now my peripheral vision really is fading for lack of oxygen. Death cannot be far away.

"You see, Andrew, you have cut yourself out of the fabric of society. But you do not yet know what you want to clothe yourself in, and your anger is not enough. Do you see?" I nod, or at least I try. My face grows numb. "Let me tell you what awaits."

At first her story seems irrelevant, some second-rate pastiche. She describes growing up in the Belgian Congo, hearing in her heart the voices of gods that the colonial masters sought to destroy. She describes rapine, the destruction of whole tribes, enslavement and humiliation at the hands of Europeans come to get rich. She describes hearing the voice of the night inside a particularly ambitious outpost supervisor, only to lose him to his madness and self-destruction. "So you see, Andrew, others know suffering too."

She tells me the story of wandering the riverbanks at night, hoping to hear a word from the moon or the shadows. And one night the shadows spoke to her. A pale man emerged and told her the litany of her sorrows and offered her the power for revenge. "Now watch, Andrew."

The shadow-arm grabs the seat I'm in and draws it smoothly out of the car, with the other shadow-arm tearing off the remains of my door in one yank. With a sudden flip, I'm right side up again. The woman pivots to remain facing me and sinks slowly to the ground. My shoes touch bloody shards of glass. The woman steps out of the column of darkness and picks the seat and me up with one hand. She tosses me casually into the air a few times

before setting me down. I'd vomit if there were anything left in my stomach.

She squats to look directly at me as I fumble for the seatbelt latch. "Stop," she says, and I freeze. Not because I want to, but because not one voluntary muscle answers me.

"Stand."

Against my will, my arms unbuckle me and push me into an upright position. I teeter for a moment and then, inevitably, fall face-forward onto the glass. Half a dozen shards slice me open, one a tiny fraction of an inch from my right eye. A piece pokes into my mouth, lodging against my upper gums. I can feel it scrape tooth beneath the gum.

"Now dream, Andrew. Imagine yourself able to do what I've just made you do. You remember your enemies. I made sure of that. Can you envision them suffering as you do now, and worse? Will you accept this gift?"

The final word catches me by surprise. "Gift?" This blood and hurt is a gift? But once again the chains of association flare. I have been very confident that I understand how the world works. I've mocked those who disagreed. In my desk at home there's a whole file of letters from readers who report disillusionment and loss of faith because of what I've written. Would anything less than this have convinced me?

And I picture the sort of torment the woman describes. "Yes." The word oozes out around the glass wedged into my mouth. "Yes."

Shadow arms flip me over so that I'm lying on my back. She opens her mouth to show me fangs. They don't look like movie-monster props. These are the real thing, emerging organically from her jaw and serrated like carnivore fangs. As she leans over my neck, no breath stirs my shredded collar. For a moment I see channels along the fangs' inside edges, stained with small flecks of dried blood. I marvel at their efficiency....

I thought that I knew something about suffering, but this is the sharpest, most consuming agony I've ever felt. The pricks are small, and I know that there are no major nerves around them, but nonetheless it's like fire sweeping from one side of my body to the other.

Just as quickly, there's pleasure. Not orgasmic pleasure — there's no physiological component, only a sense of completion and rightness. In my mind, I hear the woman say, "This is your function as prey. Remember what you are leaving, kine no more." My pulse becomes erratic, weak. Stops. Clinically, I'm dead. My eyes continue to see, dimly, but that'll stop soon. No more oxygen in the blood. No more blood. There's stillness in my body.

My eyes dim, so I don't see the woman bend over me. I hear her bite something. She presses her cold wrist to my mouth. Her blood — thick and slow — drains past my still lips. Pain returns, an electrical shock or something like it rippling out from my throat. It's been ten years since I felt any real sensation below my hips. Now, as the shock blasts through them, I can feel them again. I feel the debris, and my trousers touching the hair on my legs. Something that isn't life stirs within me.

My eyes open. The woman smiles at me. "That was the first step."

***

Now:

So you see, you're not the only one to know the sort of loss you've felt. Yes, I'm sure that the pain where your family, your job, your standing in the community once were is sharp. I know these things too.

There's a way to redress it, if you want. Are you ready to become a predator for real, rather than prey with delusions of grandeur?

Chapter One: An Unmirrored Corridor

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.
— William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

The First Lesson: Beginnings

This night's cold, not that the packmates are about to admit it. The winter storms blast off the North Pacific and up the Columbia River, driving sleet like knives. The wind hasn't fallen below 25 miles an hour since sunset. Gusts sometimes move as fast as cars on a highway. The packmates feel something in the air, though, and without actually speaking a word to each other, they agree that they must take extra care to show they understand their condition. Only two of the new recruits have any real prophetic sense, but that's enough. The Vaulderie transmits their glimpses of an impending encounter with the mentor/judge/teacher/cop of their brethren.

So it's with special flourishes that they ascend to their meeting ground, the roof of the still unfinished municipal administrative building. Nobody wears an extra layer of insulating clothing. Druitt makes a grand show of stripping his chest bare before dragging himself up the scaffolding one-handed. For the others, T-shirts and unbuttoned jackets suffice to make the point. "Yes," their actions say to their ductus, "We understand that the memory of being cold doesn't matter anymore. We know how to will a little blood through our veins and keep ourselves warm. See for yourself: We know that humanity lies below, while we rise above."

Andrew watches their ascent with quiet pleasure. He remembers how long it took some lessons to sink in. If the rain let up, he could look over to the Bank of America building and see the scorch marks where Leo met the sun last fall. Leo never quite got the hang of the basics. His example goaded (or scared) the others, and Andrew doesn't think he'll have to destroy another of this pack. He can feel Demba nearby. She's not as pleased with the brood, but then she never is. He doesn't notice any little gatherings of shadow indicating an impending strike. He hopes that his students will make it through the night.

In short order, all seven of Andrew's charges sit or sprawl on the rooftop tarpaulins. Through the Vinculum he can sense their fear and anticipation. He's surprised at how

much foresight Ming and the Other Razor show, and congratulates them. "You're doing well. It's not quite enough, of course. If you really thought it was a trap, you should have stayed away. But your concern is a good sign. Those of you who survive will probably do well for yourselves, and each other." He pauses. None of the fledglings can sense it, but Andrew hears the whispers in shadow and hurries on.

"It's lecture night." The pack groans in unison. "Not from me. Tonight you'll be hearing from the woman who really did, once upon a time, teach me everything I know." He makes a slightly theatrical bow, and Demba coalesces out from the shadows in Andrew's coat. She does not smile at the students. All their little motions, nervous tics and semiconscious habits, stop immediately. Her native appearance is completely hidden: Tonight she stands as a statue carved from shadow, lacking any facial features except very long, very sharp fangs. She has no mouth that any of the students can see, but her words carry through the air rather than directly into their minds.

"Good evening, young Keepers. This is a lecture and a test, rolled into one. Let us begin."

All Truth

First, I will tell you the foundational truth, the key to understanding everything about the vampiric condition. This is it: We can never know the truth.

You know that all evidence can be faked. Some of you here can yourselves craft works of art so flawless that no breathing art critic can distinguish them from the real thing. You know that money can buy many things, that persuasion and intimidation can earn you the rest, and that no human being begins to grasp what you and your kind can do.

You know that the kine desperately try to deceive themselves and each other about us. You've benefited from this willful denial, and you must realize that other Cainites do as well. You know that many important realities never appear in any records you can examine.

Furthermore, you know that will and memory are something less than absolutely sure. Most of you here can force a mortal to do something and never realize that he was, for that moment, your direct tool. Some of you are learning the art of personal charisma, making them love you simply because of the power in your Blood. You've no doubt seen that your ductus and other older Cainites can do far more than the few tricks you've learned so far.

Where is truth in any of this? Anyone's memories can be changed. All records can be adjusted, created or removed. There is absolutely nothing you can count on. Everything, inside you and out, might be a lie, perhaps

created deliberately, perhaps the unintended side effect of some plan that doesn't concern you, maybe even the result of haphazard psychosis. None of you have met a truly deranged elder yet, have you? Just wait till the next *Palla Grande*. In the meantime, cultivate paranoia.

Assume, for the moment, that you do exist. I do not give you my word that I have refrained from tampering with your perceptions of this occasion. What good would that do? None of you can tell if I'm lying or not. So I simply assert it. You are Cainites, as am I. We are in fact a sort of walking corpse that feeds on the blood of the living. We burn in sunlight. Our progeny grow weaker with every generation. We are not part of the natural world. We make no sense in scientific terms, and science isn't bunk, no matter what some fools would tell you. It explains many parts of the world, and the fact that it cannot explain us is just one more sign of our alienation from nature.

I'll return to that point again later, perhaps. For now, remember this: The fact that you are what you are, here and now, does not mean that the stories we tell each other about how we came to be are true. Individually, each of you has lied to each other and to yourselves about how you came to be what you are, both before your death and after. Do you think that we stop lying as we age? Nor do we become infallible in our observations and deductions. When we talk about our shared past, we tell stories. Just as you must distinguish what seems like fact from what may prove the case after all, so you must distinguish the facts of now from the explanations offered for them.

Origins on Earth

Many Cainites, whether they believe in the common myth about our origin or not, describe it as a Christian tale. "Adam and Eve had two sons," the story says, "named Caine and Abel. Abel was a herder, Caine a farmer. Each offered the best of his harvest as a sacrifice. God accepted Abel's sacrifice of meat but rejected Caine's sacrifice of fruits and grains. Caine murdered his brother. God cursed Caine with vampirism. All Cainites descend from Caine." Some versions embellish the tale with details of the steps by which our dark father Caine rejected God's forgiveness, learned secrets from Lilith and otherwise carried on like some Campbellian folk hero. This version suffices for our purposes.

I have, in the first place, reason to suspect that a fairly recent editorial hand has been at work in the common tale. The terminal "e" in "Caine" doesn't make sense in any of the ancient languages of the Middle East, where the story presumably originated and smacks altogether of an English speaker who either wasn't careful with his (or her) spelling. Given that we are a proud and boastful lot, I'd be unsurprised to find that the unknown editor simply wanted to suggest that this was the real spelling of our father's name, as opposed to the version used by ignorant mortals.

Name aside, this story exists in a suspiciously polished framework. The linkage with Adam and Eve isn't really necessary in any meaningful sense to the story, and several scholars of our clan say that some early renderings of the tale don't mention the Hebrew figures at all. The God who curses Caine need not be the God in the sense that a modern Christian or Jew would use the word, and maybe not even in the sense that an ancient Mesopotamian or Babylonian would. The God of this story is a powerful force being appeased through sacrifice with the power to inflict the curse of undeath. That's all. Everything else is accretion.

I believe that the tale conveys an important truth, which I shall try to summarize for you.

Caine and Abel represent, respectively, the societies of the Paleolithic or Old Stone Age and the Neolithic or New Stone Age. Humanity's ancestors gathered and scavenged before they hunted. For a very long time, great beasts preyed upon humans at least as often as they preyed on other creatures. Before brave warriors hunted these creatures, nervous defenders huddled and hoped to keep predators at bay. This is where the first weapons came into use: not for aggression, but for defense. Caine is quite rightly the elder brother, the symbol of that time of peaceable, passive and frightened existence. Abel, the younger brother, symbolizes the move toward mastery and conquest.

I told you at the outset that not all truths can be known. I believe that "Cainites," for lack of a better word, prowled the starless night before any known human civilization and in fact before humanity. Perhaps the dominant species of any given era receives the deathless power, or perhaps it arises some other way. Regardless, I think it sensible to say that the predators Caine and his folk feared weren't just wild beasts, but creatures like us, at least in some cases. Perhaps those early Cainites were human, perhaps they belonged to some other hominid species, perhaps something else altogether. Abel the hunter didn't just fight animals, he fought the devils in the night.

Caine's example shows that it doesn't do to underestimate the kine. He rose up and mastered first his own brother, then the powers in darkness. They may have forced undeath upon him, but perhaps he compelled them to give such to him, and then destroyed them. The fact that no trace of them remains except implicitly in stories like this one shows the magnitude of his victory. Whatever the "Cainites" before him were, they have

left no lineage that any of us can now detect. We are all Caine's childer. This is why we venerate what some of you call the "homicidal farmer" — not for his agriculture, but for the thoroughness with which he became what he had previously feared and hated.

Caine is kine become greater, victorious over all opposition. He is therefore rightly our ideal, our Platonic ideal, if you will, the one in whose name we turn on our own opponents.

The Goddess

Before I proceed, let me insert a caution about assumptions. The oldest signs of human worship that I'm aware of all involve the worship of a devouring great goddess. Certainly, men throughout history (and before) have sought to make women's display of power an evil and unnatural thing. That need not be the whole story, however. Perhaps Caine was the first male "vampire," or at least the childer on whom he turned were female. When people of every continent share the imagery of a woman wrapped in darkness, who must be placated with blood along with other gifts, who awes all around her, we may well have a window into the real past.

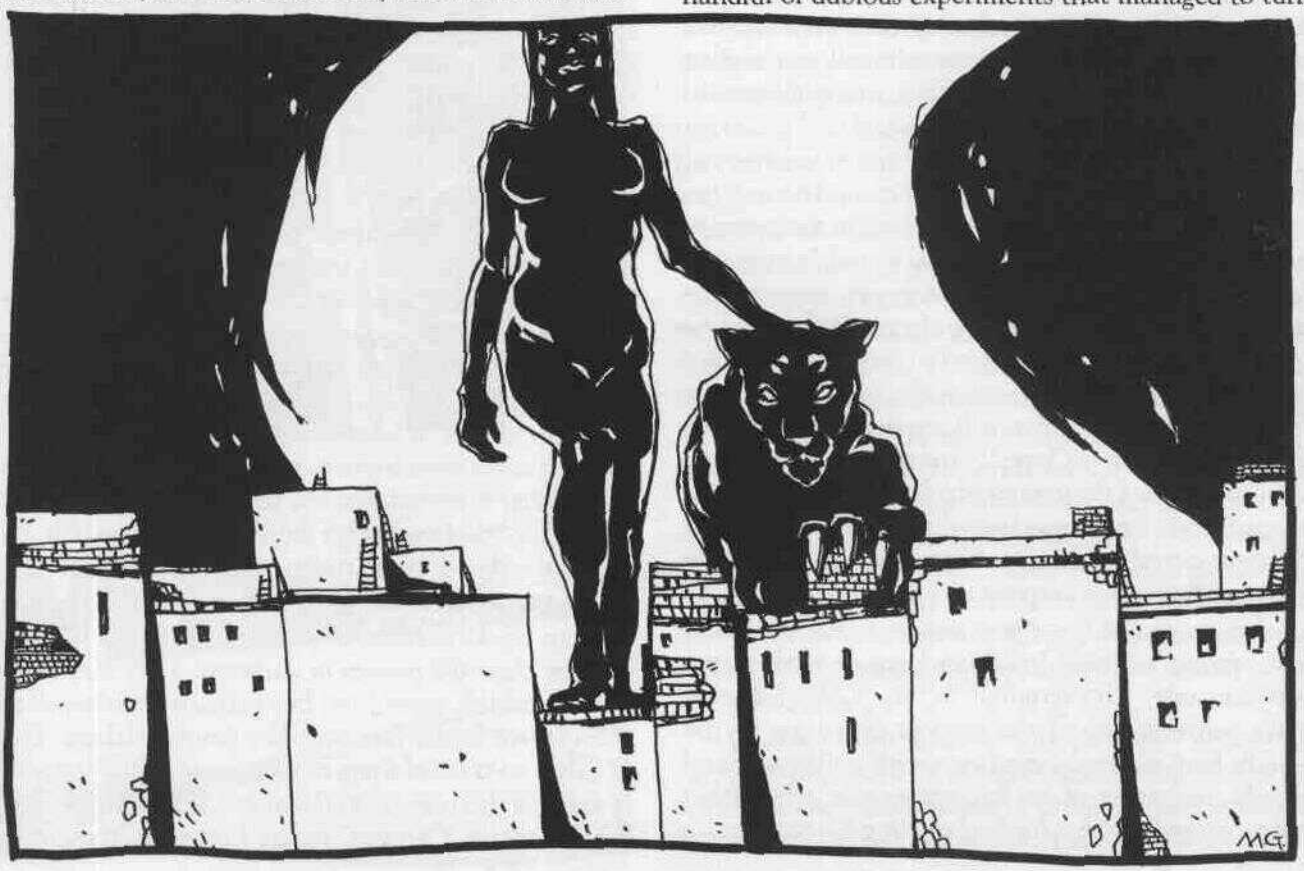
Before the Flood

If you've got an ear for fairy tales, you can seek out the Noddists among our sect. They'll gladly prattle on about the First City and the Second City and who knows what else, with tales of this brother and that sister and the other nephew. I have no patience for such things as anything except entertainment on a dull night. You may come to agree, or disagree. Let the tale-spinners give you their versions and make up your own mind.

However, I can discuss some facts. Insofar as anything I tell you is true, what I tell you about the physical world is. Go and see it, go and speak with others who have. It's easier to detect tampering with rocks than with the soul.

The very word "Antediluvian" presumes facts not in evidence, as a solicitor would put it. More strongly, it presumes claims proven false. Who was present at this universal flood? No god or spirit ever covered the world with water during humanity's existence, eliminating all but a few chosen survivors. Floods swept different parts of the world, both rapidly and through gradual inundation. But the term "Antediluvian" implies being a rare survivor of the deluge that destroyed almost all others, and so nearly as science or examination can say, this is merely hubris. Use it to refer merely to the eldest get of Caine and those of the lowest generation (or generations), and you'll avoid deceiving yourself into accepting the myths.

We first find traces of Cainites in history much as they are now. The same clans existed, apart from a handful of dubious experiments that managed to turn



on their creators or would-be manipulators. Here is the lesson of Caine again. Do not underestimate the kine. And if the kine can accomplish so much, how much more can we? I am aware of few Cainites now active who personally recall events of the pre-Christian era, but we do have a smattering of documents and physical evidence, and we have a surprisingly accurate roster of Cainites whose sires date back millennia.

Everything different about Cainites — those independent of the current clan lineages, for instance — is conveniently pushed back before the first available evidence. You can believe that Caine and his childer really did found the city of Enoch, if you like. I cannot prove you wrong. I simply point out that you have no objective evidence for it. Noddist literature is precisely as useful as any other holy book, which is to say, not at all except when it comes to finding out what the priests want you to think and do.

I suspect that if we could peer into prehistory, we'd find that clans of some sort existed long before Caine. Each lineage's particular gifts sometimes change over time, with the emergence of bloodlines. This conforms precisely to Darwinian evolution, and while we are supernatural creatures, we are nonetheless partly natural. One cautionary note: The sages of our clan know of about 13 clans, more or less depending on where one separates "clan" from "bloodline." In the absence of mysticism and numerology, I see no pressing reason to assume that we know of every Antediluvian and its progeny. Do not assume that you know everything about who else rises as the sun sets.

In any event, here we are, and there we were. The earliest human settlements were in southwestern and southern Asia. Even when we reject the notion of an actual city of Enoch, the archeological record points at foundations for more complex truths underlying the mythology.

Catal Huyuk predates every other known human city. Its remains stand on a plateau in interior Turkey, an area now barren but then fertile. By 6500 B.C. it was already a flourishing city, with more than 6,000 permanent inhabitants. Around 5600 B.C. the old city was abandoned in favor of a new site to the west, and around 4900 B.C. people left the area altogether. Human archeologists debate the reasons for the inhabitants' actions. Catal Huyuk anchored trade routes stretching for hundreds of miles in every direction.

Oddly enough, the city had no streets. The buildings stand flush against each other, with openings in the roofs to let people out. Traffic moved across the roofs. Presumably walkways, ladders or ramps connected the rooftops with the surrounding hilly ground. The city evolved around obsidian and the volcanic goddess who produced it. Imagery of the all-creating, all-devouring goddess fills the city. Leopards, who even tonight prey ferociously on humanity and its primate kin, attended her. Wrapped in cyclopean blackness, she cast forth destructive heat that in turn carried the precious black glass. Her devotees in Catal Huyuk traded it for all the necessities and luxuries their own people couldn't produce, spreading the earth's extrusions far and wide, and the religion of the goddess with it.

Does none of this strike you as allusive? When you hear this story, do you not think of the power that moves in you, and picture it moving across the landscape of the first city? Can you not picture your sire's sire's most removed sire reaching down, by hand or shadow come to life, drawing forth sacrifice from the life-filled rooms below? Does your mind's eye not show you individuals so terrible that the kine found it easier to objectify them and associate them with forces of the earth itself? Can you not picture human worshippers scattering in the wake of some dreadful conflict between Cainite lords and ladies, the humans scurrying to establish some new center as the old dissolves into blood and unleashed fury?

This is *our* Enoch, the echo of our present state in the past, reminding us of our legacy. This should be sufficient for you for now.

The winds have died down, and the sleet's piled up wherever drifts can collect. In the calm, the temperature rises slightly and then falls. Hail and snow meld into solid masses of ice.

The change doesn't affect Demba's steady pacing. Her shadow feet leave no mark on the rooftop. Her shadow-wrapped throat emits no quiver or stutter to disrupt her speech. Druitt wishes he hadn't been quite so melodramatic in ascent and is burning through his vitae to heal the frostbite threatening his fingers, toes and buttocks. The others don't actually huddle for warmth, but do make an effort to avoid wasted motion and unnecessary exposure to the worst gusts.

Demba pauses mid-step. Her face remains as blank as before. The gathering heard a brief snuffling sound, air moving through some passage very unlike a human nose. "It's later than I realized. One more topic and I conclude for the night."

Origins in Darkness

In addition to the facts of history, timeless, recurrent principles arise. We are the clan of darkness supreme, and you can look for our origin in every shadow. The fears embedded in human consciousness and culture feed our kind, giving us openings to exploit — what you might call "leverage" in modern business jargon.

"The oldest and strongest emotion is fear. And the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." So said an American writer, Lovecraft, 80 years ago or so. Lovecraft showed the peculiar blindness of his era in thinking that identifying something as rooted in fear meant showing that it was not rooted in reality. I tell you now what you should already know: The kine are right to fear us. When you loom out of the shadows that obey your command, demonstrating the ability to shatter a human body and overwhelm a human mind, you act not just with your own force but with the heritage of countless millennia of our kind.

Throughout history and before, gods in the night have demanded blood and meat from humanity. These are our sires. You are Artemis. You are Ahriman. You are the volcano goddess of Catal Huyuk and Tezcatlipoca, the Aztecs' god of the smoking mirror. You look skeptical. *Think*, students. A darkness so thick it obscures the sun, wielded by the one who requires more blood than any other god except the sun? This should sound familiar. You are Inguma, the Basque spirit that haunts the Iberian night and strangles sleeping victims who did not propitiate it. You are Hina, the Polynesian goddess who guards the underworld and teaches crafts.

You are darkness personified. So were your sires back to the beginning. Look through history for darkness. There you find us.

Without warning, Demba's form collapses. Her shadow flits from the rooftop, leaving Andrew and his pack alone.

What Manner of Creature

Cainites don't have sex very often, and after a few hundred years many of the physical and psychological features associated with gender wither. Elder Cainites often cease to care very much about gender questions. Nonetheless, anyone wishing to speak of an Antediluvian needs to use *some* pronoun.

Camarilla usage generally goes with the genders that tradition assigns: male to Brujah and Tremere, female to Gangrel and so on down the line. Many Sabbat instructors encourage their students to strip the implied humanity from the Antediluvians. Just as they frown on traditional names like "Ennoia" in favor of "the Gangrel Antediluvian," so most Lasombra priests teach that the best pronoun to use when speaking of an Antediluvian is just "it." Some Lasombra and Tzimisce never speak the clan name when referring to the Antediluvian at all, preferring titles like "the King of Shadows" and "the Eldest."

The Second Lesson: Antiquity

The worst of the storm is past now, leaving a legacy of winds chill enough to keep the ice frozen. Andrew's pack spends two nights seeking out stranded motorists and feeding on them. Andrew makes it a training game, with the object of inflicting the most thorough carnage without any residue for police or others to track. Ming shows the most creative flair, cleverly arranging blankets of temporal shadow to catch the mess she makes eviscerating her victims.

On the third night, Andrew stirs to wakefulness in the pack's communal haven. Some subconscious signal tells him to keep the pack together. He makes sure the neonates discuss Demba's lesson and related subjects, so that they'll be prepared to answer the bishop's pet questions at the next Festival of the Dead. He's not very surprised to find more reasons, as he sits up in the old hotel basement.

A small Cainite sits by the door. He's dressed in a tan suit and wears lightly tinted glasses. His complexion is slightly swarthy. Andrew knows him by reputation and immediately assumes a formal manner. "Welcome to our haven, sir. I trust you had a pleasant enough trip, and that His Excellency the archbishop won't need your services tonight." The small Cainite is one of the archbishop's paladins, a scholar and first-rate torturer.

The paladin moves his lips in a rough approximation of a smile. "Thank you, lord. Yes, I did, and no, he won't. Demba spoke with us last night about her educational effort. She would have returned to continue, but other matters required her attention. I offered to help."

Andrew doesn't speak his thoughts while rousing the pack, introducing them to the paladin and arranging the haven for a lecture. Is Demba now destroyed? Is an invasion from some credible enemy underway? Andrew knows he likely won't ever know and tries to calm himself as the paladin stands to lecture.

The Antediluvian

Be careful not to let the gift of skepticism degenerate into the bane of mindless doubt. The fact that one element of a story is false or at least unsupported is not warrant to dismiss the rest. I remind you of this at the outset, because I speak to you of facts that generally travel in the company of lies.

Regardless of the truth or falsehood of Noddist myth, the Antediluvians really do exist. In fact, at least 13 progenitor Cainites, each responsible for one of the major clans, still infest the earth, or at least they did once (there may well have been more, whose lines failed or who have been forgotten for various reasons). I believe they all endured well into the Christian era and even now, more survive than not. To understand an Antediluvian is often to understand much about its clan.

The Lasombra Antediluvian was certainly real enough. It perished only a few centuries ago, and we have accounts even in the modern nights from those who saw it, spoke with it and dwelled with it. Its origins substantially influence our nature.

The Antediluvian originally lived somewhere in the western Mediterranean. In time, Sicily became the creature's favored haven, for reasons I'll discuss in a moment. It may have been born and lived there, or it may have originated elsewhere. I favor Malta. It has some very old temples built from black stone with obsidian artifacts, and it has sufficient caves with attached legends about monsters. It pleases me to think of Calypso as some mortal's effort to explain away a thaumaturge of our clan. Other Lasombra historians point at Corsica, Sardinia or the Balearics. Realistically, we have no way to settle the question definitively. It's primarily a way to justify further research and argument.

Cainites do have some solid facts at hand, however. The first is that our founder was in life part of the Mediterranean region. Unquestionably, the oldest Lasombra all spring from that part of the world and spread elsewhere over the millennia. The second is that it came specifically from the western Mediterranean; it always spoke of the civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean as something a bit foreign, targets rather than homes. The third is that it was a creature of the sea, either an island-dweller or a resident of some coastal community.

These are not just facts of history. They echo inside you now. You must have felt that peculiar fascination to rise in time to see the sunset without feeling any comparable urge to catch the beginning of dawn. You might even know the drive to spend time on, near and under the water, even if in life you cared nothing for it. Those are part of your heritage just as much as the power over shadow. You are, that is to say, part of my field of study, as I am myself.

One excellent reason to doubt Noddist myth is that the proposed roster of Caine's childer matches the actually existing Antediluvians so poorly. Who would have been a suitable sire for the Lasombra Antediluvian? None of the three fit very well. They serve to account for the Camarilla clans well enough, I suppose, but the story has more players than the pathetic seven. In any event, some Cainite Embraced our founder, and it set about building its haven in the shadows. Speculation rages within the scholars' ranks about the motives and nature of the sire. We generally (though not always) agree that the Antediluvian didn't spontaneously

transmute itself into a Cainite, but frankly of the sire we can know nothing.

The Sea Peoples

Our clan has a long heritage of leadership in a very primal and pure sense. We do not soil ourselves with the petty details of reckoning every little scrap; we command and seize. In antiquity, you find us leading this way among pirates. Demba, I believe, spoke to you about Catal Huyuk, but she has a sometimes disproportionate fascination with settlements. It comes from her personal history. I wish to speak of peoples on the move. Quite early on in history, we find records of great raiders.

In the second millennium B.C., the so-called "Sea Peoples" ravaged all the settled lands around the Mediterranean. The Hyksos even ruled Egypt for two successive dynasties. For a while, the Sea Peoples dominated all commerce in the Mediterranean. Nobody sailed without paying tribute to them or courting destruction. Indeed, around the turn of the millennium, the Sea Peoples played a major part in smashing the Bronze Age civilizations in and around Greece, ushering in an era that more landbound historians like to call a "dark age." An age of darkness. Need I belabor the point?

Pardon? Yes, sir, you are quite correct. Lord Emory, I wish to commend your student Druitt for his attention to detail. It is indeed one thing to point at a historical phenomenon, another to show that it matters to our kind. Let me cite some specific examples. This is from an Egyptian account of the execution of a band of Sea People raiders captured in the Nile Delta. "As the fire rose, all the prisoners cried out to various gods. Some named gods of our land, even offering prayer to Anubis in the most correct way. Most called upon the power of darkness that they named Laza Omri Baras, which the priests said signifies 'The God of the River of Darkness.' But he did not attend to their prayers, and so they perished." Another record, from a ship captain who was the only one of his crew to escape a massacre while on a voyage from Thebes to Athens, gave the name of the god in question as "Lau-Som-Bheu," which is quite passable Proto-Indo-European for "profiting together by knowledge" or "profiting together by domination."

I could multiply the examples, but these should suffice. Our Antediluvian's name came to the lips of pillagers wishing to invoke a power of potency and authority. This may not constitute proof in a purely academic sense, but then this is not a university. You will not be graded for failure to master points of detail, merely destroyed at some point for want of knowledge that could have saved you if only you'd bothered to grasp more fully your heritage.

The First Dispersal

In 1627 B.C., the volcanic island of Thera erupted. Foolish scholars try to link it with everything from the Exodus to Atlantis, when it was simply what it was — a tremendous eruption, spewing ash and dust around the world. The sea recovered quickly enough, but many coastal havens suffered. In the wake of the eruption, something like a third of our clan chose to seek better feeding and opportunity elsewhere.

The Antediluvian made one of its periodic great wanderings at this time, returning centuries later with the childe Montano, whose name we associate with the foolishness of honor. More of that another time. It didn't travel alone, and we can establish firm connections between the post-Thera dispersal and the appearance of Lasombra Methuselahs in Africa and interior Asia. The subject of Lasombra in the New World before A.D. 1492 is a little more complex, and we'll save that for later. Suffice it to say that Lasombra of the Fourth and Fifth Generations established themselves throughout much of the world at this time, albeit in small numbers.

I see a question. Ah, yes. Yes, certainly a world filled with dark skies is good for us. But a world in which our food supply is diminished and more defensive isn't. The mortal toll of the eruption is what motivated the dispersal.

Parasites and Plagues

I will not speak in detail of our clan's involvement with pirates during the Greek-dominated centuries after the dark age. One man's pirate is another man's hero, to begin with. The line between soldier and pirate is the line between you and me. The decentralized governments of the time favored opportunity and... I must address a point of terminology.

Cainites stricken with conscience, that most lamentable retention from their mortal days, sometimes rant about us as a race of parasites. We aren't, of course. We are predators. We are also, in a rather literal sense, a disease upon humanity. Consider the course of a plague. It emerges, sweeps through the area, kills all those most susceptible and then fades into inactivity. That's the way raiders and warriors within humanity operate. They emerge, gather all the interesting loot and then wait until more loot arrives. We do the same, when we operate in a style more mobile than the Camarilla's favored hiding. Piracy is part of our clan's legacy. It's also a remarkably sensible way for Cainites to exist.

Kine epidemiologists refer to humanity and other target species as a disease's way of making more disease. The same rule applies to them. Humanity is a Cainite's way of making more Cainites, or of simply feeding well.

Note that this perspective immediately cures the common misconception that human history as such is driven by our desires. It isn't, and it doesn't need to be. The kine choose as they will. So do we. Events that favor our good feeding and continued reproduction endure. Events that make existence harder for us do not, because at those times we seek to cull out those responsible for the problem. We don't initiate many developments because we don't need to, any more than evolution has to wait for a species to deliberately innovate. The myriad choices human beings make every year are the social equivalent of mutations, and we are the force of unnatural selection.

Like a disease evolving toward commensurate relations with its host, we aim toward a state in which the kine prosper (insofar as we wish them to) and so do we. None of this requires us to be kings over them. As their true masters, we can and do take what suits us without the petty demands of being first among equals. Human beings don't participate in the social life of their herds, and we don't need to, either.

The Second Dispersal

All good things must come to an end, we are told. So it was with the golden era of Mediterranean piracy. Alexander's empire seriously constrained our operations in the eastern Mediterranean — for half a decade one simply couldn't mount a suitably profitable large sea campaign, and things remained relatively grim for decades thereafter. For all their various squabbles, Alexander's warring successors often maintained their guard against our folk and our comrades in spirit.

The crushing blow came from Pompey, a Roman general, 68 years before the commonly reckoned birth of Christ. The man should have been one of ours, so great was his talent. In mere months, he took the vast power and wealth the Roman Senate granted him and eradicated essentially all organized piracy throughout the Mediterranean Sea. No longer was the sea ours. Now the Roman name "Mare Nostrum" or "Our Sea" was something more than an idle boast. Many of our clan's havens fell to joint sea and land invasions, including the Maltese stronghold that had until then most often provided the Antediluvian with its home. Thereafter the black citadel in Sicily served as our father's frequent haven.

With piracy no longer an option, our clan went through a second era of dispersal. By the end of the first Christian century, Lasombra had spread everywhere in the Old World, though many of those who went east subsequently perished at the hands of Cathayans and

other menaces. Pompey's crusade also gave significant reinforcement to the terrestrial faction of our clan.

I have spoken primarily of our clan on the waves. It is also true that some lineages felt more comfortable dwelling on land, weaving themselves into the fabric of human societies and wearing the resulting garments as both camouflage and lure. The Antediluvian itself experimented on mortal communities, though primarily as part of its ongoing search for desirable childer. As members of the Sabbat, you know that identification with humanity cripples us, blinds us to our true potential. You inherit an ancient and glorious tradition of mastery from outside. However, certain things must be said about the rival tradition of mastery from within.

As you meet Cainites who belong to other clans, you'll find a straightforward correlation. The more dedicated a clan is to preserving the foolish illusion of humanity, for whatever reason, the more its members boast of their glories in "controlling" or "manipulating" human societies. The Ventrue and Brujah in particular make much of this, to the extent that childer Embraced mere nights ago seem determined to reenact the Punic Wars in their social relations. You should feel at liberty to mock such pretensions — in fact, you should feel compelled. I hope to point out a few of the complexities of the real situation, which are in my opinion vastly more interesting than Cainite mythology.

Lasombra Havens and the Course of Empire

Our clan has a very ancient practice that is regrettably not generally available to you newcomers. Ever since human empires began to expand, some of us have followed just behind the front lines, setting up havens in conquered lands and letting the imperial forces keep away all other troubles while we make them take care of our sundry needs. Lasombra went with Hittites and Sumerians and Parthians, so it should come as no surprise that we went with Romans as well. Elders describe those centuries as good ones for the clan, because dissenters could spread out to engage in experiments without cutting off contact with the main body of the clan. Not until the last three hundred years or so did we get so much routine exchange of information and resources.

Alas, I do not see how you and your peers can enjoy anything comparable without either cheap travel to the stars or a massive collapse of existing social institutions. Some of your clanmates tried to engineer a nuclear war or global plague for precisely that reason, but none of their efforts worked out. The Courts of Blood authorized the destruction of all involved. You may not purchase your haven at the cost of everyone else's.

Rome

As I was saying, Pompey's campaign shifted the focus of clan attention. It simply wasn't feasible to continue piracy as our primary mode of predation.

Many of you probably think of the Roman Empire as a looming, static sort of thing. It wasn't. For one thing, in 68 B.C. it wasn't an empire. It was a delightfully corrupt and convoluted republic of a sort, dominated by an aristocracy who made a fetish of hobbling the strong. A century before Pompey's crusade, the republic controlled territory from eastern Spain over to the westernmost tip of Greece. Carthage still stood, though most of its empire was already gone. By the time Pompey went into action, the republic had pushed its frontier south to include former Carthaginian lands (and the blighted ruin of Carthage itself), all of Greece, Egypt and much of Asia Minor.

Fun as it might be to claim otherwise, Cainites had very little to do with this. Certainly our forebears did their part to build up networks of contacts, cultivate mortal protégés and the like. We read of the occasional general stricken with a mad fear of shadow or of mysterious murderers in the night, and you may smile in recognition. Nevertheless, an empire doesn't run on such things. All vampiric influence amounts to corrective nudges and reefs in the path of human history. The very futility of vampiric rulership should be a lesson to you that it's not what we're fitted by nature (or perhaps unnature) to do.

Pompey's success led to the downfall of the republic. The details are complex. Suffice it to say that a jealous Senate tried to strip him of power and deny his requests on behalf of his troops, and that when the dust settled twenty or thirty years later, the republic was gone. Julius Caesar ruled openly as emperor, and by the time he died the empire had grown to almost its furthest extent.

At least two codified versions of the Path of Night date to around the beginning of the Christian era. Christianity itself spread so rapidly because Roman citizens traveled with unprecedented ease and safety, and you know how interesting the Christian faith has been to many of us. The Courts of Blood moved away from their Babylonian origins to reflect fresh thought among both humans and Cainites about efficiency and justice, with results that remain largely applicable even tonight.

The Third Lesson: The Great Revolt

The Festival of the Dead is over. As always, the police and the mayor scramble for hasty explanations about all the extra bodies. As always, they tried to cover it up, but amused Sabbat made sure to keep the local media informed, and the corpses made fine front-page news. Andrew reaches up to feel the bishop's hat given to him on the last night of the festival, marking his triumph over his rivals. Ductus no more — now it's Bishop Emory, thank you very much. His pleasure in the moment would be complete were it not for the elder standing next to him, surveying the city from the debris of the house they torched in last night's fire dance.

Brother Oso looks like the bear of his name. He's half a foot taller than Andrew, with fiery red hair and beard. Thick curly hair covers his arms and hands, the thickest Andrew can recall ever seeing on someone who wasn't transforming into an animal form. Brother Oso is bulky, but it doesn't look like there's any fat or flab there. Andrew remembers quite vividly watching Oso juggle three flaming roof beams, all the while balanced on one foot and using the free foot to keep kicking at the firemen unfortunate enough to be first on the scene.

Oso turns from the panorama to look down at Andrew. "You have a worthy pack, bishop. If they last, I expect that they'll be following you on the path to honors."

"Thank you, sir. I hope so." Andrew doesn't know how much deference Oso actually wants, so he aims for a neutral tone open to many interpretations.

"I would like to speak with them before I leave. Do you object?"

"I'd be honored. I take pride in having a pack who understands their world, and whatever you choose to share would no doubt serve that end."

Oso nods, then casually vaults backward, landing with a twist to face the gathered pack.

Murdering the Father

None of you know what it's like to exist in the presence of a god, or something so powerful that it might as well be a god. You look at your leaders in the Festival and find them intimidating, but not one of them is more than four centuries old. I was the oldest present at the rite, and I am less than a thousand years old myself. But I know what our founder's gaze was like, and why it made the great patricide necessary.

You are ambitious creatures. It's part of your nature, and if you showed no drive to improve your position, you wouldn't have made it this far. You chafe under the dead hand of those over you, looking at the archbishop or the cardinal and thinking how many decades they're likely to stay right where they are. Don't look surprised. Remember that it's difficult to keep secrets from your elders; plan accordingly. But now imagine that your leaders had existed not just for decades but for millennia, that you could at any time find yourself commanded by a creature older than all recorded history. Imagine all your hopes and fears known and dismissed, your plans casually toyed with to suit some scheme older than the language you speak.

The Great Rebel

Our clan in its modern form begins with Gratiano de Veronese, scion of a medieval Italian noble family. He grew up in the early 12th century, in the hothouse of peninsula politics. The German empire ruled the region's upper half, with the Norman Kingdom of Sicily controlling most of the rest. Religious and civil politics were often one and the same thing, and always interfered with each other.

Gratiano was one ambitious young noble among many. He first made his mark as an articulate preacher, using the bishopric his family bought for him when he was still in his twenties to rouse popular support for family causes. In the guise of righteous anger at noble sins, he skillfully set the mob against inconvenient rivals, generally picking up much of the glory they dropped in their hasty flights. Once the de Veronese family was secure, he turned to wider ranging matters. Specifically, he hoped to assemble an effective coalition that could force the imperial government to grant more autonomy in Italy.

In this he failed, completely. The city-states wouldn't give up their prerogatives, and all the nobles in the empire chose to pursue their separate advantage rather than cooperate against the enemy in the background. In a small way, Gratiano's efforts at inspiring resistance likely contributed to the mid-century extinction of most city-states' independence. They became sufficiently annoying that the empire and the Norman Sicilians each crushed those within reach. That, however, came later. What mattered at the time — about 1130 — was that Gratiano realized he was not fated to be the next Charlemagne or Pompey. He planned to step back from the national stage to return to the concerns of his own family, after one final visit to the emperor.

It was one visit too many. The de Veroneses felt troubled during his absence, harboring inner doubts about Gratiano's real worth or intentions. They didn't think to associate these new fears with the denser-than-usual shadows ranging through their estate, and of course with merely mortal willpower they never would get the chance. All they knew, with increasing certainty, is that Gratiano had offended the family's honor

with his hubris and deserved punishment. Family agents quietly undermined Gratiano's efforts, as did whispers in the nighttime corridors of empire.

You recognize the secret face of this story. Yes, the Lasombra Antediluvian had taken an interest in Gratiano, feeling that the time had come again for it to make a new childe. It set about ruining his life to test his character, just as our clan does to its potential childer now.

Gratiano responded to the challenges with renewed fervor. It became a point of pride with him to face down opponents and destroy their arguments, humiliating them in front of witnesses. He gained quite a following among dissidents around the imperial throne who felt that Gratiano made much sense when he talked about the benefits to the empire of a more indirect rule in Italy. Unfortunately for the childe-to-be, his arguments couldn't penetrate the reinforced mental barriers of the officials who actually had the power to approve or deny his requests. When the vaguely worded summons back home arrived one day, Gratiano found himself forced to admit defeat for the first time in his adult life (at least the first failure of any goal that had become important to him).

The irony here is that Gratiano actually had plotted to betray his family. Bavarian and Bohemian nobles with interests in Italy convinced him to betray his former associates in the Italian autonomy movement in exchange for estates and opportunities in Germany. Gratiano made no great effort to conceal his growing enjoyment of German custom. He simply concealed how deep the change of sentiment ran.

The failed diplomat returned home to face arrest. His parents accused him of treachery, of plotting to subvert the family's position through calculated offenses to the empire, which he would then exploit for personal gain. Quite convincing evidence accompanied the charges. You know how well some of you can fool mortals; just think what a few thousand years' practice could do for you. In any event, Gratiano went to jail and the threat of imminent execution.

The Antediluvian came into his cell and spoke with him that night. It was not the Antediluvian's custom to force the Embrace on anyone. For its own reasons, it wished its childer to ask for the change. Much to its surprise, Gratiano wasn't initially inclined to accept. He felt sure that he could negotiate his way out of the situation and laid out two fully developed schemes, either of which would suffice for the purpose. Naturally he found the Antediluvian fascinating, and he certainly wanted to learn more about being a Cainite, but he didn't feel himself so deprived of opportunity that he would want to give up life just yet.

With surprise and a touch of dismay, the Antediluvian withdrew to make other arrangements. The following night it returned to the cell. This time Gratiano did not leap up in surprise, for the torturers had broken both his legs. His eyes did not widen in shock, for they were both swollen shut after repeated beatings. The Antediluvian didn't need to do much to inspire the de Veronese interrogators to do their worst to the young man — it simply showed them and the family elders proof of Gratiano's German deals. The Antediluvian now spoke again to Gratiano about the blessings of the Embrace, and this time Gratiano listened more carefully. He realized that mere mortal cleverness wouldn't serve. With that realization, he accepted the Embrace.

The details of Gratiano's escape are mundane enough, involving a body altered through blood magic to resemble him and left in his place. What matters is that Gratiano accompanied the Antediluvian to its Sicilian stronghold. As he realized how far the black hand of the clan (and of other clans) reached into the affairs he'd tried to direct as a mortal, he became filled with the desire to topple the Antediluvian just as he hoped to topple the emperor. As his first step, he set about becoming the Antediluvian's model childe.

Some of you can sense the future, and you've seen demonstrations enough to know that stronger oracles exist. It seems ludicrous to believe that the Antediluvian had no inkling of its coming destruction. Several theories prevail as to why it allowed Gratiano to continue.

- ***Outside support:*** That is, Gratiano did not act alone. Either another Antediluvian or some other force gave him aid. You'll hear rumors of infernalists or the spirit-demons of the old Tzimisce domains. Disregard them. They're ludicrous. You may meet Gratiano yourself some night, and whatever else may be true of him, he does *not* reek of the infernal or anything like it. As for other manipulators, well, a theory that can explain away all evidence isn't actually useful at all.
- **Suicide:** That is, the Antediluvian chose to perish. Perhaps it got bored, perhaps it felt it had atoned for some primal sin or that it never could. Why does anyone ever commit suicide?
- **Plan gone awry:** That is, the Antediluvian wanted its patricidal childe for some scheme of its own, and Gratiano's rebellion was a matter of sheer luck on his part, bad luck on his sire's part, or both. Like the "outside support" theory, this offers no basis for analysis, so in practical terms it's a religious doctrine.

Whatever the case, the fact is that the Antediluvian accepted Gratiano's flattery and ignored the elders who whispered to it that he would do in the dark palace what he'd tried to do in Germany. I was myself Embraced some

decades after Gratiano and remember vividly the atmosphere — Gratiano continued to try directing the Italian principalities, now using his powers as well as his native aptitudes. It didn't work all that well, but he gained valuable experience and became increasingly annoyed with the vampiric hierarchy that blocked him far more thoroughly than any mortal one ever could. We young ones often spoke in the early morning, just before slumber, about the desirability of fresh opportunity. What distinguished Gratiano was that he dared to act on it.

The Era of Revolt

I can scarcely describe to you what a horrible era the 14th and 15th centuries were for us as Cainites. The great plague swept away much of our food and left remaining mortals sparse enough that maintaining our disguises within the mortal world became more difficult. Meanwhile, Cainites continued to create childer, making more cities crowded to intolerable levels. While the Antediluvians themselves spent more and more time in torpor, far too many Methuselahs remained active to torment us all with unobtainable prestige. While they and their rotten sires ruled, we could expect never to achieve what we felt to be our potential. Violence erupted as generations clashed and as clans forced into competition for valuable kine resources sharpened their antipathy.

To make matters worse, we faced organized mortal opposition on an unprecedented scale. The fools of our kind alerted clerical and civil authorities to our presence. The Inquisition mutated from a random collection of doctrinal questioners into an efficient secret police, capable of ferreting out us and our pawns. Just as the Inquisition's ranks swelled, the expanding Ottoman presence — all the way to Vienna, before turning back! — forced eastern European Cainites to flee westward. Their movements and their crowding into others' cities only made it that much easier for the hunters to find us all.

By my tally, the overwhelming majority of the Cainites who existed in 1350 had perished by 1500, whether at the hands of mortals or Cainites. You can picture nothing like it. You are all too young to remember the 1919 influenza, let alone actual genocide. It was a time in which all saw that we could not continue as before. That was Gratiano's great contribution.

Gratiano planned while the rest of us fretted and dabbled. He made contacts among the so-called anarchs, listening to their complaints and showing them twin lessons. First, he taught them how to identify and exploit opportunities in whatever their circumstances of the moment happened to be. For most of a century he ran a sort of Socratic academy for anarchs, covering

The Devil in the Details

Oso's account differs in some ways from the ones found in other **Vampire** books. From the vantage point of the Final Nights, there's no objective way to establish the truth of the matter. All surviving witnesses and participants claim great certainty of their recollections. Simple tests reveal that they are all telling the truth as they recall it, and that all involved are sure that no mind control, hypnosis or other mental manipulation happened along the way. Nearly all Lasombra know what Dominate feels like, and none of the conflicting accounts shows such traces. Nonetheless, the stories don't add up. Cainites interested in Sabbat history deal with discrepancies mostly through selective ignorance and discreet silences.

mortal and vampiric politics, the use of religious orders, trade and the like. Second, he showed them that however useful these lessons might be, in the end it all came down to the whim of the eldest. In between sessions of his academy, he traveled all over Europe, cultivating new alliances outside the clan. His deals with the Assamites of the Holy Land and the Balkans proved most important for us all.

Sometime around 1400, Gratiano became convinced that he could destroy our Antediluvian. For two full mortal generations he laid his plans. Around the middle of the century, things finally started to happen. The "Victory Order" and other groups of Lasombra enforcers encountered anarchs with memories of Lasombra elders conspiring with them to commit acts of diablerie. Some such memories immediately proved false, while others held up to sustained examination. The Courts of Blood convened more and more frequently in response to charges of this sort of conspiracy, and the ranks of the clan's elders thinned visibly. The Antediluvian itself didn't seem to notice or care, and never answered questions about what its progeny should do.

Gradually, the memories the Assamites implanted into selected anarchs more selectively incriminated the elders Gratiano saw as a threat. Above all, he wanted to remove Montano, but he also worried about lesser figures of the court. To his dismay, the targets he most wanted removed proved most resistant to charges based on mental forgery. Gratiano himself assisted the Assamites in mind stirring, and as he says now, never before or since did he ever dominate mortals so thoroughly. The pressures of his plan and the general situation must have inspired him to great heights, not to be ascended again until some future crisis makes it necessary.

With the clan in chaos, the killing blow fell one evening in the summer of 1483. Well, perhaps not. Accounts differ as to the actual date; this is what I recall. A mixed-clan force of anarchs assaulted the Sicilian stronghold. The Antediluvian did not wake or rise, and mutual distrust hobbled Lasombra defenses. In short order, all the castle's inhabitants other than the Antediluvian faced the command to surrender or perish. Montano evaded capture for the rest of the night, flitting about with Obtenebration arts not known to anyone else (except, presumably, the Antediluvian). In the end, Montano escaped. Everyone else surrendered to Gratiano's force or became the invaders' food.

Gratiano and a handful of elders descended into the depths to face the Antediluvian. The void-spirits common to the stronghold's lower reaches were absent, so the descent was quick and easy. Half a dozen raiders fell upon the sleeping thing and drained it in minutes. It never awoke or stirred. When the draining finished, it simply crumbled into a fine black ash with tarry residue. There was, at the last moment, no great drama about it, merely the completion of a well-executed plan.

The Clan Without Its Head

Gratiano convened the Friends of the Night, the *Amici Noctis* as they were then, and presented them with the deed already done. They could condemn him. Indeed, he dared them to do so, taunting them that if they did not stop him now, he would remake the clan into something altogether new. The Friends listened and stepped aside. Some Friends chose to join with Gratiano's revolt. Others kept quiet and let events unfold.

The great rebel announced that unlike Augustus Giovanni, he would not claim the status of clan founder. He was, he said, quite content being a member of Clan Lasombra, now that the monster which once defined the clan was gone. Now every member of the clan could decide for himself what the lineage meant and act accordingly. No single will would thereafter run the clan: Gratiano explicitly rejected the role and "suggested" that the Friends of the Night not anoint a successor. Montano frantically campaigned against this step, but to no avail. He and a handful of his supporters became a roving clan-in-exile and were dubbed by some unknown wit among the Friends as an "anti-tribe."

Hatching the Sabbat

Just one decade after Gratiano struck the decisive blow against our clan as it was, the Anarch Revolt came to a formal end in the pathetic declaration known as the Convention of Thorns. In short, the vast majority of anarchs meekly submitted to their elders once more in

exchange for symbolic declarations of allegiance on the part of their once and future masters. Only a courageous handful in each clan chose to continue the fight. Our term, the "anti-tribe," became a badge of honor; eventually the form *antitribu* found widest acceptance.

You must remember that organization of any sort beyond the scope of a single clan was very new. The Camarilla was an actual innovation, something our kind produces only slowly. Elders turned to it not so much out of enthusiasm as out of the dread sense of its necessity. Caught between mortal pressures and challenges from neonates, they voluntarily gave up a significant portion of the autonomy which used to define their status. The clans that stayed out of the Camarilla did so primarily because their elders were wise enough to see that the imperatives of the new organization would destroy old ways just as effectively as capitulation to the anarchs would have.

For the next half-century, our clan simply pursued its own course. So did the Tzimisce, who copied our destruction of the Antediluvian, for similar reasons, the Assamites (who cravenly capitulated to the Camarilla's imposed curse), Giovanni, Ravnos and Setites remained at liberty. Our elders largely continued as they had done for some time, since the Courts of Blood continued to function. Our neonates experimented with new relations with humanity.

I remember very clearly the first occasion on which I heard the term "Sabbat" applied to a pack of Cainite preying on mortals. It was on Maundy Thursday in 1502, just after the midnight service. I remember this because I'd gone to Mass with certain clanmates in Naples. There was concern in the region about what some Friends called the Cainite Heresy. (I will not pause here to discuss the matter. Ask your pack leader, or your archbishop.) After the midnight service, a small group of us stood in the courtyard, admiring the stars and casually discussing the whole question of what role we played in God's order. I was so earnest then, and so foolish.

One of the youngest neonates spoke up to say that the whole area of Italy was blighted with peasant superstition (as it still is), including the notion that covens of witches roam the countryside in "sabbats," dragging off adults and children alike for hideous rituals. He and his associates, he claimed, dressed themselves in various styles traditionally ascribed to witches and acted as they were expected to: They ran with superhuman speed into a village, shouted out that they had come to collect the souls due their lord Satan, break down doors at random and seize enough people to feed themselves. We all found the notion highly amusing and commended his ingenuity.

I remembered that clever fellow again perhaps six or seven years later, when reports came to us of Cainite packs doing the same thing in the Danube Valley and along the Baltic coast. The presence of these Sabbat Cainites was, for many mortals, a precursor of the Ottoman siege at Vienna.

Freed in Blood

Not long after the Ottoman tide peaked and turned back, we began to hear in Sicily of this new thing, the Vaulderie. You, of course, take it for granted. You cannot easily imagine what a startling thing it was. Bishop Emory never subjected any of you to a blood bond, did he? No, I thought not. It used to be that your sire or another elder could bind you to himself by making you drink his blood, and you would feel compelled to obey his whim, and love it. It was the recurring threat against disobedient childer.

Suddenly, thanks to some anonymous blood magician, we were free of the threat. We could form bonds to our like-minded peers, the Cainites to whom we *chose* to commit ourselves, and leave the elders none the wiser. I myself was one of the first to drink from the Vaulderie cup in the grand rituals we held above the ashes of our Antediluvian, and I helped remove my sire not long thereafter. It was a sweet, sweet thing. Whenever you chafe under the bond that the Vaulderie creates, remember the alternative, and know that the old horror is always waiting to creep back if we cease our vigilant guard.

Whoever invented the Vaulderie, it spread like wildfire in the middle of the 16th century. Quite soon, particularly as Cainites measure such things, it was the defining practice of Cainites rebelling against the Camarilla and the sect's masters, just as the Sabbat pack was already the defining organizational unit. The combination of the two created a sense of unity among the dissenters. Sometime around the middle of the century, we began referring to ourselves as the Sabbat. The Courts of Blood first used the term in charges brought in 1552, and again in 1558, and then regularly after that. Remember, of course, that at this point we Lasombra mostly associated with each other; cross-clan packs were still rare as far as we were concerned. We regarded them suspiciously, even with the Vinculum bond at work.

Nonetheless, we took part in efforts to harass and undermine the Camarilla. You'll find quite a good description of me in one of Charles Fort's books, where he records (with his usual exuberant skepticism) an attack by Cainites on Maltese pilgrims in 1585. Even this scar is there in his text. We created such a public disturbance that the Antediluvian-lickers spent literally years trying to smooth

things over again, and of course in the end it didn't altogether work. Such successes came too rarely, perhaps, but we certainly forced them to commit more resources to the response than they would have liked. Our rising glory established us as genuine rivals to the sect and attracted a small but steady flow of defectors who wished to be what the sect would never allow: Cainites exercising themselves to the fullest.

Building Paths

Human philosophy took fresh twists in those centuries. So did ours. But first I must lay the context for you, as it was a time very different from this.

Most Cainites throughout history have always kept to a moral standard more or less like that of the human society in which they originated. They reject some tenets, of course, but keep to others. They are more likely to think of themselves as wicked people than as good beings by standards that have nothing to do with humanity. Around this contemptible fascination for the ways of the living, tradition placed a number of "Roads," more or less formalized ethical systems reflecting vampiric experience. Most of them took some particular interest — chivalry, or insight into mortality, or what have you — and magnified it into a whole... I believe "paradigm" is the modern word.

In the late Middle Ages, the weaklings in the newly created Camarilla went on a crusade against the Roads. Yes, faced with rising challenges from humanity and given the opportunity to join the anarchs and Sabbat-to-be in turning on elder tyrants, they chose to purge Cainites who refused to pretend to be kine. I'm sure this impresses you just as it did me when I first learned of it. Yes, the Camarilla in its collective wisdom decided that the real problem was with those Cainites who chose not to exist in ways conducive to hiding among humanity. Many of the Roads disappeared altogether, and the rest vanished from general view. Afterward, their practitioners kept their secrets hidden.

All of this created an intellectual void among Cainites. Under the aegis of the Sabbat, a great intellectual fervor roiled throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Nearly a dozen new ethical systems came into existence and received the ruthless acid test of practice in the hands and minds of Cainites very keen to shed more humanity without losing themselves to the Beast. Collectively known as the Paths of Enlightenment, these systems are among the great lasting achievements of our sect. It goes nearly without saying, I hope, that Clan Lasombra played a vital role in this development. We wisely refrained from annihilating our own distinctive Road of Night, and thus began with a better foundation for Path development than any other clan. The *Amies Noir* provided extensive support for the philosophers and sages interested in codifying other approaches, as well.

There's a curious feature of this work. Most of the key inventors chose to remain anonymous. We simply don't have reliable names or necrographies (if I may coin a term) for the Cainites who, for instance, formalized old dualist notions into the Path of the Cathari or worked out the elegant compromise that is the Path of Honorable Accord. You can learn much about early adherents to each of these, and it's a plausible guess that those speaking and writing early on about a given Path are the ones who created it, but that cannot be more than a guess. Perhaps there's something in the act of creating a system intended to be universal that conflicts with the normal egoism of Cainites. Or perhaps, as some Lasombra tell it, the fact that the creators chose to remain in the shadows is a literal fact as well as a metaphor, and indicates the creative power of the Abyss at work within them.

Into the New World

I do not reveal a great secret when I say that despite our best efforts, we did not succeed in displacing the Camarilla from Europe. This shouldn't be any great surprise, of course. Of the clans outside the Camarilla, only we and the Giovanni had significant presence in Western Europe. The others were all, in their respective ways, marginal, attached to other lands. We had fervor on our side — holy fervor, I like to think, an echo of the passion that drove Caine — but we lacked the resources.

Inevitably, then, we examined alternatives. The Camarilla knew about the discoveries across the Atlantic just as we did, of course. They simply didn't care, except for a passing interest in Aztec and Incan cities. We didn't have the luxury of passing interest — we *had* to find new realms for ourselves. So it was that, individually and then collectively, we sailed with our clan's own corsairs (and unwitting mortals) to carve out empires from the lands of the savages.

I see a question in your faces. Yes, I said "savages." I don't care what social feats they achieved before Europeans came. A people who do not build great cities are not a people worth feeding from, let alone worthy candidates for the Embrace. The European notion that the city defines civilization is at least in part a tribute to our influence, and it is one of the great truths of our kind, Gangrel and other rabble notwithstanding. We backed settlement ventures everywhere in the New World to create proper homes for ourselves.

Those were nights of chaos, or so those who made the trip early on tell me. Cut off from their various clans'

procedures for governance, the emigrants constantly squabbled among themselves. Efforts to organize continent-spanning Vaulderie gatherings came to nothing, so the only reliable bonds of unity were local. In addition, the emigrants encountered a level of Lupine activity unprecedented in our experience since the Stone Age. Nor did we get the continent to ourselves: Camarilla rabble (and some infiltrators disguised as rabble) made their way across the sea as well, bringing with them the stifling protocols they worship as "Traditions."

It goes without saying that in the middle of this struggle, we distinguished ourselves as leaders. The somewhat decentralized nature of the Friends of the Night means that our clan's members are never wholly cut off so long as an experienced clanmates is nearby. The Courts of Blood became, for several decades, the closest thing to procedural justice in the New World, and on some occasions the Friends even contracted out their services to Camarilla Cainites needing disputes settled. Just see if any of the participants who still remain active ever discuss *that*, though.

The subject of parallels between our practices and various traditions the savages practiced warrant discussion, but on some other occasion. Suffice it to say for now that just as we'd incorporated disparate European traditions to suit our emerging body of *ritae*, so we drew on these unfamiliar customs as well. Unfortunately, while we engaged in this syncretism, the main force of the Camarilla itself arrived in the late 17th century; by 1700, significant enclaves arose in most port cities and some interior settlements. Our hit-and-run tactics fared better on the frontier, so we concentrated there, leaving behind too many choice morsels.

We did better in Central and South America. Mexico, of course, has been ours almost since Cortez. We were there as the old city of Tenochtitlan became Mexico City, with literally miles of warrens perfect for our gatherings. We were slower to follow Pizarro and his ilk, but that's the fault of the Amazon and the fanatically Cainite-hating creatures who dwell there. It took time to work out safe routes to new Sabbat strongholds in the mountains and southern shores. I don't wish to give you the impression that we did nothing in the English- and French-speaking colonies, merely that it was harder to make progress. For some reason the Camarilla "Kindred" from northern nations did a better job at opportunistic aggression than their southern cousins. We faced the sharpest competition along the northern Atlantic seaboard and down the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Your instructors have, I'm sure, pointed out that as a clan we seldom attempt to drive human affairs, simply to profit from them as suits our own interests. The matter of the conquistadors and the Aztecs is an interesting exception. Two Lasombra scholars accompanied the second expedition to Mexico, and they listened with great interest to Aztec priests' accounts of how the sacrifices to Huitzilopochtli, god of the sun, insured that the sun would rise every day. These were nights of sometimes mad ambition among our clan, and a pair of Spanish packs decided that they just might be able to plunge the world into eternal darkness by eliminating the Aztecs.

This wasn't quite as ludicrous a notion as you might think. Early Sabbat travelers in the New World encountered ancient thaumaturgists lurking in the wilds, practicing paths unknown in the Old World. Some of them seemed to be very old indeed, Methuselahs, perhaps even Antediluvians whose names were lost to history. It frankly didn't seem entirely out of the question that they might have powerful magic affecting the sun, or at least the passage of light to Earth.

We did not make the great genocide. For that matter, neither did the Europeans, directly, at least. Disease did most of the work long before armies arrived. We *did* as a clan provide funds for missions of conquest, and we used our influence to support the dream of conquest at moments when bad news might have weakened mortal commitment to the cause. All of this amounted to helping mortals do what they already decided to do, but we made them more effective than they'd have been otherwise.

As you know, the sun did not go out when sacrifices to Huitzilopochtli faltered and stopped. Pity.

Peace and Flight

The century of mortal revolution was also a century of war within the Sabbat. No American or French revolution could be any more incestuous and altogether wretched than the conflicts for scarce herds that swept through our sect. For a tense decade around 1800, it looked like the Sabbat — at least in the Americas — might not survive as

The Blood Masters Fade

Several holes in Lasombra history suggest the use of high-powered mental Disciplines. One of these is the activities of the thaumaturgists who inspired the Lasombra to support genocide in the New World. After about 1550, they just don't show up anymore in the records. Nobody asks about them. Perhaps they were destroyed or perished voluntarily. Perhaps not. They might just as easily be out there in the deserts and mountains, pursuing whatever ends brought them across the Atlantic millennia ago.

a united entity. Obviously, from your presence here, we did survive, and we owe much of that to a deal struck in 1803. The so-called "Purchase Pact" proclaimed an end to old grievances and granted a right of destruction against individuals acting in ways that threatened the sect's interests. This latter gave more power to the ecclesiastical hierarchy that was forming at the time. (Standardized titles and ranks didn't appear until later in the 19th century.) The Purchase Pact didn't end all strife within the sect, nor did anyone expect it would. It reduced the level of existing tension and made it easier to respond quickly to future conflicts. That was remarkable, under the circumstances.

The peace, such as it was, took time to spread south of English- or French-speaking lands. It never fully took hold in the new nations carved out of northeastern South America. Simon Bolivar and his revolution changed the mix of forces at work. The Camarilla stayed further away from the ongoing mess, while our kind reveled in it. Even now, you simply don't find many of the Antediluvian's servants in Colombia, Uruguay or Venezuela. In an environment with fewer external pressures, our internal differences ranged more freely, and something like warfare has always existed among the local archbishops and cardinals. Which reminds me...

Cainites in Miters

Some of you, I'm sure, have wondered how it is that a gathering of Cainites dedicated to the free expression of our innermost selves comes to resemble human institutions dedicated to doctrinal conformity. Two distinct but constantly interacting forces make it so.

First, there's parody, or rather satire. We use the forms of mortal religion, primarily but not exclusively Roman Catholicism, because it amuses us to do so. Cainites get bored, and a bunch of bored Cainites in one place is an invitation to trouble. Since we need some structure to our routine affairs, why not make it one with intricate details and much potential for administrative complications? Our institution, like our rites, is in part a game.

Second — yes, we glorify the power of the individual Cainite. But to fully understand what that power is, we must seek the truth and eschew error. We deceive others. We must not deceive ourselves. The truth we probe is ultimately religious. Whether you subscribe to the modern fad for treating Cainites in anthropological terms or possess the courage to acknowledge that our existence points directly at God, spirit, soul and other

facts the modern world flees, you must see that the questions we pose are religious ones. We deal with the nature of the world, of sin and damnation and redemption, of curses and death. These are real things, not the product of our imagined hopes or fears. There are active powers in the night and beyond the stars, and those who approach them unprepared perish.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy, at least when administered the way we run the Sabbat, brings prepared individuals to the top. The structure serves to remind us all that distinctions exist between us, and that some are in fact better prepared for particular roles than others. You give obedience to your superiors because they are superior in certain regards. You owe your survival to them for performing their assigned roles properly. You are not prepared to confront alone the enemies we face, let alone the deeper threats behind them. You serve precisely in order to develop yourself in freedom. Total freedom would be mere annihilation — you surrender what you must to gain what you can.

Other veterans of the Sabbat would cite at least two more points. Neither of them impresses me much, but you may as well hear them as not.

Some members of our sect believe that this or that human religion actually speaks truth. The late Cardinal Monçada was our most prominent exponent of that notion with regard to Roman Catholicism. The peculiar Abyss cult among the *antitribu* holds the same notion with regard to Zoroastrian and other dualistic religions. They would tell you that we use mortal religious structures when those structures are true. Give this notion whatever respect you feel it deserves.

And finally, some of our most prominent elders argue for the use of mortal religious structures for purely psychological reasons. When the Sabbat came into being, Roman Catholicism was the official religion in the lands we were strongest in. Protestant Christianity prevailed elsewhere, but has frankly never generated a very strong set of symbols, so we can make little use of it. Even in Protestant lands, Catholic (or Eastern Orthodox) imagery conveys a sense of sacred authority. In Hindu lands, our cathedrals hold shrines to all the gods of death, chaos and terror. In the Americas, we erect totem poles to dark forces and gather in sweat lodges as well as temples. Wherever we go, whatever speaks of the sacred becomes a tool for us to evoke a state of mind in you, while you learn to grasp the truths to which the symbols point.

It grows late. The rest is for someone else to tell you.

The Fourth Lesson: The Rest of the World

It's been fifteen nights since the battered freighter left Bangkok. Andrew and his pack are having a marvelous time. They came on business: The Pacific Rim cardinals "asked" several reliable bishops to investigate rumors of heterodoxy and possible infernalism among the Southeast Asian packs. Andrew decided to bring the pack along, to help them make contacts (and establish some Vinculum ties that might come in handy somewhere down the road) and for a change of scenery. Back in his living days, Andrew sometimes corresponded with a mysterious old crone named Dun Meiling who resided in Bangkok and wrote some of the most scathingly nihilistic revolutionary screeds Andrew ever encountered. It was, in the end, not a great surprise to learn that she was a Cainite — Brujah antitribu — and had been for decades.

Dun's pack shows unusual prowess, enough to fuel suspicions that they've received infernal investments. Andrew introduced himself and his pack, and promptly got an invitation to join Dun and her brood on piratical rounds. The time since then has been glorious. The freighter, with a base crew of completely conditioned mortals, maneuvers alongside a target ship and asks for help. Dun dispenses with the mortal trappings of Asian piracy, the speedboats and so on, in favor of brute strength. She leads the pack over the side of their ship to the target via leaps or sprint swimming. They destroy any resistance by hand, take whatever valuables catch their fancy and depart. Sometimes they scuttle the ships, sometimes they leave empty derelicts to confuse mortal authorities.

Tonight the two packs rest comfortably on the forward deck of a chartered yacht. Pieces of the crew and tourist passengers drift behind them, the wake glistening red in the reflected June moonlight. One of Dun's brood turns out to be Lasombra, and a Chinese Jew at that. This boggles the Americans. Lin Baloh laughs at their confusion and succinctly explains the Jewish settlement in Nanking, synagogue-building under the Qing dynasty and other strange matters. He's something of a scholar, and a random question about some aspect of Sabbat history turns into an increasingly formal lecture. Andrew sits back and listens to Lin's careful cadences.

The Clan in the World

I've noticed that while many proletarian Americans and Europeans hate to admit that anything's wrong

with their lands, many bourgeois and intellectual Americans and Europeans seem afraid to admit that anything's right. The culture you were born into leads the world. The same is true in vampiric affairs. We childer of Caine all spring from founders in the arc from Europe through Asia to India, as nearly as I can establish, and our sires spread from there.

So the Europeans among you can take proper pride in being close to the heart of the clan and the sect, just as the Americans among you should glory in being so close to the great events of our time. You do not, I assure you, give offense by pointing out facts of history, nor should they embarrass you.

Asia

I can establish with some certainty that Lasombra were creating childer in China before 1300 B.C., and that Brujah and Malkavians established broods in the Korean peninsula not later than 1100 B.C. Dating early arrivals by the other clans is difficult. Of course, many of these strangers didn't last long in the face of opposition by the native Cainite-spirits, whom some of you call Cathayans. It takes great determination and intelligence to flourish amid hostile natives, which of course is why the Lasombra in particular did well for themselves. We have never enjoyed large numbers here, but throughout the recent millennia, a few dozen of us have always made our havens here.

China

Traditionally, more Lasombra exist in China than, say, Japan or India, for several reasons. India sees enough Cainite presence from the other clans to make competition both fierce and relatively unchallenging. Little seems distinctive, from our perspective, in grappling once again with Ventrue and Ravnos and so on. No great glory comes to those who survive in such conditions. Further east, matters change. The Cainite-like things who dwell here *do* afford us great challenges. So do the peculiar mortal hunters with their various preternatural gifts and the fiendish alliances of Lupines and comparable werecreatures of other breeds. Even now, three thousand years after our arrival, much remains mysterious to us.

I shouldn't give the impression that it's all just fighting other monsters. One can go decades or centuries encountering no other supernatural beings at all, apart from perhaps the occasional ghost. My sire and her sire and his sire and so on back to the Chou dynasty have often exercised power in mortal courts, and half of them never had direct experience with the "Cathayans."

One Clan, One Blood

Separate bloodlines don't arise among the Lasombra outside Europe. They all share the same clan disciplines. What differs is the range of common out-of-clan disciplines.

Mind you, mortals can be great challenges by themselves. The philosophical tradition in which I grew up regards supernatural manifestations not so much as blasphemous intrusion, the way many of you were taught, but as a private matter best handled through polite silence until it goes away. That's opportunity. The concomitant challenge is that observers who believe themselves skilled in omens and propriety feel at liberty to attack those who engage in "improper" manifestations, where *your* mortal ancestors would have deferred or fled. Fully a third of those in my lineage have perished at the hands of mobs.

I've heard that Western Lasombra date their clan's first great expansion to the aftermath of the Thera eruption. That fits my research. My great-great-great-great-grandsire arrived, as I said, sometime before 1300 B.C. — that gives three centuries to travel from the Mediterranean to China, plenty of time even with stops to establish broods and pursue goals other than travel. I can only prove the arrival of my remote ancestor in the Blood, but I would be unsurprised to find that he traveled with companions whose lineages have since perished. I know of another Chinese Lasombra lineage, in the upper Yangtze Valley, of about the same vintage, and I can trace back a Japanese Lasombra lineage to 1200 B.C. or so.

More Lasombra arrived around the dawn of the Christian era, as part of the post-Pompey dispersal. Many of you never learned this in school, but for a century or more, the eastern edge of the Roman empire and the western edge of the Chinese empire were within a few hundred miles. While diplomats never made the crossing officially, traders did. At least half a dozen lineages run back to the period from about 50 B.C. to A.D. 200, when the Han empire fell into civil war and the western frontier became much less hospitable.

Lasombra who presented themselves as gods of darkness seldom flourished — the Confucian tradition is not receptive to claims of authority on the part of evil spirits, given Confucius' obsession with moral government. Confucians do respond quite well to sage spirits in shadow who offer wise advice and speak with the voices of ancestors. Thus my ancestors in the Blood have often emphasized the mental arts of domination over Obtenebration. Some of the early Lasombra settlers brought with them mastery

of the diviner's arts, secrets of concealment and disguise and some forms of blood magic. Auspex in particular is as common among us as Obtenebration, which I gather confuses hidebound classifiers of clan.

Vampiric immigration came to a nearly complete stop for centuries after Rome and Han China fell. Climatic changes dried up old routes, and various internal conflicts among the "Cathayans" made it difficult to develop new ones. The existing lineages settled into an isolated existence, drawing intellectual stimulation from their mortal environs rather than the interplay of kindred thoughts. Some, like my own line, flourished in great cities, playing subtle games of influence and study. My own sire and grandsire still compile their notes for a comprehensive mathematical model of human behavior, with enthusiasm not noticeably dimmed despite centuries of data collection. The Yangtze lineage I mentioned earlier occupies itself by acting as oracles, flitting here and there to answer prayers and petitions. A small brood ranging through the northwestern desert seems to spend most of its time desecrating tombs in the search for evidence of elders in torpor. Whatever keeps one's attention focused, I suppose.

Contact with Europe resumed in the 15th century, and an era of purges followed once more Lasombra arrived. Some Asian lineages had become just plain peculiar and not dedicated to behaving in ways conducive to survival. Word of the Antediluvian's destruction and rise of the Sabbat came less than a century after the initial contacts with Lasombra who'd come on Portuguese and Spanish vessels, and it was a deeply confusing time. The fact that I am here now, comfortable among you, shows that the Sabbat view prevailed, but I can and do still regret that nearly half of the Lasombra lineages active in 1400 had to be destroyed by 1600 for their refusal to adjust to the new reality.

In a way, the news that one of the founding Cainites had been destroyed helped win us relief from some confrontations with the native Cainite-spirits. Their mythology teaches a version of the Wheel of Ages in which, as time passes, more demons arise. Creatures capable of slaying the eldest are sufficiently demonic for many "Cathayans," and while they didn't like us much, they left us alone at least some of the time, as harbingers of the age. We were of course glad to exploit this belief to secure ourselves.

Industrialization was a boon for us. Large urban populations in a condition of extreme alienation make wonderful prey and also sometimes cast up just the sort of humanity-hating visionary who becomes an asset to our clan. The smoke of factories, particularly the old coal-burners, makes a marvelous night sky, all cloud and reflected fire, much more interesting (at least to my eye) than irrelevant stars. I myself was one such visionary in the wake of the Taiping Rebellion, bitterly disillusioned by the manifest failure of my revered leader and by association disillusioned with all of Chinese tradition. I threw myself into Westernization wholeheartedly, though it did not relieve my soul. My sire spotted some of my poetry — why, Bishop Emory, you smile. You too? Heh. Once again we find that the Toreador hold no monopoly on the arts as a tool for recruitment.

In any event, when I speak of the desirability of the wretched age, you must understand that I have a personal attachment to it all. I give thanks for the circumstances that brought me here.

Lands Around China

To the best of my knowledge, few Lasombra flourish in Japan, the Koreas, the Indochinese peninsula and elsewhere in Asia, nor have they ever done well there. My sire used to speak of bands of "feral" Lasombra who roam the New Guinea highlands, encouraging tribal warfare and feeding on the fallen. I didn't hear the phrase "urban legend" until much later, but even at the time I suspected a tale.

Africa

Discussing Cainite history in Africa before the colonial powers' arrival is a mess at the best of times. In recent years — the last generation or so — mortal scholars have argued quite passionately and sometimes entertainingly about the real ethnicity of this civilization or that, the flow of ideas from one civilization to another. They don't realize that arguments over who owes what to whom have been going on since before anything their history records.

The best person I know of to talk with you about this would have been our packmate Liu Dou, who resided in Kenya from 1575 until 1976. Unfortunately, last year he ran into a mid-level bureaucrat whose view of herself as a monster hunter in training proved much less delusional than we would have guessed. She's dead now, but Liu is ash. I will do what I can to pass along his thoughts, along with my own study.

It's very difficult to distinguish early Lasombra from early African Cainites of any other sort. As the saying has it, they all look alike to European-based chroniclers. I myself cannot readily distinguish the various tribes that produced Liu's childer, or even predictably identify an African as Bantu or Nilotic or what have you. Many observers, particularly those with axes to grind, fail to make important distinctions or create divisions where none exist. I am quite certain, for instance, that while

some of the members of the African bloodline sometimes called "Laibon" do refer to one of their distinctive gifts of Caine with the Swahili name "Abombwe," none of them did so before the invention of Swahili, and that even now Cainites inhabiting all the places in Africa that do not speak Swahili are unlikely to do so. In some eras, mania for grand syntheses arise, often at the expense of particulars.

When dealing with Cainites, the problems that affect the study of mortal cultures only get worse. Few of us exist, and when we get powerful enough, our delusions become very hard to shake. In his final decades, for instance, my grandsire refused to acknowledge that the Ming dynasty had in fact fallen to the Qing. And within his haven, it hadn't, or at least you couldn't tell that it had. His hapless, mind-controlled guests created artifacts to support his views, and no one in the area could disagree without a tremendous act of will. So the fact that an elder believes it was a great force in the land in the time of this dynasty or that does not itself constitute proof, even if you find the account credible in some ways.

So you must understand that everything I have to say on these matters is tentative and conditional. Proceed carefully.

Where No Lasombra Have Been

As nearly as I know, there has never been a significant Lasombra presence in Egypt. The Setites have always thrived there, as have Lupines with a particular fetish for hunting Cainites. Even more so than their kind's general obsession with that pastime, I mean. Only the advantages of Sabbat practice make it possible for a band of Lasombra to venture in reasonably safely on a particular errand, and even then they shouldn't linger. Likewise, I know of no Lasombra presence among the Pygmy peoples.

Ancient Kingdoms

Now, clear-cut evidence places Lasombra in eastern Africa south of Egypt even before the post-Thera dispersal. Half a dozen words in the ancient language of Meroe, far up the Nile from Egypt, reflect names of known childer of the Antediluvian. Pottery from the Khartum Mesolithic culture, around 10,000 years ago, sometimes depicts scenes of shadows flying under the moon, images that look familiar to anyone who knows our powers. The Antediluvian's Sicilian stronghold contained silver artifacts crafted in styles that flourished in Nubia and Meroe in Mesolithic and Neolithic times, and as nearly as I know they came across the sea not long after their making. One of them, at least, features in Pompey's account of his attack on Sicily's pirates as "a chalice of great antiquity, ascribed to the power of a night spirit from far to the south," which the pirates filled with blood and drank before their raids.

A little further south, we find similar evidence of Lasombra presence in Ethiopia. It is, of course, well known that the Antediluvian's eldest surviving childe, the great failure Montano, came from one of the tribes wandering through the land that modern maps divide between Ethiopia and Kenya. If you listen carefully, you'll hear that the stories speak of previous experiments by the Antediluvian among those various tribes. The nomadic peoples who settled Kenya 4,000 years ago almost immediately took up maritime activity. I strongly suspect that the Antediluvian's interest in seafaring had something to do with this, with it using them for its sundry ventures. I find intriguing hints of an ancient Lasombra presence in what's now Mozambique, but the migrations that settled Kenya also wiped out preexisting societies on the southeastern coast. Too little evidence exists to settle the question.

Shadows Among Many

What interests me most is that once our clan arrived in Africa (or returned to it, depending on your preferred theory of vampiric origins), our predecessors never made much of a mark on the mortal societies they preyed upon. The Antediluvian itself engineered catastrophes of various sorts but gave that up after the second dispersal, and few or none of its childer attempted to do the same. Did the Antediluvian fear the creation of some destructive rival? The ironist in me wants to believe that it did, and that this set the scene for its destruction thanks to the absence of a real challenger to Gratiano, later.

Cainites of other clans set themselves up from time to time as kings and sages. We did not. We inspired fear. Our influence was indirect and indeed undirected. While you may trace the evolution of myths about dark gods and night powers and show how they stem from our activities, you will find precious few accounts of any of those powers speaking to fearful mortals, providing explicit lessons or commands. We were what we were, and they reacted as they deemed fit.

You will also find a surprising number of havens — literally dozens, if not hundreds — inhabited by tightly bound brood lineages for centuries or millennia, that seem to have had no impact on any nearby kine. They fed, chose childer, pursued their philosophical or religious ambitions and passed without a trace. Abyss mysticism flourished among the African lurkers, along with research into the nature of our blood-borne powers. Perhaps if some strong leader had risen among

them, the African lineages would feature prominently in clan history. As it is, they're scarcely a footnote.

The Fifth Lesson: Into the Final Nights

Demba returns to Portland in mid-October. She's been traveling around California, trying to make sense of the continuously evolving chaos among Cainites there, and not at all sure she understands what's going on. She decided to celebrate the Grand Ball in more secure circumstances and likes the style of the Oregon Sabbat.

Andrew, for his part, continues to consolidate his position as bishop. It's tricky, particularly with two of his pack gone under ignominious circumstances. Ming left a note saying she was off to find the antitribu. Druitt promptly challenged Andrew to Monomacy, claiming obvious failure of leadership, and the ambitious young Cainite perished on the field. Two more individuals from other packs also tried to take the bishopric away; Andrew mastered Black Metamorphosis in the course of beating them down.

It's two nights before the Grand Ball, now. Nomadic packs begin to gather. Andrew's own pack is back from stirring up incidents to keep the police busy, and relaxing in the chill rain. Demba started talking about the Anarch Free State, the New Promise Mandarinate and the rest of the sordid mess down south and gradually segued into a more thorough review of Sabbat affairs in modern times. Andrew enjoys her reviews, since he always picks up something new.

Before the Industrial Revolution

The Lasombra position in Europe before the Industrial Revolution may best be described as "bad." The same goes for the Sabbat as a whole. It's just not easy to take on a well-established secret hierarchy connected to a variety of groups who'd love to destroy you. We retained a few strongholds in Spain, the Sicilian fortress and enclaves here and there. Beyond that, only nomadic packs could flourish. The one good thing about the Camarilla in Europe is that it very thoroughly subdued the Lupine menace long ago, making it much more feasible for us to flourish in rural lands.

In the Americas, things were better. The *antitribu* in the Sabbat did us all great service, most especially the Gangrel, Malkavians and Ravnos, in forging havens among the aboriginal tribes in North America. They presented our kind as familiar monsters and spirits who shared enmity with the forces of static civilization. Never mind that we would gladly have paved them over ourselves, given the chance. The tribes needed to see only that the Camarilla's notion of desirable cities isn't ours. The Camarilla's fondness for modern cover stories played into our hands as well, since our missionaries could point out quite truthfully how seriously we as a sect take spiritual matters.

Central America remained a delightful playground. We have never bothered establishing extensive influence in mortal affairs in Mexico, primarily because we don't need to. The succession of tyranny and revolution keeps the population more than adequately roiled for our purposes. American invasions and imperialism in the peninsular lands served the same function. Who needs to order mortals when they think of such things all by themselves?

South America largely remained hospitable, apart from the great wilderness in the Amazon. In Buenos Aires, our clan took the initiative in working out a sensible compromise with the Toreador of the area, which keeps sect strife to a minimum thanks in part to the Courts of Blood. They often settle disputes before they escalate.

In Africa, as I believe Lin Baloh described to you, our clan continued making little difference, before the colonial era began in earnest.

New Tools, New Conquests

Unlife improved for us quite dramatically in the early 19th century. The Industrial Revolution, beginning in England and spreading rapidly throughout Christendom, created whole new opportunities for us.

First of all, factories disrupted patterns of rural life. People gathered in towns, then in cities. They had to give up old customs, old notions of family organization, adopt new ways of organizing their days and years. They were confused and scared. They made wonderful prey. I've often wished for the opportunity to travel back to those nights. Of all the eras of Cainite history, I believe that none is more perfectly suited to our way of existence. Prey was plentiful, and so disoriented and suspicious of new authorities that many crimes went altogether unreported except in private accounts. Reading the diaries of workers in Manchester or London, tracing the litany of murder and mysterious weakness, provokes envy.

With industrialization came empire-building on a much grander scale. For centuries, some harsh or rugged environments had held Europeans at bay. No longer. Mid-century, Europeans spread throughout my own continent, ending an era of relative isolation and... not stagnation, because in fact Africans developed several societies comparable to anything in Europe before the Renaissance. Rather, an era of change within limits, in

which the absence of resources and concepts to progress beyond a medieval stage of technology limited innovation to cultural rather than scientific spheres.

Industrialization also opened up Central and South America to more effective exploitation. Humanity even made inroads into the monster-infested depths of the Amazon jungle, and we followed, in small numbers. The urban blight that made England so interesting soon appeared on the European mainland and in slums around the world. Lin Baloh talked about his own experiences in that time, yes? Many of the clan's current leaders originated at about the same time, and with similar motives. It was a real outpouring of passions suitable for leading one away from humanity. I became a Cainite a few decades later, on the outskirts of the same phenomenon in Africa.

The Code of Milan

Some Sabbat historians like to speak in terms of "Sabbat civil wars." If you fancy such terminology, then the First Sabbat Civil War took place from the late 1790s until the Purchase Pact in 1803. I've already alluded to why no single date makes sense as an ending point for the conflict, and I frankly think it makes little sense to lump a great many disparate battles together. It implies a unity of cause that never really existed.

If that was the first civil war, then the Second Sabbat Civil War occupied much of the early 20th century. Something like coordinated clan strife actually existed between our clan and the Tzimisce around the turn of the century, with extended recriminations over who was responsible for letting the Camarilla gain so much ground in the United States. Obviously that particular issue didn't matter much anywhere outside North America, but the existence of one feud catalyzed the emergence of others. The two clans and the various hangers-on came to blows over countless local issues.

The Code of Milan, issued at the end of 1933, brought an end to all that. It reflected the conventional wisdom of that time about what the Sabbat's founders intended. As far as our clan is concerned, it embodies an extremely precarious balance between the views of the Black Angels and the rest of the major camps. It's not quite what anyone seems to have had in mind in the 14th or 15th century, least of all Gratiano and his coterie, but as an averaged-out consensus statement, the Code of Milan could easily be worse than it is. I can tell you with a straight face that if you adhere to its tenets with reasonable faithfulness and perform your duties with competence, you are unlikely to ever face harsh punishment for deviation from your leaders' wishes. That may not sound like much, but in a sect as

driven by conflict as ours, it's more impressive than you may yet realize.

It's worth noting that no later effort to update or replace the Code has won widespread support. Should you harbor revolutionary impulses, at least study the failures of others and try to make some fresh, interesting mistake.

The 20th Century

Individual Lasombra won notable triumphs and of course continued to provide good leadership for the Sabbat, but that's not really the same thing. The closest we came to united clan action was in 1957, in what you may hear called the Third Sabbat Civil War. A Brujah *antitribu* uprising in New York went down to its inevitable defeat, and somehow the rest of the rabble decided to mount more uprisings in, I suppose, a display of sympathy for those unable to properly gauge the odds. We and the Tzimisce joined forces to suppress the rebellions.

In their wake, wise Lasombra leaders persuaded the Tzimisce to accept the existence of a sort of "new clan" to provide a certain familial sense for interested Caitiff and *antitribu*. The aggressive if not always very intelligent Joseph Pander gave his name to the new entity, and henceforth the Panders would take part in sect deliberations. Keep this lesson in mind. Even the most patently ridiculous offers can appease the foolish if you make the offer seem sufficiently worthwhile. Let the foolish believe you're acting reluctantly and giving up something of value, and they will not notice what you do behind their backs.

The Coming Wars

Never mind what the nostalgic among us tell you: The Sabbat has never been stable. We are born out of chaos and always move amid turmoil. There's no baseline reference time to point at and say, "This is what we are when the world allows us to be." Our fundamental goals remain constant — most particularly, to destroy everyone who'd stop us, from Antediluvians on down to mortal resistance. So while we face new opportunities and challenges in recent times, this only means that we continue to exist in history. "This is not your father's Sabbat," I believe some of you say, and you are correct, but part of your father's Sabbat was exactly the capacity to change into your own Sabbat.

More clans are in upheaval at the moment than at any time since the Inquisition. The Gangrel left the Camarilla, and we hear from new *antitribu* that the elders fear active Antediluvians. Let us all pause for a moment of shock and surprise that it took only five centuries for our founding tenet to register within the collective unconscious of a Camarilla clan. The Assamites are doing something complex and messy, and not talking about it a great deal. Lesser schisms exist hither and yon. All of this adds up to opportunity for us, since we combine a modicum of clan unity with independent action in a largely ideal balance.

In times of upheaval, current leaders fall and new ones take their place. The Camarilla regards this as a bad thing, because their whole existence depends on protecting the power of elders. They run on individual identities. The Sabbat, by contrast, exists primarily as an idea, and one Cainite can hold to the creed and act on it as well as another. We are, by undead standards, a sect of fledglings. If you pay attention and keep yourselves fit, the next generation of leaders will include you.

Is Gehenna upon us? I think not. It's possible that some Antediluvians stir in their slumber, but I think that what we see is mostly a combination of panic and deliberate hoaxes. Last year, for instance, I was subjected to a long diatribe by a peculiar old Ventrue *antitribu* who claimed he used to belong to some Gehenna cult operating within the Sabbat, and that a great storm in the afterlife had destroyed his leaders, and now the end would come at any time. I diablerized him, in the end. His rant was too painful to endure. Keep in mind that he could have used tremendous resources to back up his delusions, if he'd chosen to. Apply a certain principle of parsimony as you look for signs and portents: Remember how much our kind can do, even unconsciously, and retain your skepticism.

That's all for tonight.

The Antitribu's Story

The Seattle Police Department responded to a series of calls shortly before sunrise on June 12, 2000. Several morning-shift workers reported seeing what looked to be an Asian woman nailed or bolted to one of the Floating Bridge pillars, alive enough to thrash around but clearly fading fast. The police arrived just after sunrise, and found bloody bolts but no sign of the woman herself. A satchel on the sidewalk contained the following manuscript, which police psychologists interpreted as evidence of a very sophisticated psychosis. Perhaps, they speculated, she believed in her vampiric nature so deeply that she had decided to "greet the sun" and end her existence. If she was part of some cult, perhaps her fellow fanatics took her away to keep their existence secret.

Alternatively, it might all have been some elaborate hoax to play on popular fears of vampirism. Like many university towns, Seattle suffers its share of sophisticated pranks.

Investigation turned up no promising leads, and the case soon became inactive. A routine inventory of the police

evidence lockers in September revealed the manuscript to be missing. In the absence of any reason to pursue the case, nobody made much fuss about it.

Last Words First

My name is Ming, and I am a child of darkness. You don't need to know the name I bore when I was alive. That part of my history is over and done with. Now the unliving part of my history comes to an end as well. I will write this account to explain to someone why I seek destruction, and then my faithful human lackies will perform their last service to me. I will see the sun, and perish.

You will not believe this story unless you have had some experience to show you that another society exists behind the one you know. If you have not had such an experience, seek out someone who has. You know someone who's been touched by darkness, who shows a secret fear or secret pain that they've never been willing to discuss. When you read this, you will understand them. Seek them out and let them know that they were right. In a world you do not own and which you will never own, at least you can give that comfort.

The Beginning

In the beginning there was Caine, the first murderer. Yes, it's true. There was an Adam and an Eve, and a Garden of Eden, and a God who rewarded the sacrifice of blood and condemned the sacrifice of grain. You live in someone else's story. I did not wish to accept this myself — I was a child of my time just as you are, skeptical and sophisticated. Nonetheless, it is true. In the beginning one word made creation, and in the end one word will end it. But the ending is not quite yet.

The curse that God inflicted on Caine was what we now think of as vampirism. Caine created three "childer," or offspring, and those three sired 13 grandchilder for Caine. The 13 warred with each other and their creators, and it was their wickedness as much as the sins of humanity that provoked the Great Flood. You may say, as I once did, that the flood is a myth without geological evidence. I say in return, who can trust evidence when God Almighty wills otherwise? Perhaps he removed the evidence, or just as likely, it's right there and we simply can't see it.

If you believe any of this, you should feel fear. Good for you, if you do. My unlife has been a never-ending nightmare of fear, of being so close to such power, without defenses. We are all the pawns of forces beyond our control.

The 13 Antediluvians survived the flood. Did God change his mind, or have some other plan for them? God doesn't speak to me any more than he speaks to any other damned soul. Perhaps he might answer your prayer, if you

ask with a sufficiently pure heart. Perhaps you would be better off not knowing, though. Whatever his reasons, the 13 survived, and they founded clans of Cainites that remain active to this very night. One of them is my own sire eight generations removed, who is called by his progeny "Lasombra." All of his childer, including me, suffer from a particular weakness that makes us unable to reflect in mirrors, and we inherit an aptitude for preternatural strength, the ability to command others by force of will and the ability to command a sort of living darkness. Each of the other clans has some other distinctive combination of a comparable sort.

A Tale of Two Childer

Like the other Antediluvians, Lasombra created countless childer, for reasons of his own. Many he slaughtered for weaknesses of character — that is, for lack of the virtues that interested Lasombra, including a ruthless determination to power. I suppose that were he still walking the earth, he would judge me one of the unfit as well.

The eldest of Lasombra's childer still active in the world is Montano. I met him once and was struck by the weight of sorrow on his shoulders. I read in the Bible that the Messiah was to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and I think of Montano. No single mortal lifetime, no matter how tragic, could begin to approach his state. Montano was once a boy on the steppes of Kenya, more than a thousand years before Christ. Lasombra came there seeking a worthy heir. When Lasombra set about torturing the people of Montano's village, seeing who endured, Montano volunteered to become Lasombra's servant in exchange for the freedom of his people. Lasombra accepted. Never again would the Antediluvian go there or torment those people (though he performed the same deeds in other lands).

Montano hated the vampiric condition and still does. He is no happy childe of Caine. But he is honorable and even now stands by his agreement to uphold his sire's interests, even though (as you shall read) his sire is gone from the world. Montano traveled throughout the Old World with his sire, learning languages and skills undreamed of on the steppes. When the two returned to Lasombra's favorite haven in Sicily, Montano led mortal armies and senates as well as Cainite forces. For a very long time, everything he did prospered, no matter how much his jealous siblings tried to sabotage it. Still, Lasombra never understood his childe's soul and continued seeking some other who might be his heir.

You may think that this is strange language for a woman born less than forty years ago in an American city, and you would be right. But it's impossible for me to put it in any other terms. I write of gods and demons among men, and the jargon of a scientific society would contain countless lies by inference about it all. When I write this way, I hope to tell you something of what I have felt as well as what I know.

Lasombra had many other childer, some of whom may still exist, but they don't matter to the story of the clan as a whole. The childe who matters is Lasombra's last. Not even a thousand years ago, Lasombra bestowed the curse of vampirism on an Italian noble named Gratiano, an ambitious young man who showed the sort of ruthless dedication that Lasombra treasured. (Who was Lasombra in life? Perhaps he was himself a man of power. I suspect, however, that he was a pathetic failure, Embraced (as we call it) for some trivial reason, who flourished unexpectedly. Someone who had lived with real success would surely not be so obsessed with the matter forever after.) Gratiano was perhaps what Lasombra wished he had been.

Gratiano, for his part, understood how to be a successful courtier. He gave Lasombra endless flattery, praising the Antediluvian's own accomplishments and those of the clan, making a great show of studying it all so as to be a "worthy successor." Montano quickly saw that Gratiano sought to take Lasombra's place, but their sire wouldn't hear of it. Senility seems to come for Cainites as well as for mortal men and women. We may call you "kine" and "prey," but we are not so different from you in some ways. For something like two hundred years, Lasombra's oldest and youngest childer fought a covert war of influence against each other, trying to win support for their respective agendas. Montano lost.

The elder childe realized that he couldn't forestall Gratiano's rebellion. He alternated long years of wandering with quietly desperate efforts at the Sicilian court to awaken others to the threat. It didn't work. Gratiano used the clan's institutions for judgment to destroy his rivals, all the while impressing Lasombra.

Finally Gratiano struck. He had allies from other clans and his own native treachery. The court filled with blood, and Gratiano himself destroyed Lasombra in the Antediluvian's favorite crypt. In one stroke, the clan had no head. Montano fought a vigorous defense, but once his sire fell, the childe escaped. Around him coalesced the heart of resistance to Gratiano's redefined Clan Lasombra, those Cainites still loyal to the old notions of clan order. Montano would not claim to be Lasombra's true heir, but felt still bound by his oath to act in Lasombra's best interests.

Gratiano and other rebels created a sect of rebellious clans, whose founders dubbed themselves the

Sabbat in appreciation of human stories about demonic terrors. Most Lasombra surrendered their dignity and honor and joined up. They bound themselves by unholy rituals. Only the loyal remnant, dubbed mockingly the "anti-tribe" or *antitribu*, carried on in the older style.

From Founding to Me

What can I say about the centuries after that? Many Lasombra show a flair for the sea, perhaps reflecting part of our dark founder's mortal preferences. The *antitribu* seem to do even better at sea than the main clan. Pirate fleets harassed the clan's financial interests and made things risky for Cainites trying to move their slumbering bodies by sea. On land, the *antitribu* struck where they could find weaknesses in the local Sabbat and otherwise mostly watched for defectors willing to join the true clan's lineage.

The Sabbat, meanwhile, spread like wildfire. Some people will always hate humanity, and they respond to a message of brutal vengeance and heartless domination. In fact, to my shame, I was one such person. I mistook my adolescent fervor for some real insight into the human condition, and when a monster offered me the chance to indulge my hatred forever, I took it. It took me more than a year to realize how wrong I was and longer than that to find out how I might go about doing differently.

Eventually, I made my way to a small gathering of Lasombra *antitribu*. I won't tell you where I came from or where I found them, except to say that neither my origin nor my destination was Seattle. I came here for personal reasons that matter only to the individual I had to speak with before destroying myself. While with the *antitribu*, I met Montano and learned much of what I've recorded here.

I came to my decision to seek destruction not long thereafter. If Montano, as ancient and powerful as he is, cannot stop his errant clan, what hope do I have? I saw too many elder *antitribu* becoming monstrous themselves, creatures of blood isolated from any human joy or hope, seeking only an endless cycle of nights like this one. I need something more to sustain me, and if there is nothing more, than I am not sustained.

May God have mercy on my soul. I do not believe he will.

Memo to Scourge Adam Pretorius:

Dammit, Adam, this could have been a major fiasco if our people in the department weren't on the job. Look at this. Masquerade breach first class. You tell me that allowing those damned Lasombra to take part in court routine is a good idea. Antitribu be damned, I say, they're all the same. Clear them out, or we're going to get more fuckups like this.

— Liam Genet, Seneschal, Domain of Seattle

Chapter Two: The Keepers' Unlit Halls

When we have ceased to love the stench of the human animal, either in others or in ourselves, then are we condemned to misery, and clear thinking can begin.
— Cyril Connolly, *The Unquiet Grave*

The Bible says that the first murderer disavowed responsibility for his victim, with the rhetorical question "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Lasombra accept the responsibility that their progenitor denied. Yes, they are indeed their brother's (and sister's) keeper. The Lasombra are not stewards, for they do not hold power on behalf of another. Nor are the Lasombra kings, for they need no formality of title or position, and they certainly accept no restraints on their power in the form of any human or divine sanction. The Lasombra simply are the rightful masters of everything in heaven and earth, whether their subjects accept the fact yet or not.

This self-image puts tremendous pressure on the clan's neonates, whether Sabbat or *antitribu*. An accumulated glory burdens them, a standard of excellence to which sires expect their childer to hew. Few childer can actually do it. In previous ages, the Lasombra elders tell each other, they could take the time to select each childe individually and cultivate him properly. Now everything must happen in a hurry, and sometimes inferior stock receives the Embrace. A Lasombra childe who actually excels can expect a combination of being taken for granted and regarded with suspicion, while childer who happen not to be the best in their field face a constant struggle to avoid destruction.

Lasombra with an eye for ironic comparisons sometimes refer to their clan's younger members as the Kennedy grandchildren of the Sabbat. It's not a bad comparison, as the newcomers try to find some way of distinguishing themselves while overshadowed by the legacy of Gratiano and the other founders.

The Gathering Shadows: Becoming Lasombra

Very few people successfully set out to become vampires. In general, the desire to become an undead creature of the night goes along with psychological features that work against vampiric survival, including a willingness to act with insufficient knowledge and a lack of attention to details. The Lasombra choose their recruits from among those mortals who show aptitude for survival whether or not the targets yet know anything about vampires or would want the condition for themselves if they did.

The Short Road

Occasionally a mortal selected more or less at random for "shovel party" transformation into an undead shock troop survives and shows an intuitive knack for Lasombra powers. Estimating how often this happens is tough, though most Lasombra archbishops agree that about one shovelhead in a thousand proves worth saving. It depends partly on how carefully the shovelers selected their target for strength of will, determination or simple hatred of humanity at large, partly on unrecognized qualities within the victim and partly on sheer luck.

The Long Road

Most Lasombra recruits enter the clan more slowly, with a great deal more deliberation on the part of their sires. The Sabbat maintains no strict accounting for progeny, but a sire who creates too many unsatisfactory childer eventually comes to the attention of his superiors. Success justifies risk, in the Lasombra conventional wisdom, so would-be sires generally prefer to take their time in creating childer.

Long experience shows the Lasombra that kings, presidents, chief executive officers, popes and comparable leaders seldom make good vampires. Such individuals are too tightly woven into the framework of their society, bound to human values and human rewards. Better recruits come from the ranks of those near the throne but not actually sitting on it: assistants, understudies, secretaries, advisors and the like. These people may exercise substantial power in practice, but on behalf of someone else who gets the credit. While the vast majority of assistants deal just fine with this situation, some succumb to festering resentment and take the first unknowing steps into the Abyss.

Ambitious failures may also make excellent recruits, depending on why they failed. A would-be politician with great intellectual gifts who couldn't quite mask her contempt for the public, for instance, bears watching. As a Lasombra, she wouldn't be called upon to treat the public charitably. An entrepreneur repeatedly bought out or otherwise balked by corporate rivals sometimes succumbs to deepening resentment; he's also worth watching, to see whether his hatred might broaden into the rage that characterizes some of the clan's best crusaders. An artist whose work offends critics and gallery owners on whose whim commercial success depends is likewise worth watching, to see whether her determination lasts in the face of defeat. If it does, she might be a valuable addition to the ranks of those facing Gehenna.

In each case, the sire looks for habits of thought and states of mind. The world is unpredictable, and success doesn't prove the presence or absence of any particular quality. Experience counts, but in the end it's the soul that endures through the Embrace, while all life's lessons become at least partly irrelevant.

Pride is not sufficient. Anyone can be too proud to get along, and pride untempered by judgment is *not* a survival trait for neonates. Ambition is better, particularly if it's only partially satisfied in life. Revenge in all its forms is a good sign, as long as the vampire-to-be also shows patience. Cold detachment also warrants consideration. It's quite rare to find a human being who can actually evaluate the world dispassionately, and the Lasombra snatch up as many such people as they can.

Some Lasombra stick to tried-and-true sources for neonates. They examine the dominant institutions of their society and perhaps rummage around in certain countercultures. Other Lasombra deliberately look elsewhere. Several of the most successful war leaders in current crusades were housewives in life. In each case, a prospective sire noticed some quirk of behavior that caught his or her fancy, and follow-up examination revealed untapped wellsprings of dark passion. Other talented Lasombra have come from hospices, refugee camps and medical clinics for the working poor. People willing to stop being human can turn up almost anywhere.

Testing to Destruction

Once the prospective sire identifies a promising candidate for the Embrace, she sets about testing

Human Hardcore

Lasombra argue about the merits of Embracing serial killers and other particularly violent, driven criminals. Some vampires idealize serial killers as vampires in all but unlife already, humans becoming glorious predators, while others look at serial killers and see only dangerous competition, good enough to be a nuisance but not good enough to avoid efforts at capture which can in turn seriously interfere with vampiric affairs.

Clan consensus currently leans away from rewarding such people with vampirism. Many of them are intelligent, but the psychological foundations of serial killing almost always involve a level of obsession and behavioral constraint — the so-called "signature" of the criminal — that makes it hard to adapt to vampirism. Serial killers let loose among the undead almost inevitably burn themselves out in a few years, if not months or weeks. They can't continue doing what they used to without significant modifications to their routine, and even though their unliving brains don't have the biological compulsions anymore, the habit remains. So they go down in gunfire, or under the fangs of their fellow vampires. Another experiment failed.

Still, a fad for Embracing serial killers arises every few decades. The last one passed in the early '90s. The one before that ran from the end of World War II through the early '50s. Whenever a significant number of Lasombra feels dissatisfied with the way their faction fares in Sabbat society, they turn to extreme measures of this sort.

him. Ideally, the testing happens over the course of years, though circumstances often reduce it to months or less. The testing measures the candidate's response to adversity — the sire usually attempts to break him by ruining his life.

The sire begins by striking at whatever the candidate seems to regard as most important. If it's his family, the sire kills them, or uses Disciplines and mundane means to alienate his relatives. If it's physical ability, the sire cripples the candidate, infects him with a chronic disease or otherwise takes the ability away. If it's social standing, the sire arranges a series of scandals to isolate the candidate from former associates. Whatever it is, a dedicated Lasombra can take it away, either by himself or with the assistance of packmates and other allies.

Step by step, the vampire cuts off her childe-to-be from the world. The candidate must remain in control of himself; Lasombra regard using Dominate to force states of mind as cheating — the point is to see how the candidate copes. A candidate who breaks under the strain generally ends up in pure misery. The sire abandons the experiment but seldom bothers undoing the wounds inflicted along the way.

The tricky part of all this is to keep the prospective childe from simply feeling deprived of purpose. Each loss must give rise to some new motive, whether it's simply reclaiming the lost thing or an emphasis on something that hasn't previously seemed important or desirable. A vampire who lacks drive cannot fend off the Beast or flourish in the Sabbat's harshly competitive environment, and the Lasombra prefer to separate the losers from the passionately alienated before the Embrace. The ideal Lasombra candidate, for most of the clan (and this applies to the *antitribu* as well), is someone who feels distanced from his society and yearns to change or overthrow it, but isn't locked into an overly narrow sense of what must be done. Even if the mortal's current vision looks only at what's close, it must contain the seeds of grandeur, or the centuries of unlife will become a burden.

From Life to Unlife

A candidate who remains driven and active despite adversity at least meets his sire. He probably doesn't learn at that time how much of his suffering is the sire's fault. She generally lies like mad, saying whatever she deems likely to make the candidate accept vampirism. She demonstrates her powers and offers them to the candidate.

Some Lasombra prefer to tell the truth to their childer: "Yes, I set about blighting your life. You've proven enduring, so now I offer you power." Most sires find this too risky and prefer to spin fables about how they've noticed the miseries afflicting their childer and how the powers they offer can let them redress the situation. The shock of Embrace leaves many childer a little deranged anyway — random slaughter followed by sober realization cuts new Lasombra adrift from humanity.

After the childe undertakes his initial period of revenge or otherwise deals with the misery of his mortal life, his sire brings him into Sabbat society, and the usual process of training and Creation Rites begins.

Note that revenge is *not* the defining neonate passion in all or even most cases. Andrew Emory accepted the Embrace (see The Darkness Claims You) in large measure for revenge on people he hated, but that's at least in part just how Demba's lineage chooses

its childer. Lasombra offer the Embrace with all sorts of emphases, including the following.

• **Ambition:** Dominate and Potence make very attractive offers to mortals who yearn for prestige or physical achievement otherwise denied to them. Thus the ranks of Lasombra recruits include people who begin unlife as suddenly successful boxers and managers, before they turn away from their mortal lives altogether.

• **Inquisitiveness:** The driving desire to understand everything about the world and how people work often produces first-rate paladins and scholars.

• **Belligerence:** This category includes bruisers and soldiers, but isn't limited to them. The Sabbat's various crusades require tacticians and strategists, spies and saboteurs, and many other kinds of warriors besides the obvious. The Lasombra like to seek out those who show a willingness to keep up martial efforts beyond the boundaries of a mortal lifetime.

• **Specialized Expertise:** As with warriors, so with programmers, accountants, publicists and other sorts of specialists. The Lasombra need people who understand the modern world. An attentive elder can learn to function perfectly well in an unfamiliar culture, but it always helps to have a freshly informed perspective. Access to the clan's resources and opportunities for working outside the limits of human law and morality draw specialists.

After the Last Sunset

Andrew surveys his newly constituted pack. They all bear the scars of last night's Creation Rite and reek of

Sire's Gamble

Deceiving the childe about who ruined his life carries certain risks, though not as many as some sires worry about. The more a childe becomes accustomed to regarding all humanity as prey, the less what happened in life seems to matter. Many sires go ahead and tell their childer the truth, when the childer begin the process of siring themselves.

Sometimes a childe decides that the manipulation and lies do call for punishment. A sire whose newfound childe spontaneously develops a bit of Auspex may unexpectedly face confident accusations of deceit, and sometimes a sire in the flush of the Embrace finds himself diablerized in short order. A more cunning childe may set about ruining the sire's unlife in revenge, culminating in the sire's destruction, with or without blessing from the Courts of Blood.

tonight's blood. They stand confident, ready to take over the world. He hopes to ruin their night.

Most new Lasombra don't survive. By making it this far you've already beaten the odds, to some degree, but never for a moment think that your existence is now secure.

More than half of the kine we choose to Embrace fail to survive their testing period. They despair and commit suicide, or break under the strain, or survive but show that they're crippled by unworthy personality traits. At least one in a hundred, and sometimes more than that, fail to survive the Embrace itself, either simply dying or emerging so totally mindless and compulsive that they must be destroyed immediately.

So of a thousand mortals who seemed worthy after initial investigation, we now have about 450 to 500. Look around you, and notice that where there were ten of you on that first night, now there are only eight. We lose ten to twenty percent of new recruits in the training interval before formal acceptance into the Sabbat. In times of crisis, the percentage can double or even triple, and it's never much less than ten percent. Too many new vampires retain more humanity than is good for them. That gets us down to perhaps 350 to 450 of the original thousand.

In the next five years, experience says, at least half of you will have gone to your respective unmarked graves. You will perish in battle, or offend your superiors and warrant judgment by the Courts of Blood or the bishopric. Some of you will fall in Monomacy. Some of you will destroy yourselves in accidents. One of you may attempt to join the *antitribu*, and may even survive to do so. If more than seven or less than three of you stand together five years from now, you will be a most unusual pack indeed. Of our initial thousand, as few as 200, or as many as 300, survive.

Those of you who make it to five years will continue to face challenges. Of the five or so of you likely to last that long, at least one and perhaps as many as three will perish in the next five years. The pace of this brutal winnowing slows further and further for those of you who endure. Another halving takes place between 10 and 25 years, another between 25 and 50, another between 50 and 100. Your instructors and I face the same challenges. Perhaps one of you will win the right from a Court of Blood to destroy me and enrich your standing in the ladder of generations. Perhaps then in turn one of your current peers will win the right to destroy you.

In the Camarilla, which keep its pampered childer in gilded cages, more vampires survive past a century than in the Sabbat. You can even seek to join them, if you wish. All you give up is your only real chance at survival when our true enemies appear, your freedom to choose your own destiny and the precious support the Vinculum provides. Yes, you can exist indefinitely as the Antediluvians' pawn and the prince's slave. Or you can remain here, burning more brightly and becoming far, far more of what you can be than they allow. Those who persist in our grand conflict reach heights of mastery that no humanity-fearing vampire, let alone any prey, can imagine.

You gamble your existence. Would you have it any other way?

In Endless Dark: Lasombra Culture

The Lasombra revel in the endless struggle for survival and mastery. At least that's what they say when asked, and what they try to convince themselves they feel. It would be gauche to admit that over the long years, social and physical warfare grow tiresome. It would be far worse to admit that one sometimes admires virtues quite different from those identified publicly with the clan, or that one would prefer not to shoulder the burden of leadership all the time.

Lasombra consensus holds that overly rigid structures turn on their creators. Thus the institutions within the clan operate flexibly and with substantial local autonomy. These informal distinctions are just as deadly earnest as anything chartered and codified, but they are much more lethal for being open to interpretation. Keeping things loosely defined allows for more dimensions of competition, many more opportunities for the victors to show their superiority.

On the Inside Looking Out: Viewpoints

Individual Lasombra see the world and their role in it many different ways. For survival's sake, like-minded vampires tend to cluster together, particularly in the Sabbat. They only commit to Vinculum bonds with others they like or at least respect to some degree.

Most of the Lasombra subcultures have no organization or even a well-known name. They're outlooks rather than institutions. The only clanwide institution is the Courts of Blood (and the Friends of the Night behind them). Everything else is unofficial. A group that became organized enough to challenge the courts would be co-opted and folded into the Friends themselves or destroyed, depending upon how well the group's leaders pled their case.

The Factionless

What the hell are you talking about?

— Druitt, pack member, Detroit

Most Lasombra identify themselves this way: "I'm a Lasombra and a Sabbat." They don't worry about other details much, and they don't feel driven to identify themselves with subgroups of any sort.

The factionless aren't mindless supporters of the status quo, or at least don't have to be. Many of them take part in the debates about future policy for the Friends of the Night and the Sabbat as a whole. They argue about how to deal with the Lasombra *antitribu*, about who are the Sabbat's biggest enemies and other practical matters.

Factionless Lasombra vary widely in how much attention they give to their clan heritage. In some ways it's inescapable, thanks to the clan's signature Discipline and role in Sabbat history. (Not all Lasombra learn Obtenebration, of course, and thanks to sharing between packmates, a fair number of non-Lasombra also know it. Some vampires revel in the fact, proud of having inherited power and glory and a tradition of using both effectively. Others just don't care. They're interested in building their own empires, however defined, and they regard the clan heritage as irrelevant or even a nuisance that pressures them to conform to norms they reject.

The Crusaders

We are an army. Not a fan club, not a sporting league, not a philosophy. An army. You stand on the brink of destruction at the hands of the Antediluvians' pawns. You speak of independence, but wish for yourself only the independence of annihilation. I will make you survive and triumph, regardless of what you think you want now. Submit to me and win.

— Dr. Julius Sutphen, Bishop of Atlanta

A minority of Lasombra are "crusaders," Cainites who view the Sabbat as a religious and military organization almost to the exclusion of the Sabbat as an ideology of freedom. More elders favor this approach than neonates, though a surprising fraction of the Lasombra Embraced in the last few years share their elders' concerns, thanks to the rising possibly of Gehenna.

Assigning numbers and fractions to any set of vampires is an inexact art. Too few vampires exist,

and ideas don't spread evenly around the world. Any large Sabbat city has at least a few crusaders in its ranks. In a few large cities and several small ones, crusaders dominate the local hierarchy. In most councils, the crusaders are the annoying handful who either end up totally ineffectual because everyone hates them or making most of the decisions because they wear their critics down.

In the Sabbat at large, the Ultra-Conservative faction includes both Lasombra and Tzimisce elders, along with some *antitribu* elders, especially Ventrue. The crusaders specifically favor Lasombra leadership of the Sabbat, pointing out that Lasombra began the crusade and often citing prophecies of doubtful reliability to the effect that Lasombra shall complete it.

The Faithful

When Jesus was crucified, we were there, to darken the skies until He died. We continue now, darkening the hearts of those who reject the salvation we can no longer escape, guiding them to destruction. In the end, we will gather all darkness unto ourselves and descend into the Abyss, leaving behind the world God intended. Thus we serve Him.

— Brother Paul, Franciscan, Barcelona

In earlier nights, many Lasombra *took* Christianity very seriously indeed, as smaller numbers did Judaism, Islam and other faiths. They regarded themselves as servitors of God locked into certain or near-certain damnation. Their actions likely wouldn't earn any reprieve from divine wrath but might postpone final judgment as long as they remained useful tools.

Cardinal Monçada personified this approach to unlife. He was for centuries the leading exponent of the Faithful outlook, surviving the destruction of many of his former comrades. He sought to kindle the spark of faith in new generations, but with little success. Vampires who lived in cultures that didn't worry much about God seldom developed an interest in the subject after their Embrace. Even the Cardinal's occasional pet project of mass Embrace in the midst of religious revivals didn't work very well. Few flavors of postmedieval religion lent themselves to the concerns that drove him. Embraced snake-handlers, speakers in tongues and evangelicals had no use for the cosmology he offered them.

With the Cardinal's passing, the Faithful lack a strong leader. Half a dozen rivals — almost all Latin

American or Mediterranean archbishops — seek to establish themselves as "Monçada's heir," but none of them can make a very strong case. Archbishop Menard of Nicaragua has the most widespread support at the moment, combining a deeply traditionalistic Roman Catholic fervor with fanatical devotion to the Sabbat's various wars. Unfortunately for his campaign to succeed Monçada, his vision remains focused on Latin American concerns, and too many Faithful elsewhere simply get bored by his diatribes about the leftist influence in Latino Catholicism and the need for a purge.

The Black Angels

Taint of sin in my soul? Fuck, yes! My every act makes it manifest. It is my glory. Let me share it with you.

— Madd Killah, ductus-in-training

Since the first Christian centuries, some Lasombra have interpreted their role as being literal devils on earth, serving Satan's will by feeding moral as well as physical darkness. Even before Christian teaching spread, similar movements existed on the fringes of Zoroastrian and other dualist beliefs. In the Middle Ages, the *Angellis Ater* or Black Angels constantly provoked the Friends of Night with their reckless and relentless assaults on mortal society. The Black Angels' depredations fueled popular support for the Inquisition's monster hunting. The clever survivors among the Black Angels played a crucial role in bringing the Sabbat together with a doctrine of supremacy in evil.

In the last thirty years or so, the Black Angels have re-emerged from the margins of Lasombra culture. Explicit dedication to evil appeals to surprising numbers of neonates who've grown up in societies they find bland and unprincipled — any code of conduct will do, it seems, as long as it provides a firm justification for their depredations.

The Abyss's Children

I find no truths except in darkness. The world will not interest me until all traces of light have been expunged from it forever. I act only to hasten the end of the last day.

—Filipe Toreaso Maguno, pack member, Cali, Colombia

The Children are the dedicated practitioners of Abyss mysticism (see page 63). They tend to care about the Sabbat only insofar as it affords them a safe space in which to pursue their studies. Occasionally they venture forth to battle, demonstrating exotic Obtenebration arts and often calling on unfamiliar occult forces. Then they return to their labs and libraries. Lasombra bishops love to have a few of the Abyss's Children around in moments of crisis, and are then glad to see them go away. The dedicated scholars of the Abyss are strange even by Sabbat standards.

No city has more than a few of the Abyss's Children, but secret enclaves of Abyss mystics supposedly locate themselves far from known Sabbat strongholds. Their inhabitants either don't mingle with the rest of the clan or do so under disguises no one has pierced. Skeptics figure that this is one more rumor used to keep vampires looking away from real targets in search of fake ones.

Private Submarines

Yes, they really exist. Most of them operate as the submersible equivalent of glass-bottomed boats in the Bahamas, South Pacific and other tourist destinations. They seat anywhere from half a dozen to a couple of dozen passengers and cruise along at a few knots. Some very wealthy individuals arrange for private subs built by businesses like US Subs when yet another yacht seems so typical. In the World of Darkness, a vampire with connections to a maritime engineering firm might well be able to arrange for custom modifications to a Navy or scientific submarine which then gets "lost" in interagency record-keeping errors. (The Kings and Queens of Shadow may prove useful in this regard, if the corsair can make a suitable offer.) Such a venture requires extensive resources and influences, and could get exposed if security slips. But then that's what makes it a challenge.

The Kings and Queens of Shadow

Yes, I believe in ruling from the shadows. But I want to be the shadow that stretches ahead of mortals marching away from the light, intimately bound to them and defining them in ways they do not recognize. My kingdom is their souls.

— Gloria Yee, ductus, Manila

Some Lasombra take the vampiric condition as a mandate to rule directly over humanity. They serve a very important function in the Sabbat, doing much of the work performed by ghouls in the Camarilla. They take part in mortal institutions, exerting influence, gathering resources and in general keeping the mortal world soft and susceptible to Sabbat control.

Despite their grandiose name, the Kings and Queens of Shadow are nearly outcasts within their clan. They must retain Humanity rather than adopting a Path or they lose most of their ability to mingle with human beings at all. Furthermore, they must

retain a high Humanity to operate in the company of people who aren't psychopaths. This means that they have to avoid many common Sabbat activities, including some of the most important rites. Being assigned to duty among mortals is often a punishment, carrying with it the implicit sentence of isolation from one's pack; choosing duty among mortals shows either tremendous dedication or some secret defect of will, and few vampires give the Kings and Queens the benefit of the doubt.

Sometimes the Kings and Queens form their own packs. These often receive special (and critical) attention from the local bishop. Several times a century, a scandal arises when some pack of Kings and Queens gets destroyed for heresy against Sabbat doctrine and conspiracy against Sabbat organization. Often the charges are true: Cut off from other ideas, the packmates come to think of themselves as the true Sabbat and formulate plans to establish their mastery. In other cases, the charges are simply convenient excuses for removing vampires who've gotten a little too attached to their charges and show too much sympathy for the Camarilla's notions of restraint.

The Corsairs

Three quarters of the world is covered with water. That's more territory in pure darkness beneath the waves than in all the closets and caves that ever were. When the lands perish beneath pollution and your precious cities burn in the kine's final war, my interests will continue undisturbed. You tell me who's wasting time with trivial pursuits.

— Louisa Baker, Bishop of the Madagascar Fleet

Many Lasombra take interest in the sea once in a while. The compulsion to spend time around dark tides comes even at many generations' remove from the Antediluvian. A few Lasombra dedicate themselves to the sea full-time. The corsairs include disciplined individuals who were naval officers in life (or wished they were) and ecstatic, impetuous adventurers alike. Some corsairs operate entirely alone, exploiting computer-assisted navigation for their yachts or even commissioning private submarines.

Some corsairs run private empires in shipping, feeding on crews and passengers, moving their havens from one vessel to another. They may never set foot on land at all, or may spend much of the year attending to business onshore. In recent decades, more corsairs have turned to piracy, particularly in Southeast Asia and both coasts of Africa. Most Europeans and Americans have no idea that thousands of people make a very profitable and violent living preying on shipping in these areas. Whole packs of vampires blend in without a fuss. Bishops dealing with particularly violent packs sometimes "recommend" piracy to get the most violent troublemakers away from prying eyes: Mortal pirates engage in enough butchery to conveniently cover almost any Sabbat acts.

A handful of corsairs deal with the world's navies. At least one fast attack sub is in Lasombra hands, a Soviet Kilo-class sub sold to Iran in 1995 and "lost at sea" two years later. The *Black Fang* preys primarily on Camarilla-controlled shipping and, when possible, ships carrying important members of the Camarilla. Archbishop Ferrari of Morocco directs the three packs required to operate the sub. Vampires can neglect life support systems, with substantial gains in efficiency and stealth. This compensates for some of the difficulties in getting first-rate maintenance.

The Friends of the Night keep the sub's movements a deep secret indeed, and on several occasions have given Courts of Blood sanction to destroy noncorsair Lasombra unfortunate enough to see the sub in action. At least a dozen ambitious packs are trying to get control of ships and subs rotting in ex-Soviet naval yards and other trouble spots. So far, none have managed to pull it off.

The Transhumanists

"Every day in every way we're getting better and better." This is a great time to be undead. Never mind all the talk of Gehenna: Look at developments in cybernetics, materials technology, communications and all the rest. We have the best tools ever to build a world empire of blood that will never, ever fall. And I aim to be there for the rest of eternity, breaking new ground all the time.

— Malcolm Federsen, pack member, Denver

Many modern people (living or undead) don't realize that theories of evolution run back to antiquity. Darwin didn't invent the notion, he just identified natural selection as its mechanism. Since before recorded history, some Lasombra have taken as their primary goal the mastery of all their implicit abilities, evolving into beings who show the full potential of unlife.

The spread of Darwin's idea made the notion more acceptable to modern vampires who didn't buy into Pythagorean mysticism and the other ancient philosophies surrounding evolution. While they grant the intrinsically supernatural state they're in, transhumanists point out how many natural laws still apply to their condition and see their ongoing devel-

opment in essentially scientific terms. The modern transhumanists aim to systematically create the perfect vampire.

Transhumanism confuses both elders and neonates who think of vampirism in mystical terms. Transhumanists quantify their various powers, work out taxonomies and otherwise seek to reduce vampirism to data. Some end up retaining their *humanitas* simply because debauchery and villainy seem boring. Others excel at wildly inhuman Paths because they regard human morality as a dam in the flow of ideas, forcing innovation into narrow channels.

Many transhumanists retain an interest in advanced technology: computing, biology, medicine, aerospace engineering and the like. Others seek a perfection that relies on no tools, though they also appreciate logic and method. They're not Spock with fangs, however — they recognize that passion and destruction are parts of vampirism as much as logic and insight are, and when they take part in the rites, they're often the most driven participants. They do everything that seems worth doing at all as wholeheartedly as they can. It's just that they explain their fervor in terms that most vampires find incomprehensible.

Some transhumanist Lasombra pursue matters of common interest with Tzimisce Metamorphosists and *antitribu* who share similar inclinations. Others prefer to associate only with their own clan.

The Fatalists

It doesn't matter. Everybody says that, but I mean it really, truly doesn't matter. Your own sire can make you lick his boots and like it. What do you think the eldest can't do to you?

— Vincenzo Fiore, nomadic Sabbat, currently in southern Italy

Fatalist Lasombra do not speak of themselves as such, not if they want to avoid destruction. Insofar as the Friends of the Night acknowledge the faction's existence, they regard it as a recurring failure among otherwise worthy clan members.

The fatalists hold just one doctrine: that no matter how things appear, they have no actual free will. Some argue that the Embrace makes them (and all vampires) into tools of the eldest, but that human beings retain free will. Others claim that no sentient being ever enjoys free will because the Antediluvians usurp all minds, at conception or birth or adulthood, for the endless wars the eldest wage among themselves.

Fatalism almost disappeared in the early centuries of the Sabbat era. Only gradually did young Lasombra pause to reflect that they were still surrounded by entities more powerful than themselves. The rising tide of unprecedented calamities in recent years brought fatalism back to popularity. Some Fatalists throw themselves into frenzies of activity. Others withdraw and avoid doing any more than necessary to survive.

The Doomed

I drink to your memory, asshole!

— Garcilaço, pack member, Mexico City

Some Lasombra style themselves heroes, warriors and other self-congratulatory terms. They aim at the immediate conquest of everything in sight. They're not really thoughtful enough to qualify as extreme worshippers of freedom. They don't deal with anything so abstract. Self-indulgence, pure and simple, is their goal. Some go so far as to make a point of always showing their fangs, tattooing black hands and other shadow symbols in prominent places (like the top of a shaved head) and otherwise flaunting their condition.

The doomed are just what the name suggests. Most Lasombra wipe such clanmates out on sight. It's one thing to lord it over humanity. It's another to do so in stupid, short-sighted ways that invite reprisals without preparation on the vampire's part. It takes a lot of Fortitude to shrug off a SWAT team, and more to deal with hunters filled with the fearful knowledge that punk vampires lurk somewhere in the vicinity. Exhibitionism generally doesn't pay, at least not among the Lasombra.

The Iron Fist: Institutions

In most matters, Lasombra run their own affairs in accordance with Sabbat principles and varying interpretations of clan priorities. The clan maintains no permanent hierarchy, police force or other such agency. Inevitably, clan members do fall into disagreement with each other, and the single prominent institution of the clan comes into play on such occasions.

Behind it stands an intermittently visible organization, or working alliance, or some sort of gathering. It operates with little obvious plan, and doesn't set any sort of clanwide policy. Nonetheless, it exerts influence on the clan both by teaching and by example.

The Courts of Blood

Long before the Sabbat existed, before any human society now known to mortal scholars, the Lasombra Antediluvian realized that its childer would (just like the Antediluvian and its peers) seek to feed on each other. Suppressing the practice outright wouldn't work anymore than, according to Noddist stories, Caine's decree against diablerie.

But predation could be bound by rules, and the destruction of one's clanmate could be made the reward granted in accordance with procedures and policy. The Antediluvian set up the Courts of Blood to put this insight into practice.

A Lasombra who has a grievance against a clanmate starts the process by making her dissatisfaction known. She speaks to the powerful Lasombra in her vicinity. They speak among themselves, and anywhere from three to 13 members of the Friends of the Night constitute a Court of Blood. They listen to the plaintiff's petition and then dismiss her while they deliberate the case. This can take minutes or years, and while the court deliberates, the vampire with a complaint must not press the case or risk destruction herself.

In over half the cases, the court decides that the complaint has insufficient merit. The court members reprimand the plaintiff for poor judgment, and sometimes impose a sanction like loss of status. In 10-15% of cases, the court decides that the target warrants some punishment short of destruction. Occasionally, the court simply orders the target to turn over information or assets to the plaintiff. More often, the court instructs the plaintiff that she's entitled to certain property or influence if she can take them from the target. If she goes beyond that, she again risks destruction by the court, and if she can't manage to take it, well, she obviously doesn't deserve it.

In the remainder of cases, the court agrees that the target warrants destruction. Often the court imposes constraints: no use of Disciplines, destruction of ghouls and possessions before destruction of the target and the like. In all cases, one or more Lasombra, who may be chosen by the court or nominated by the plaintiff and confirmed by the court, must witness the act of destruction itself. The plaintiff can try to destroy the target either a limited number of times (usually just one) or during a specific timeframe, after which the court considers the matter settled. The court prefers to grant the right to try rather than to guaranteeing a result.

The court convenes in darkness. The plaintiff shouldn't know which local clanmates hear her suit. She's summoned anonymously to a meeting place and enters to find the judges already cloaked by Obtenebration, Obfuscate or other means. If she can pierce their concealment, she's clearly worthy to do so, but any effort later to act on the knowledge that

Using the Courts

Esteemed Ming:

Ductus Andrew tells me that you're about to present your first case to a Court of Blood. Just as I did for him, I offer you a few words of advice on getting what you want.

1. Be prepared in advance. Make sure that you are clear on your target, and make sure that you can document your grievances. This doesn't mean that all your charges must be true. They must be plausible and supported by what appears to be good evidence. Do not, however, attempt to fake things beyond your capacity to succeed in the deception.

2. Be concise. If the court has questions, the judges will ask you for more information. Do not start by insulting their intelligence or experience.

3. Offer kickbacks and incentives. If possible, explain how your action will benefit the probable members of the court. Do not make too many assumptions in this direction. Above all do not confidently assume that you know who isn't on the court and explain how this action hurts that absent Friend. Inevitably, either he or an ally of his will be on the court. If a judge has shared blood with him, she might heed the Vinculum's call to oppose you.

4. Be respectful and confident. The court could, after all, decide to destroy you. Show yourself a worthy heir to the clan's tradition of authority. Respect the judges. Command your inferiors. It helps in this regard to have some inferiors to command. Cultivate subordinate members of your pack for the purpose if you expect to do this on a regular basis.

5. Follow all instructions the court gives. Follow them completely. Do not go beyond them. Do not stop short of them.

6. Do not get greedy. If you petition more than once every few years, you'll draw skeptical attention. The court may well authorize your destruction as a disruptive threat to clan interests. Do not waste your effort on trivial matters. You and your target are in principle immortal. Take your time.

Regards,

Demba

a particular vampire was one of her judges almost always warrants destruction. The courts are supposed to operate as the voice of tradition, abstracted from the myriad voices of individual Lasombra.

No formal procedure for appeal exists. A plaintiff may request a second hearing, but the court has no obligation to agree. Judges may themselves choose to refer the matter to other Friends of the Night, but this almost always happens in the deliberation process so that no other vampires know about it. Occasionally an appellate court gathers in the same place as the lower-ranked court and calls the plaintiff back; the practice of concealment makes it hard to distinguish this from any routine request for further information.

Attempted destruction of another Lasombra (other than an *antitribu*) without court sanction is itself grounds for a complaint, whether the attempt succeeds or not. A neonate acting in the grip of frenzy may win reprieve, as do some elders facing extreme provocation. In general, however, the Lasombra expect each other to possess enough self-control to hold back from destruction (though not from lesser violence). The courts' efficiency in oversight of such matters depends entirely how zealous the Friends of the Night dwelling in that area are — in some cities, almost anything goes, while in others only the mildest infractions escape.

The whole concept of the courts exists in an uncomfortable tension with the Sabbat's organization. The courts do not respect position within the Sabbat as anything but an incidental concern. A low-ranking Lasombra may press a complaint against a vastly higher-ranking Sabbat Lasombra, and if the court finds merit in the case, the inferior may proceed and the judges will intercede (at least to some extent) on his behalf with the surrounding Sabbat hierarchy. The court can decide to postpone a judgment until after some local crisis ends — very few decrees come down in the midst of a war, for instance, or right before one of the big annual rites when Sabbat officials must prepare for the occasion.

Few elder Lasombra see a conflict between sect and clan tradition. The Lasombra predate the Sabbat, and the Sabbat owes its existence to visionary Lasombra above all else. For elders outside the Lasombra, the issue is equally simple: The Sabbat governs and the clans yield. Minor skirmishes often flare wherever a court decision upsets the Sabbat order of things.

The courts actually operate in some cases among *antitribu* as well as the main clan. Neither side advertises the fact, but some cities rich in Lasombra simply don't pay much attention to the division and make clan "justice" equally available to both sides.

The Friends of the Night

Behind the courts stand the Friends of the Night, a loose-knit network of clan elders and some younger members who have proven themselves exceptionally capable.

Like the courts, the Friends predate all known civilizations. They usually render their name in whatever language most firmly indicates culture and authority. When ancient languages in the Middle East were still differentiating themselves from Proto-Indo-European, the Friends were "Brether Nokw." When Latin was the language of empire (and then of scholarship after the empire fell), they were the "Amici Noctis." When French was the universal European language for diplomacy and commerce, they were "*Les amis noirs*." In the last century or two, they've generally been "Friends of the Night."

The Friends take a simple oath to protect the interests of the clan as a whole and to work against its enemies. In theory, they stand apart from internal disputes. In practice, of course, most Friends simply associate their partisan concerns with the clan's best interests and proceed accordingly. In times of strife, half or more of all convened Courts of Blood deal with disputes between Friends of the Night. (Lesser clan members do not learn of such things. They only know that for some reason, elders are slower than usual to convene courts and seem grouchy about it all.)

While the Antediluvian still existed, it was easy to identify overall clan concerns — they were whatever the Antediluvian said they were. Since the Anarch Revolt, no consensus exists on the matter.

The Death of Ambition

Diligence is good for vampires, but the obsession with persisting without a break isn't. A vampire who cannot cope with the limitations of his new condition is very likely to develop derangements or simply lose all self-control and perish in the final fury of Wassail. Alert priests sometimes steer troubled neonates toward a suitable Path of Enlightenment to avoid a terminal crisis, but this only works when the youngster is ready to give up his humanity altogether — the problem is precisely that he's still too attached to his old goals. The suicidal behavior of such neonates is one of the major causes of Final Death among the Lasombra.

Some *antitribu* still take part in meetings of the Friends, their safety guaranteed by elaborate pacts and often reinforced by blood magic of various sorts. This is rare — most Sabbat Lasombra prefer to simply annihilate leaders of the dissenters or (more elegantly) to co-opt them through mental Disciplines. Nonetheless, it would come as a shock to many young Lasombra to find out just how muddy the lines get high up in the clan.

Most Lasombra who survive a century or so get invited to join the Friends. The Friends don't all speak with one mind about nominations. Rather, a nominating Friend consults with as many others as possible and tries to address concerns. A sufficiently unworthy Friend inevitably ends up the target of a court-sanctioned destruction, and likely so does his sponsor, so these matters are somewhat self-correcting. A Lasombra of a few decades' experience may get an invitation to the Friends after some remarkable feat — a brilliantly executed series of crusades (not just one), a breakthrough in Obtenebration applications, a diplomatic coup that strengthens the clan's position in the Sabbat, the defection of a prominent *antitribu* lineage. These invitations are few and far between, and warrant careful concern.

The Friends of the Night are "secret" in the sense that mortal secret police usually are. Everyone, or at least every Lasombra with more than a few nights' instruction, knows they're there, and many Lasombra know the names of several Friends. The scope of the network as a whole remains concealed, and few of its operations take place anywhere outsiders can see it. *The Lasombra don't conceal the existence of the* Friends or courts from other vampires. They just don't call attention to the institutions and few vampires of other clans think to ask.

The Rhythms of the Night

What exactly do vampires *do* with their endless existence?

It's easy to overlook the constraints vampires experience. Only the handful with extremely high Fortitude can routinely resist the urge to slumber when daylight approaches, and low Humanity forces vampires to sleep longer after the sun has set. Averaged over the course of a year, the vampires with the highest Humanity get 12 waking hours per night.

I See You

Lasombra havens, whatever other features they may possess, almost all tend toward one of two extremes in regard to mirrors. Some are mirrored on virtually every surface (often including ceilings and floors). A few seek out dramatic lighting and create artistic effects in the endless reflections, surrounding their guests with dazzling, even downright confusing, displays. The other extreme favors no mirrors or reflecting surfaces of any kind. Tradition associates a fascination for mirrors with a preference for Dominate, while a hatred of mirrors supposedly goes with a preference for Obfuscate. Whatever truth once lingered in this tradition, it's just superstition now. In truth, Lasombra who favor reflection like to keep their audiences a bit on edge and disoriented, while Lasombra who try to banish reflection like to quietly remind their audiences that something unusual is at work but the host is in control.

Nearly all Sabbat vampires get substantially less, down to as little as eight or nine hours per night.

At least an hour a night usually goes toward feeding, though in practice many packs don't hunt every night. They drink their fill and then do without for a few nights. Even with well-established herds — which few Lasombra other than the Kings and Queens of Shadow enjoy — it takes some time to get kine together, feed on them and then disperse them again.

Performing the *ritae*, *auctoritas* and *ignoblis*, takes time. The grand annual rites each require multiple nights of preparation and more time cleaning up afterward. Games of Instinct occupy all available time in a particular night. Ritual preparation for combat against sect enemies takes all of the night not consumed by the fight itself. The Sabbat has many enemies, from the Camarilla to human opponents (witting and otherwise) to other races inhabiting the shadows. A crusade occupies weeks, months or years. Self-contained skirmishes can occupy weeks even without the complications of sustained conflicts.

By the time all is said and done, Lasombra can count on only having a few hours a night for their own pursuits. Within this window of opportunity they must train themselves and each other, seek out entertainment, rest and do everything else that interests them. No human workaholic labors under anything like the constraints upon an ambitious Lasombra. One important reason the Sabbat as a whole exercises less influence over mortal society is the pressure of time: It cannot insinuate itself without forsaking the practices that define it as a sect.

Lasombra who survive their first nights often develop quite elaborate personal interests: quirks of style, particular aptitudes, some environmental factor they require in any place they inhabit for a while. Such obsessions must compensate for the sort of well-rounded personality and expertise that hinges on time Lasombra simply don't have. Even the eldest lack the sort of diversified mastery a comparably immortal human being would, since the vampire's endless years are still constrained at every step.

Vampires are creatures of ego. The Lasombra, pushed by their heritage to show themselves worthy leaders, feel a great need to make themselves stand out from each other and from the vampires around them. For young Lasombra, this is also a survival trait, showing impatient and distrustful elders, "See, in this way I excel and show myself your worthy heir."

Successful packs often recognize the limitations of their existence and assemble diverse individuals to complement each others' weaknesses. A pack full of hackers, or automotive aces, or performance artists excels at one tasks and had better hope that they don't face other challenges. By contrast, a pack with one hacker, one ace and one artist can cover a lot more ground adequately if not always excellently. Ambitious pack leaders compare notes about what works and spy on each other to learn the tricks that don't get noted. Clan Lasombra, like the mortal business world, suffers from fads in management.

The Clan in the Sect

Elder Lasombra tend to feel possessive about the Sabbat. It's theirs in very important ways, the fruit of their brave actions (or least actions they stood by and allowed). The elders of the clan expect that their childer and grandchilder will lead packs, teach doctrine, preside as bishops and rise through the ranks. For the elders, if Lasombra aren't at the forefront in both peace and war, then things aren't working right.

By the numbers, Lasombra make up about a quarter of the Sabbat. They fill more than a third of all offices, and in some cities an actual majority of the titled leaders belong to the clan. In addition, experienced Lasombra serve as advisors and specialists even when they happen not to hold a Sabbat title. The clan's elders don't actually cheat in helping promising young Lasombra gain power, but they can and do provide assistance, information and co-

vert aid. Elders see this as a self-correcting process, in that unworthy heirs flame out and perish, while anyone who flourishes once in the position clearly deserved to be there in the first place.

Lasombra Among Themselves

Lasombra pride themselves on doing things with style and elegance. That doesn't mean they all dress alike, act alike or furnish their havens the same way. Lasombra havens that win respect for their appropriate elegance range from recreated (or preserved) chambers in Mughal and Etruscan styles to the pinnacles of I.M. Pei-designed buildings and self-sufficient rammed-earth homes half underground. Lasombra leaders may turn out for formal occasions in clerical garb (earnest, blasphemous or satirical), classic evening wear of recent centuries or styles popular in their mortal days. The Lasombra taste in ritual observance and social gathering ranges from ancient pagan through selectively medieval to aggressively postmodern — sometimes varying wildly from one performance to the next, depending on what they hope to accomplish.

Almost anything can be elegant. One of the classic Lasombra virtues is the gift of exposition, allowing one vampire to explain to others why this particular choice is in fact elegant. The clan favors its members who can articulate their preferences in persuasive manner. The clan frowns on efforts to shock — unless they work. Managing to introduce something so unfamiliar that it tramples on existing assumptions and yet, with explanation, manages to fit clan imperatives is one way to win a great deal of honor. Merely being offensive warrants loss of status, at a minimum, and may bring harsher punishment.

Sabbat Lasombra vigorously deny that they keep anything like the Camarilla customs of Elysium and salon. Talk is cheap. In practical terms, most Lasombra gather and exchange news and views with like-minded associates, and deal with each other in environments policed against random violence. Purposeful violence like dueling is another matter, of course. The Lasombra seek to reassure themselves and each other that they are, despite their differences, united by superior lineage. At least that's how the elders see it. Many younger Sabbat could care less about lineage, but recognize that angering their creators is unwise. Generational tensions fester just out of sight.

For many young Sabbat Lasombra, tonight's elders seem very much like what the stories say Gratiano and the others rebelled against in the first place. Yes, the Sabbat's structure allows new vampires to develop in ways that the Camarilla and independent existence do not, but at a cost. A vampire who wishes to be more than human but rejects the crusading element of the sect, for instance, is simply out of luck. She'd better conform and keep her opinions to herself. Paranoid elders see new conspiracies like Gratiano's in every unhappy gathering of neonates. This fear motivates ever more ostentatious rites, with an eye toward building Vinculum bonds strong enough to make rebellion difficult or impossible. Such acts themselves stimulate neonate plotting to find ways around it.

So far the balance of power remains intact. It would take the coordinated removal of a great many elders, inside the clan and out, to inaugurate a new era of Lasombra openness. If it happened, such a purge would bring immediate reprisals from the Sabbat and opportunistic attacks from Camarilla and independent vampires. The would-be conspirators know all this, and haven't struck yet. Yet.

The Unkept: The Antitribu

To begin with, the Lasombra *antitribu* never refer to themselves as *antitribu*. The distinction has nothing to do with their view of the clan. Clan Lasombra is a single family of lineages. Some glory in the destruction of the Lasombra Antediluvian and embrace the Sabbat. Others don't. In addition, some individual Lasombra choose to accept or reject the Sabbat for reasons of their own. Thus the boundaries between Sabbat-committed Lasombra and the rest of the clan remain in constant flux.

The lineages that reject the Sabbat sometimes do so for one of two diametrically opposed reasons.

Reactionaries

Most Lasombra who reject the Sabbat remain attached to the traditional (if outdated) order of clan hierarchy and childe-sire relations. They often support the Camarilla, although a third of the conservative lineages steer an altogether independent course and avoid the sects completely. Reactionary *antitribu* usually value Humanity, and when they adopt Paths, favor scholarly, sedate ones.

Some reactionary Lasombra war against their Sabbat clanmates, but it's tough going. Sabbat doctrine and training breeds very thorough warriors, free of the ethical constraints that often tie down

their *antitribu* assailants. The "Kindred" have few great warlords or generals. This is one reason they work with the Camarilla.

Within the reactionary Keepers exists a subfaction, "the Distinguished." These Cainites prosecute the war against the Sabbat, but not by direct means. At sea, they maintain the famous *antitribu* pirate fleets. On land, they engage in complex schemes of espionage and sabotage. Some act flamboyantly within the context of rigid, demanding ethics, while others are almost as monstrous as their enemies. Like the Kings and Queens of Shadow, many Distinguished specialize in working among mortals to turn the surrounding society against Sabbat activity.

Radicals

The radical complaint about the Sabbat is that it doesn't go far enough. Radicals fully accept that vampires are innately inhuman. They venerate the Antediluvian as darkness incarnate and think that any later vampire who believes he can destroy darkness incarnate is too foolish to earn any respect. Radicals practice Obtenebration and (whenever they can find instructors) Thaumaturgy with consummate devotion, and seek to bring about the end of all light in the universe forever. They wish that their Sabbat clanmates would give up this business about tearing down Antediluvians or banding together with other clans and get on with the Lasombra's true work.

Radical Lasombra seldom retain Humanity for very long. It interferes with their calling.

Becoming *Antitribu*

The *antitribu* choose their childer very much as Sabbat Lasombra do, including testing to destruction, or at least to near-destruction. Indeed, in some cases the *antitribu* take it much further. The Lasombra see pragmatic justification for this: Only a few *antitribu* exist, and they can't afford even one deadbeat or marginal childe. Reactionaries must always think about what impression they make on the Camarilla, since it wouldn't take much for a twitchy archon or justicar to decide to sweep away "dangerous impediments." Radicals need childer who can stand up under the mental and physical rigors of constant exposure to the darkest forces.

Lasombra who belong to the Camarilla generally make a very visible point of respecting the Traditions governing Embrace and release, and their released childer are among the best educated in the sect. (This only annoys many members of the six core clans, who resent outsiders doing it so well.) The rest of the *antitribu* follow their own inclinations and established clan wisdom about suitable childer.

The reactionaries have experimented on at least three occasions with mass Embrace in the style of Sabbat "shovel parties." Conservative Lasombra on Paths that didn't interfere with this practice set about creating dozens of childer in short order, while their more humane allies Dominated the shock troops and gave them crash courses in using Disciplines. The berserk hordes then went plunging into battle. All were slaughtered. Some reactionaries speculate that a Sabbat rite infuses the sect's shock troops with knowledge and power. Most of the experimenters disagree, but they certainly missed something important. The Sabbat Lasombra occasionally get a worthy survivor out of such efforts. The reactionaries never have.

The non-Sabbat Friends of the Night have made it clear that they will not look favorably on any fourth effort. The effort will still happen — the crises of the Final Nights make it too tempting a tool — but it will happen somewhere a few Lasombra gather in secret, well away from the Camarilla and other observers.

Defection from the Sabbat

The Sabbat make no great effort to teach childer about the *antitribu* and even less effort to provide any information helpful to a would-be defector. Among disgruntled neonates, urban legends of all sorts proliferate — think of junior-high myths about sex for a sense of how accurate the stories are. Any Sabbat Lasombra who decides to act quickly on her sense of dissatisfaction, taking the common stories as her guideline, is likely to end up caught and destroyed.

Successfully leaving the Sabbat takes time. A vampire with extensive Vinculum bonds probably can't do it at all. The knowledge that she is joining the enemy and fighting against her former allies is sufficient to make unlife uncomfortable with a Vinculum bond of 3 or higher, difficult at 6 or higher and almost altogether impossible above 7. The would-be defector must remove her allies herself or wait for time and chance to do it for her.

Once she can leave, she must then find the *antitribu*. Likely she knows, at most, in vague terms where nearby Camarilla vampires congregate. She knows nothing of their practices, and if a sheriff or scourge detects her, she'll likely be destroyed before getting a chance to make any other social gaffes. She must remain on her best behavior for an extended period of time, avoiding giving offense to anyone with the right of destruction over her and convincing someone with influence to grant her at least

temporary protection. The Sabbat does not favor the development of those social skills. Either she knew it in life and hasn't forgotten it all, or she manages to scrape by on intuition and quick learning.

Nor does finding the Camarilla actually help much, unless she wants to get adopted into some other clan. Few princes know much of anything about the Lasombra *antitribu*, and few want to admit ignorance of such things or alert the Camarilla's authorities to the presence of a new oddball individual. So some defectors choose to give the Camarilla a miss, either altogether or once they've earned the most rudimentary acknowledgement, and instead search for their own clanmates.

The *antitribu* try to keep some observers in areas of Sabbat activity. It's difficult and dangerous work. Most of the alleged defectors who come to their attention are in fact decoys set to lure the *antitribu* into traps. A genuine defector who makes a few too many unconvincing moves generally ends up destroyed without warning by precisely the people she hopes to reach.

Perhaps one in ten defectors actually ends up with the clanmates she hoped to find. Once found, she must undergo extended probation. The existence of mental Disciplines means that her new associates can't be entirely sure of her reliability; she may have things inside her head she's completely aware of, just waiting to explode. It takes years or even decades to fully earn trust and standing among the *antitribu*, once one's been tainted by the Sabbat.

The Clan and the World

The early night air is stagnant and humid. There's been neither rain nor wind for more than a week, and urban smog combines with the detritus of crop burning to leave the air reeking. Demba stands on the back deck of a Vancouver condominium, looking with preternatural eyesight across the Columbia River at downtown Portland. The unfinished building where she spoke to Andrew's pack about origins is done now, even with the delays occasioned by an "accident" early one morning when a whole series of safety bolts failed.

She smiles at the memory — she still feels some emotions a human being would recognize — and looks down at the Other Razor, who's still draining the last drops from the family whose condo this was. He bears the scars where he cut himself to remain awake long enough into daylight to strike after the morning shift was at work. She was impressed then, and remains so now.

"O.R.," she says. "Stop playing with your food."

Immediately, he looks up. "Okay. I'm ready when you are."

Demba smiles again. "If you're still serious about becoming a priest..." He nods emphatically, and she continues. "... then you need to know who you're fighting against, so that you can prepare your packmates in mind and soul."

"Everyone, right?"

"Well, yes. But not all targets are the same. Pay attention, now."

The Sabbat

You'll actually do as much fighting within the sect as against outsiders. That's a matter of practice, not theory. We who survive the first few years of unlife might *like* it if the sect were a little less fratricidal, but wishing doesn't change things. The bishop would strongly disapprove of you saying that the chief enemy of the Sabbat is its own members, and I encourage you not to bring up the subject unless your examiners broach it first. Even then, downplay it. Let them see that you know the realities of the situation but that you're not mired in skepticism about the great crusade.

Remember too that your only allies are inside the sect. Every outsider who knows about us hates us and would like to see us destroyed. Of course we return the favor. Anyone who'd work at our destruction is an obstacle to our eventual triumph and must be removed. Your only opportunity for companionship is within the Sabbat. Don't use up the opportunity frivolously.

In short order, of course, if your pack endures as well as it seems to now, you won't have the option of using up your packmates. The Vinculum will ensure that you don't. Does that seem frightening to you? It should. You should sometimes stir in quiet moments and worry that a force you don't understand is working in your body to make you care about these other Licks, and to make them care about you. It should strike you as strange that pronouncing ritual blessings with the right attitude turns regular vitae into something that can make the Vinculum bond. You need to remember that you are part of something larger and older than yourself, which operates at a level you do not now understand and which in some ways you will never understand, unless the Courts of Blood award you many diableries.

And that's the good news.

The Tzimisce

The Fiends are our closest allies and most bitter competitors. Never forget that *we* initiated the revolt that led to the Sabbat. Before Gratiano and his allies acted, and before *Les amis noirs* endorsed their action, a few disgruntled individuals made only haphazard strikes. Lugoj and his followers imitated Gratiano. The Fiends simply hate to come in second on anything and seize every opportunity to punish those with the misfortune to be more successful. They've launched wars against us before and will do so again. Always be on your guard. Always use them. Trust them only when you see the vitae go into the chalice during Vaulderie, and even then be slow to spread your confidences. Sometimes you'll find a common cause on a specific project. Never pass up an opportunity to make useful contacts or to get something worthwhile done. Watch your back, and keep the mirrors handy to see them coming.

Blood Brothers

Yes, it's true, experimentation is vitally important to our sect's continued existence. Were we to decline new opportunities, our enemies would soon predict us, surround us and destroy us. That said, I question whether this experiment in particular adds anything to the sect. We *have* cannon fodder. Perhaps some night I may see Blood Brothers accomplish *something* that commands my respect. Some night I may diablerize Caine, too.

Harbingers of Skulls

I don't know. I don't want to know. They walk out of the lands of the dead with masks and grudges. If they hate the Camarilla or other vampires, fine, I will work with them. But I prefer to let my trusted subordinates handle it. These fellows disturb me like nothing else.

Kiasyd

Well-beloved student, if you ever learn anything about these creatures, tell it to me and I will reward you handsomely.

Panders

Speaking of cannon fodder... I find their pretensions to clan status profoundly amusing. Encourage them — you may need them to interfere with Tzimisce plans every so often.

I am slightly unfair to the mob. A few of their members show real aptitude for our clan's Disciplines and lore. You should recruit such individuals away from the mob and arrange for a proper surrogate sire to fold them into our clan. What I said about the rest of them still applies.

Salubri *Antitribu*

Truly we occupy an era rich in portent. Who would have suspected that the Tremere's victims would return in force, and so willingly fight for us? When I was young to unlife, the Salubri were one of the great cautionary stories about what one clan could do to another if the Antediluvians allowed it (or, more likely, encouraged it as a scheme of their own). We knew that it's hard to completely destroy any group, but expected that any survivors must huddle childeless in remote wastelands. Now here they are, full of the warrior's drive. I welcome the sign, for it reminds us that Gehenna will bring us triumphs as well as defeats.

They seem reclusive when it comes to their lore and powers. Any member of our clan who managed to acquire insights into the Salubri secrets would win much merit in the eyes of *Les amis noirs*.

Other *Antitribu*

At least the Tzimisce form a meaningful set of lineages, bound together in blood and tradition. They have social and ideological coherence, even if it's misguided. The *antitribu* all predicate their existence on a "no" rather than a "yes." We and the Tzimisce affirm our continuity with traditions worth respecting, paradoxical as that may seem to outsiders. We annihilated our respective Antediluvians in the service of our own survival and the goal of ultimate freedom. The *antitribu* begin with rejection, rightly turning against their pathetic ancestors but lacking much coherent alternative. They're generally more eager to destroy than to build or rule. This is fine: Why sacrifice your clanmates when you've got volunteer cannon fodder? Give them even scraps of respect and instruction and they'll follow you anywhere.

I have a personal fondness for many of the Ventrue *antitribu*. They understand what their clan has forgotten, that the end to which we are fitted is power. If they had more defectors, they could pose a serious threat to our situation. As it is, they make good lieutenants.

The Camarilla

In the other corner, wearing this millennium's fashions in shackles and pathos, the Camarilla. I once visited a carnival in New York. The barker's style reminded me of the Camarilla, or vice versa. See the finest vitae in captivity to the manipulators who want to eat us all! Gaze on the awesome spectacle of the world's best predators cowering in the night and hoping to turn back into prey!

Here's Van Zooks the Dog-Faced Ventrue, who thinks banks are better than thrones, next to Emilia Toreador, who lurks in the bowels of the art world like a tapeworm and regards herself as a co-creator rather than an annoying parasite.

In the next booth, it's Rampaging Jack the Brujah, willing to boldly promote any ideology that won't force him to confront his inhumanity. He towers over Clever Zelda the Tremere, who's gotten as far as using her blood to reshape the world but doesn't think this means she has to give up fawning over the kine.

Bringing up the rear, we've got Manson the Malkavian, willing to entertain any vision that lets her deny her inner yearning, and Ugly Charlie the Nosferatu, who makes a big fuss over his clan's independence — they even hang out with evil old us — and how they're all bravely ready to get wiped out together rather than separately as Gehenna accelerates.

Oh, yes, and there's Gorgeous George the Gangrel, the most beautiful mastiff who ever was. He barks out that he's slipped the Camarilla leash, but even though he acknowledges the eldest are harvesting us already, he doesn't have the sense to join us. Pity. We could use the infantry.

And that's the group that thinks it understands the undead condition best.

Oh, very well, with a little less sarcasm and a little more specificity.

Brujah

If I were forced to pick the single most pathetic clan, Brujah would get my vote. Yes, even ahead of the Toreador or the Gangrel. The Rabble are the parasites' parasites. Their sect seeks to cower away from mortal eyes rather than striding forth in glory or simply blinding the kine with hot pokers. This clan in turn prides itself on rebellion but cannot actually manage to leave, take over or otherwise alter the

status quo. The *antitribu* are much the same, except with more blood and piercings.

Gangrel

The Outlanders make good poster children for wasted potential. They could rule the wilds as gods of chaos if they only had vision and organization. As it is, they scatter in the face of what they believe to be approaching Gehenna. Precisely because their strengths do not challenge ours, I like to make a little effort now and again to recruit them. They could strengthen and diversify the Sabbat, if they were willing to accept discipline. Certainly their twin Sabbat bloodlines reflect well on a mongrel ancestry, producing surprising feats of vigor and cunning.

Malkavians

Visionary, lunatic; po-TAY-to, po-TAH-to. I sometimes suspect that the Malkavians' collective dreams and hallucinations are the result of a botched effort to simulate our clan's experience of the Abyss. Note the suspicious similarities, from the subconscious working to the symbolic nature of the communications, or so I'm told by a Malkavian *antitribu* who once belonged to my pack. She stayed long enough to master Obtenebration to a surprising degree, so she had a basis for comparison.

The precise nature of the Malkavians' blood curse seems a little unclear. Do you suppose that it's imbecility, or simply a streak of infantile nature exactly deep enough to keep the clan trivial? Some of the *antitribu* seem interesting, but for every really visionary general or inventor we get, quite a few more serve as educational examples.

Nosferatu

Any clan that appears so altogether pathetically useless and yet survives must be up to something we don't see. Noddists say that a passage describes the Nosferatu as first to fall in any war between vampires, and I suppose it's possible that one or more Antediluvians keep the clan around for fodder in some impending battle. That strikes me as unlikely, however. I suspect that mere competence would suffice to give the Sewer Rats a competitive edge in the Camarilla. That sect does not (to put it mildly) display much collective wisdom, so the idiot savant information-broker act may simply lull the others into blissful ignorance.

The Nosferatu of our sect are a shifty bunch. They're not always smart, but they are clever, and they see too much even with our clan's particular advantages in the way of darkness. I try to keep the ones I encounter busy investigating my rivals.

Toreador

Poetry! Sweet poetry! I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree! There. Now, if you were a Toreador in disguise, the beauty of my words would captivate you. Then I would slaughter you and your servants, and seize your goods to sell later. What a wonderful clan they are. I've found that some of the *antitribu* find our shadow-transformed bodies equally captivating. When you master the Black Metamorphosis, you can build a little legion of Toreador admirers, if such suits your plans.

Tremere

This is one of the few Camarilla clans I take seriously. They have an effective organization, even with allowances for the greed, jealousy, backstabbing and other individual passions that drive us all. They systematically study the art of Thaumaturgy, which is predicated on the unliving condition and often leads its practitioners into increasingly inhuman states of mind. Were they to decide to pursue collective power, they would be serious rivals indeed. Fortunately for us, the affairs of their sect keep them from mounting serious challenges to our position.

Not long ago, I lost contact with the Tremere *antitribu* I used to exchange services with. Rumor has it that something befell them all. If you find any new defectors from their clan, see that they're properly welcomed and cared for.

Ventrue

Think of the Lasombra. Subtract the intelligence, the forethought, the style and the dedication to supremacy. That's the Blue Bloods: like us, but stupid.

The Independents

Assamites

You need a score card to keep track of what the Assassins are up to now. Many longtime Sabbat stalwarts have returned to clan strongholds, and they haven't all just been wiped out. Meanwhile, a whole fresh crop of Sabbat admirers is spreading through many of our cities. I recommend proceeding very, very cautiously until you understand what caused the changes. In the meantime, the Black Hand seems to be in substantial disarray. Perhaps you or someone you know could fill one of the vacancies and help gather the confused faction back under proper leadership.

Followers of Set

If you ever find the Abyss as such too intimidating, try the Serpents. They dress up the darkness with a snake. Fine if you like that sort of thing, I suppose; it strikes me as the cartoon version of truths we face directly. They're very useful business associates as long as you remember to set boundaries. The roster of Lasombra condemned by the Courts of Blood includes too many fools who thought that one more deal couldn't hurt. It can.

Giovanni

I don't understand them, and have no particular interest in remedying this as long as I have allies who can work with them. You might think that with the various points in common between our respective clan histories we'd share some sympathy of outlook, but I find no point of contact with their obsession with the dead. At times I think it's even more pathetic than the Camarilla and their Masquerade. At other times, the Giovanni strike me as perhaps approaching the Abyss itself from other angles. Fortunately, I have little that requires me to deal with them.

Ravnos

I hate them. If I could, I would exterminate them from the face of the earth. No, never mind the silly stereotypes about Gypsies and such. Their clan is as old as any other and just as diverse, and happens merely to escape our gaze most of the time. What matters to me is that they bring a unique sort of confusion and disorientation. When a Ravnos is in the area, by far your wisest course of action is to retreat into the shadows and wait until it leaves. The creatures play on fears and hopes and willful delusions with virtuoso precision. I don't believe the stories about their mystical powers of illusion, nor do I think they need any such power. They're social engineers of the finest rank. Unfortunately, they've wed this aptitude to a disgustingly distracted and altogether useless view of the world. They weaken all undead social structures as they pass, and the Sword of Caine cannot afford such turmoil. Let chaos happen on our terms and no others.

Cathayans

Yes, there are clans of vampires native to other parts of the world. You know from your historical

study about our interactions with the vampires of Africa in various ages. Of the non-European clans, the most successful ones I'm aware of reside primarily in Asia, with occasional incursions elsewhere. I dislike the term "Cathayan" myself, but no other seems as widely known, so I'll use it for the moment.

The Cathayan sect they call the Pentuple Court or Crossed Court, their equivalent of the Camarilla or Sabbat, includes at least three distinct clans, and perhaps as many as eight. It's difficult to establish distinct lineages among them, and many of them deny having clans in the sense we use the term. What they hope to gain by this deception I cannot readily imagine.

Their policy toward mortals is a peculiar combination of our ideas and the Camarilla's, blending a proper sense of superiority with extremely convoluted ethical guidelines and monstrously inflated claims of power for their elders. They deny the existence of Cathayan Antediluvians, but if you encounter one of their Buddhas or Brahmans, destroying it would apparently be as much a service as the destruction of any Antediluvian.

Some Cathayan factions seek territorial expansion around the Pacific Rim. So far, *Les amis noirs* have taken the view that expansion at the Camarilla's expense doesn't matter to us. Some elders seem concerned, and the gathering as a whole merits careful surveillance. If the Asian vampires threaten our clan and sect interests, then it will be necessary to mount a crusade against them.

Other Creatures

We have enough to do in dealing with the kine and other vampires. To properly fulfill our destiny as the Keepers, we will in time have to confront the other races that clutter the world. The rule of thumb is simple: Stay out of their way when you can, and destroy those who refuse to move.

Lupines

It's much easier for Lupines to destroy you, on an individual basis, than vice versa. You enjoy several advantages — you are an urban creature who spends a great deal of time with your kind. Even though you probably reek more strongly of blood and whatever else it is that upsets the Lupines, you pose a less tempting target than the typical Camarilla or independent wanderer. When you discover Lupines active in your vicinity, exploit your advantages. Feed them a few sacrifices and either wait until the beasts leave or relocate yourself.

One sometimes hears of vampires who work out deals with the Lupines. I remind you that one hears more often of vampires receiving messages from Caine. Treat the stories as equally valid.

Magicians

In theory, *Les amis noirs* wants to understand in detail what sorts of magic various human beings work. In practice, it's just too dangerous. The best blood magicians I know say that the magic that comes easily to vampires shares very little with mortal magic, so no pressing point of self-interest balances out the fact that master magicians among the kine are very powerful indeed. As always, take action when they threaten your current activities. Otherwise, steer clear.

Ghosts

You've seen for yourself that restless souls do exist. You know that they are driven by individual passions that makes the typical Sabbat recruit in the first flush of Vaulderie seem temperate. If you draw any conclusion from this but "stay away," I will undertake to correct you. At times, it's possible and profitable to deal with a ghost. Very occasionally, our plans bring us into conjunction with various camps who share our interest in toppling existing kings and potentates, even if they presumably would object to our rule as well. Deal with them as I recommended dealing with the Tzimisce or the Setites: Keep the deal clear and bounded, and stop when it's done.

Changelings

Should you desire to better understand creatures who supposedly feed on dreams and exist half in an imaginary realm, well, *Les amis noirs* will lay out the circumstances of your demise quite carefully. Clearly we will have failed to properly instruct you in some way and seek to avoid that error in the future.

Hunters

Certain venerable elders of our clan explain confidently that they know everything important about kine society as it is now, or as it was at some moment in the past. They're wrong. Even though we are blessed with vast superiority, our numbers are small, and the kine are many. Never assume that you understand everything about any situation. Allow room for surprise, and you'll avoid many of the stupid ends that destroy your fellow warriors. We hear reports of mortals with unfamiliar aptitudes in recent nights. So? Mortals are constantly coming up with

something new. It's a sort of collective immune system, doomed to failure in the long term but sometimes annoying along the way. Don't panic. Study your environment and act accordingly. Nothing seems fundamentally new about these witch-hunters.

Shadows' Dance: Lasombra and Mechanics

Keep in mind while reading this section that your game may start with the printed rules, but it doesn't stop there. Not everything here may fit a particular chronicle. If not, players and Storytellers should modify to taste.

Abilities

Occult

Not all Lasombra share an interest in the occult as such. The clan includes many pragmatists and... not materialists, precisely, since it's hard to believe in a strictly natural order when you're an immortal being, but at least individuals who regard the search for deep secrets as a waste of time. They'd prefer not to squander their nights studying occult lore at all, except that it's clearly necessary to make the best use of Obtenebration.

A handful of skeptical stalwarts try to do without. Their clanmates think they're pathetic.

Many Lasombra lineages teach a sort of stripped-down version of Occult, or Shadow Occultism. Vampires who learn this collection of techniques gain only fragmentary insight into the larger realm of occult studies. When a character attempts to use Shadow Occultism for any purpose other than Obtenebration, the player should halve the rating in the Ability, rounding down. The character is rummaging through compressed and edited descriptions, hoping to find something useful, rather than drawing on systematic knowledge.

At the other extreme, Lasombra occultism constitutes an entire constellation of theories and observations. Lasombra characters can learn Occult with the Abyss specialty if they study the clan's accumulated lore on the subject.

Non-Lasombra learn Abyss mysticism in two ways. About once per century, the Friends of the Night authorize teaching the subject to an outsider who's rendered some particularly noteworthy service to the clan. This gift of lore comes with the stipulation that the outsider not teach it to others without permission, which the Friends never grant. (Sooner or later, therefore, most non-Lasombra Abyss mystics end up hunted and destroyed for violating the terms of their agreement.)

In earlier ages, a handful of independent thaumaturges and other outsiders learned Abyss mysticism by studying the abandoned occult libraries of Lasombra destroyed or forced to flee. Since the Tremere looted the clan's occult resources, the Lasombra have guarded their secrets more carefully. It's been at least three centuries since anyone gained enough raw material in the form of notes and commentaries to master Abyss mysticism this way... as far as the Lasombra know.

The Abyss specialty applies to Obtenebration use, and to knowledge about and performance of rites associated with gods and goddesses of darkness, death and destruction. The Lasombra traditionally feel an affinity between their Antediluvian and gods of the darkness. Lasombra thaumaturges — of whom a handful more emerge with each century the Sabbat endures thanks to packs' frequent sharing of Disciplines — enjoy the same bonus to darkness- and destruction-related blood magic, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Merits and Flaws

Weather Sense (1-pt. Mental Merit)

This acumen is very much prized among seafaring Lasombra. A few sires manage to pass on its intricacies to their childer. You subconsciously sense impending bad weather. The Storyteller makes a Perception + Survival roll (difficulty 7) on your behalf to give up to several hours' notice of storms and other weather problems before they manifest.

MET: Make a Static Mental Challenge against seven Traits for advance warning of bad weather.

Controllable Night Sight (2-pt. Supernatural Merit)

You can choose to invert the effects of light and darkness on yourself. Spend one turn in concentration to turn Night Sight on or off, plus one per each health level of injury you currently suffer. While Night Sight is active, pitch-black darkness seems brightly and uniformly lit to you, while any light brighter than a hundred-watt bulb creates a zone of pure darkness. The penalties for partial darkness instead apply instead to weak illumination. This Merit doesn't allow you to see through

Obtenebration-created darkness, which glows with pure white light that obscures all details.

Pelagic Harmony (3-pt. Mental Merit)

Being close to the sea calms you and reinforces your self-control. All Willpower rolls made while you're on or within sight of the sea have their difficulties lowered by one.

MET: Receive a +1 Trait bonus to Willpower *Tests while on or within sight of the sea.*

Poseidon's Call (1-pt. Mental Flaw)

Your self-control varies with the weather. Make rolls to resist frenzy at -1 difficulty in completely calm weather, but +1 difficulty on rough seas, +2 in thunderstorms and +3 in hurricanes.

MET: In calm weather, receive a +1 Trait bonus to Virtue Tests to resist frenzy, a -1 Trait penalty in rough *seas and thunderstorms and a -2 Trait penalty* in hurricanes and other particularly severe storms.

Uncontrollable Night Sight (2-pt. Supernatural Flaw)

Light and dark are permanently inverted for you. Pitch-black darkness seems bright and uniformly lit to you, while any light brighter than a hundred watts creates a zone of pure darkness. The penalties for partial darkness apply to weak illumination instead. This Flaw doesn't allow you to see through Obtenebration-created darkness, which glows with pure white light that obscures all details.

This is a *very* difficult Flaw to handle in a story, both for Storytellers and players. Storytellers, be sure you know what you're getting yourself into if you allow a player to assign this Flaw to her character.

MET: Make a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits to turn Night Sight on or off. Again, Storytellers should be very careful in permitting a player to take this Flaw for her character — it's even more difficult to adjudicate its use in a live-action setting, and you know that some players have no scruples....

Pelagic Compulsion (2-pt. Mental Flaw)

You become increasingly agitated when on land. Raise the difficulty of all Willpower rolls made when you've been away from the sea for more than 24 hours by one.

MET: Suffer a -1 Trait penalty on Willpower Tests when you've been away from the sea for 24 hours or more.

Death's Reflection (3-pt. Supernatural Flaw)

You cast a reflection normally, which would cancel out the clan weakness — except that your reflection always shows the state you'd be in if you were dead. Any Lasombra more than a few decades old looks in reflection like an ambling skeleton. Younger vampires appear as rotting corpses.

MET: Wear a card that indicates your condition to others. Roleplay this Flaw.

Morality in the Shadows: Paths

Most Lasombra remain committed to the Path of Humanity. They're not very *good* people, but they remain tied in some ways to a human outlook. Sabbat notions of freedom and inhumanity don't actually require practicing a Path of Enlightenment. Most Sabbat members make virtues out of things that are, in terms of Humanity, sinful. That's their perspective, and it doesn't change what happens on the level of game mechanics. No matter how good a vampire following Humanity feels about his masterful acts of mass murder, he's still going to drop to Humanity 3 in fairly short order and get the associated problems of frenzy, sleeping late and so on.

Almost Falling Off

This is a central fact of belonging to the Sabbat and staying with Humanity: Sabbat are not wholly their own masters. No vampire stands altogether free to choose his behavior, thanks to the Beast and the fundamental requirements of vampiric survival. The Sabbat makes matters worse with its beliefs and practices, which repeatedly push participants into acts that erode conscience (and Conscience).

When you play a Sabbat vampire, you take on a distinct set of challenges. It's not necessarily more "adult" or "sophisticated" than any other sort of vampire, nor is it automatically more "juvenile" or "indulgent." Sabbat exist within tighter boundaries than most independent or Camarilla vampires. Not everything you'd like to have your character do, or that he would plausibly want to do, is actually within reach.

In his early years as Sabbat, your character can compensate in part for the loss of Conscience through attention to Self-Control. This isn't just a matter of mechanics. Sabbat often turn calculating, probing their own limits through Games of Instinct and informal challenges to establish the circumstances under which they snap. It's one thing to deliberately lose control in the rapture of the hunt, quite another to go berserk because of a trivial provocation.

The Lasombra discuss this matter explicitly with their new recruits. The honor of the clan requires its newest members to refrain from acting with bone-deep stupidity, if they can possibly avoid doing so. A Lasombra who does not learn from experience about his psychological vulnerabilities is very likely to suffer Final Death at the hands of his sire or some other Lasombra in a position of authority. Lasombra tradition, including the notion of "gods of darkness," emphasizes the naked mind detached from fleshly concerns — not necessarily reason so much as conscious choice, emotional as well as logical. The mind wrapped in shadow ought not act like a mind still bound in flesh.

Unfortunately for would-be masters of the night, Self-Control also fails as Humanity crumbles. After a few years' worth of rites, crusades and routine Sabbat existence, an experienced vampire must make one of three choices.

- **Accept diminished Self-Control.** This is what most Sabbat — Lasombra and otherwise — do, for however many years they manage to survive. In most Sabbat cities, the veteran Lasombra look after one another to some extent, saving each other from acts that would embarrass the clan as a whole... except when sacrificing the indulgent vampire advances the schemes of others. Elaborate scheming goes on at such times, with a few visible clues like increased reluctance to participate in the Vaulderie with the chosen victim. (Ongoing crises make it easy to plead being too busy or otherwise occupied — it's harder to betray one's neighbors in peaceful times.) Individual ambitions aside, the Sabbat provides plenty of opportunities for vampires running short on Self-Control to do useful things, from crusades to random terror-provoking acts.
- **Accept restrictions on self-indulgence.** This is the choice for vampires who want the freedom to interact with mortal society. They must carefully balance their individual needs with the demands of ritual observance, and the situations into which Vinculum bonds may call them. See "The Kings and Queens of Shadow," p. 48, for more about the Lasombra who choose this course of action. A high-Humanity vampire (by Sabbat standards) should expect never to hold a high office in the Sabbat and to endure constant hostility from other Sabbat.
- **Abandon Humanity.** This is difficult, and never happens lightly.

Shedding the Inner Self: Onto Paths

Paths aren't easy or fun to follow. They require the vampire to surrender even more power of choice than simply trying to maintain free will in the face of low Humanity. The vampire *deliberately* adopts an artificial system of beliefs to contain the Beast. A particular Path may allow some measure of choice at lower levels, but survival in the long term requires moderate to high Path ratings. Paths lack Humanity's margin for error. A vampire on a Path becomes increasingly constrained and committed to a highly formalized code of conduct. Observers who know the Path's tenets know a great deal about how a vampire on it must act, and in a brutally competitive society like the Sabbat, this can be a serious liability.

Nonetheless, vampires do turn to Paths with time, because Humanity, longevity and the Sabbat simply don't go together. Playing out the change in worldview offers many hooks for troupes who wish to delve into the psychology of monsters. It may not be much fun for the vampire, but it can be tremendous fun for the player.

See **Vampire: The Masquerade**, Revised Edition, p. 288, for the mechanics of adopting a Path. Keep in mind that these aren't just numbers to measure off on a character sheet. A vampire who isn't already routinely committing planned acts of extreme violence and general mayhem isn't ready for a Path. Humanity 3 is the highest score a vampire can have when trying to adopt a Path, and at Humanity 3, the odds of success are small. Bring the scene to life: A creature with essentially no conscience, constantly succumbing to frenzy, tries diligently to adopt a carefully constructed code of ethics. There's comedy in here, if you want it, along with drama.

A vampire all the way down at Humanity 1 stands an even chance of making the leap to a Path. Of course, a creature so degenerate cannot count on surviving for long — if he doesn't make the leap, he's going to burn out quite soon.

The Lasombra offer help to clan members who wish to abandon Humanity. Many Sabbat cities have a Friend of the Night who specializes in teaching the young. He or she needs a particular combination of aptitudes, including a moderate to high Path rating herself, ties to comparably experienced practitioners of other Paths and a knack for instruction. (A long-term Lasombra chronicle focusing on the changing relation of the clan to mortal society could use a pack of instructors like this, who constantly have to study the moral challenges of the moment.) While most bishops and higher-ranked Path instructors feel responsibility to all Sabbat members, Lasombra Path guides give priority to their clanmates. The informal but effective network of alliances within the Friends of the Night helped give the clan an edge early in Sabbat history and continues to do so in the Final Nights.

Obtenebration Special Effects

Some Disciplines like Obtenebration involve spectacular effects. If players and the Storyteller agree, apply the following guidelines, or as many of them as seem like interesting additions to your game.

Wherever a power calls for spending blood, the blood pours out of a cut the vampire inflicts on herself (or from her mouth, tear ducts and other openings) and crawls through intervening space to the chosen area of effect. A vampire using Shroud of Night therefore disappears momentarily in a fine mist of blood, while Arms of the Abyss calls forth jets of blood that plunge into target shadows and animate them. Vitae itself isn't quite like human blood, and an astute Storyteller exploits the differences as part of the shock value of Obtenebration in use.

Note that these cuts don't inflict any health levels of damage unless the vampire specifically chooses otherwise. They're outlets for blood created with deliberate effort, not random damage. Vampires who know Black Metamorphosis and more advanced powers may choose to go ahead and inflict ghastly wounds like ragged rips through their limbs or their own chest, which the emerging shadow heals on its way into the world.

When the effect ends, a faint residue of blood may linger. As an optional rule, failure or a single success on an Obtenebration roll leaves enough blood for a vampire with Enhanced Senses or other means of identifying blood to recognize the individual signature of the vampire using Obtenebration. With two or more successes, the vampire leaves a testable residue only if she chooses to.

MET: To gain the option of leaving a residue or not, spend one extra Trait of whatever sort the challenge involved.

Powers that don't require blood draw on shadows the vampire ejects from herself. Depending on the vampire's own conception of the Abyss and her needs of the moment, the shadows may flow out of her open mouth, from cuts she makes or even emerge from shadowed folds in her clothing. When the effect ends, the shadows draw back into her the same way.

The Path of Night

The Lasombra claim this Path as their own. Records show it being taught in earlier forms far back into antiquity, and reasonably plausible legends attribute it to the Antediluvians' childer. The Path of Night sums up the Antediluvian's legacy in a few brief imperatives: domination, mastery of the darkness, transcendence over fleshly limitations.

The Path of Night's ancient legacy gives it a certain organic flexibility that the more recently invented Paths lack. Nobody's existed long enough to really internalize a Path invented only a few centuries ago, and few enough vampires have explored the ramifications thoroughly. The Path of Night, on the other hand, exists in a variety of related forms, and vampires who adopt it get to make a few choices. Once they commit to a particular version, changing from one to another is as hard as adopting a Path in the first place, so Lasombra elders who want to avoid tormenting their childer encourage discussion and study before the new practitioner makes the commitment.

• **The Cold Path of Night.** The most prominent variation of the Path of Night is often called the "Cold Path," as distinguished from the "Hot Path," the common form of the Path of Night described in **Vampire: The Masquerade**, Revised Edition, p. 291. The Cold Path relies on Conviction and Self-Control rather than Conviction and Instinct. The Hierarchy of Sins remains intact with somewhat different interpretations — Cold Path followers do the same things for not quite the same reasons as their Hot Path comrades. A Cold Path follower, for instance, rejects impassioned and premeditated killing because mortal death merely distracts him from contemplating the deeper mysteries of his existence. He kills and eats as he would scratch or blink. Likewise, he rejects accidental killing because his goal is to make every aspect of his existence consciously chosen, even when it's unimportant.

• **The Allied Path of Night.** The version of the Path of Night favored by many Abyss mystics replaces the role of the individual in the Hierarchy of Sins with the role of the clan as a whole. Thus the level 7 sin is "Asking aid of a vampire of another clan," while the level 9 sin is "Acting in the interests of another clan." The Allied Path teaches that in the end, all Lasombra become one in the Abyss, and individuals matter only until that grand dissolution. In the Final Nights, the clan as a whole becomes its own new master, replacing the Antediluvian of old with a comparable power at the end of time. The

Allied Path may use either Self-Control or Instinct, depending on the vampire's inclination toward frenzy.

• **The Lightless Path of Night.** The Lightless Path focuses on darkness as the quintessential Lasombra condition. Several sins change to reflect this emphasis. The level 10 sin is relying on sight, while the level 9 sin is allowing light to strike oneself. The most experienced practitioners of the Lightless Path blind themselves and rely on senses other than sight (at least physical sight, and they debate the proper role of Auspex and the like). Rather than penalizing the lack of innovation, the level 8 sin penalizes depredations conducted in the light: A Lightless Path Lasombra sins by killing or wreaking havoc while illuminated. The Lightless Path uses Self-Control.

• **The Righteous Path of Night.** This is one of the oldest surviving variants, more popular in times when Lasombra believed in themselves as agents of a divine will. Cardinal Monçada's destruction spurred widespread abandonment of the Righteous Path. Just as the Allied Path replaces the individual with the clan, the Righteous Path replaces the individual with all vampires who believe in their divine purpose. Accepting the superiority of a fellow Righteous Path practitioner or, say, a devout practitioner of the Path of Caine or the Path of Cathari isn't sinful. Innovative killing is no particular virtue on the Righteous Path. Instead, the practitioner sins by killing in a way that does not strike fear into the hearts of sinners and impress upon them the very present wrath of an angry God. The Righteous Path generally uses Self-Control, but some packs of Instinct-driven "fearful angels" do exist.

More alternatives exist as well, many practiced at any given moment by just a few Lasombra. Players should feel free to work up variations, whether presented as new or old in the World of Darkness. Storytellers can use the examples here to judge whether a variation makes sense. It should never make existence a whole lot easier for the vampire.

Clan Disciplines

While Obtenebration shows the distinctive Lasombra nature most clearly, the clan's scholars believe that Dominate and Potence also reflect particular aspects of Lasombra's legacy. For most Keepers, what they do isn't quite like what other clans do even when they're using the same Discipline. Similar effects sometimes spring from very different causes.

Dominate

The two Lasombra obsessions — shadow and reflection — come together in clan thinking about Dominate. The Lasombra vampire doesn't just force her will on her target in a generic or abstract sense. She incises out part of the target's own will, leaving traces of herself inside his mind to direct him.

A famous painting from shortly before the Great Revolt hangs in the clan's ancient Sicilian stronghold. It depicts a commanding Lasombra surrounded by a crowd of mortals in two concentric circles. The people in the inner circle look toward the vampire, and their eyes are all mirrors reflecting his glory. The people in the outer circle look out, carrying their various badges of office and power. Each one casts a shadow stretching away from the vampire, and in each case the shadow is gray and translucent except for a silhouette of the vampire within the person's head. That silhouette is pitch black.

That's how many Lasombra think of Dominate.

Potence

The clan abhors weaklings. On the other hand, "strength" comes in many forms. Few Lasombra develop great strength in a purely physical sense. The supernatural vitality many Lasombra possess doesn't rely on undead muscle and bone. It reflects the transformation of the vampire's body into something increasingly inhuman.

For Christian Lasombra (and those interested in various of the Christian heresies that attract vampiric belief), their mastery of Potence is a form of transubstantiation: They retain the appearance of mortality but not its substance. Some technically-minded Lasombra believe that they draw on the intrinsic energy of the universe through the Blood, and that in theory a master of the Discipline could literally move worlds. Most Lasombra associate Potence with Obtenebration. Potence is the clan's shadow legacy reinforcing the vampire's own body, rather than manifesting in the environment.

Obtenebration

Lasombra have spilled more blood and ink over Obtenebration's precise nature and operation than over any other topic, including the Great Diablerie. Obtenebration is, if not the heart of the clan itself, certainly intimately bound together with what the Antediluvian was and what its childer are now.

The first question many new Lasombra ask about Obtenebration is "What the hell is that stuff, anyway?" The darkness Obtenebration calls forth has

substance. It can entangle targets and even inflict damage. It absorbs sounds and scents as well as light. On the other hand, it doesn't seem to have much if any weight of its own, and it has no substance that any chemical analysis can detect. (Yes, a few Lasombra do point spectrographs and the like at Obtenebration's shadow-stuff and establish only negatives. They know that Obtenebration creates nothing with any identifiable chemical signature.) The shadow-stuff operates by rules unlike those that govern nature.

In short, Obtenebration brings into the world something even more alien than vampires. Depending on the particular Lasombra's inclinations, she may refer to the endless space within which Obtenebration's stuff resides when not summoned as "outside" the world, "beneath" the world or "beyond" it. The shadow-stuff responds to the Lasombra's blood and will, leaking out, under or beyond the world once the command ceases. See Occult, p. 63, for more on the subject.

The linkage between Obtenebration and occultism bothers some Lasombra. A small minority within the clan insists that nothing about Obtenebration requires anything beyond their own vitae and the immediate environment, that the Discipline merely changes air and shadow much as the Embrace changes blood into vitae. The rigid self-control required to keep this attitude while actually using Obtenebration takes a heavy toll, and in time most of the skeptics recant or crumble under the strain. Another, somewhat larger group holds that whatever the key truths within occultism are, it should be possible to isolate them and incorporate them into a framework based on rhetoric or philosophy or science. Millennia of effort have produced no success, but the rationalists keep trying.

As always in such matters, clan legend attributes one such success to some adept vampire who's now gone. The details move around from one account to another like humanity's urban legends.

The prevailing answer to the question about Obtenebration's shadow-stuff is simple and direct: "It's what it is. It's what you get when you do the thing that draws it out."

All Disciplines can be shocking and frightening. They're not natural, by definition. They all come from an ancient curse keeping corpses alive. Some don't so overtly offend human sensibilities, at least not in their weakest manifestations. In an era of special effects and tales of PCP addicts on the rampage, for instance, Potence and Fortitude look scary

but not completely unexpected. But Obtenebration's overt manifestations are just *wrong* on a very deep level. Shadows simply don't move independently of the light, and they especially don't come loose to fly around.

As a Storyteller, you should give some consideration to how the power strikes any mortals in the area. It's disturbing. It confronts people with proof that the world is something very unlike what they thought. In addition to panic, many people confronted with such upset respond with moral revulsion, the conviction that the wrongness must be removed — the conviction that drives Inquisitors and other hunters, if they can manage the courage to avoid fleeing into the night.

If a character's courage fails him, it should mean more in play than just "he runs away." It indicates a complete collapse of choice and willpower, a moment in which a single terrified impulse takes over a person's mind to the exclusion of all else. Obtenebration exploits deep-seated fears in the human psyche: of isolation, of demonic powers, of nothingness. Vampires who use terrifying powers soon learn what effect those powers have, and repeated, informed use is a good way to sap their Humanity.

Shadow Play

Many players assume that one-dot powers just aren't good for much. They're often wrong, and particularly so in this case. Many Lasombra find Shadow Play quite sufficient for most of their purposes. The opportunity to simultaneously enhance Stealth and Intimidation and to reduce targets' soak and Stamina, all for one blood point and no concentration, for an entire scene...

The Lasombra sneer at any of their clanmates who can't find something useful to do with this power.

Note that Shadow Play doesn't just make shadows slide around and provide dramatic lighting effects. Pieces of darkness come alive to wrap themselves around the Lasombra's victims. Irregular masses of pure blackness fly through the air to swat at targets. Shadow Play involves a blatant show of supernatural power. Dazed mortals can explain away the effects that enhance Stealth or Intimidation relatively easily. Animated shadows in midair just don't yield to logic.

Most Lasombra care nothing about the Masquerade as anything but a survival tactic, but they prefer not to be overtly supernatural except in situations they control. Hasty recourse to Shadow Play shows dulled imagination and poor planning, just as refusal to use it where it's appropriate shows a dangerous tendency toward self-imposed strictures.

Shroud of Night

Shadow Play's animated shadows spring from existing sources. The transformation itself is scary, but at least it has an obvious source. Shroud of Night brings forth something that has no antecedents. A vampire using Shroud of Night must consider the tradeoff involved: The people inside are well and truly wrapped in shadow, the ball of which is utterly obvious to anyone outside. The ball of tangible darkness Shroud of Night invokes can be a secret only when the environment around it is also fairly dark. Then again, secrecy isn't always the priority, and for sheer shock value, a roiling mass of blackness beats many alternatives.

Lasombra in Rötschreck often subconsciously invoke Shroud of Night to hide themselves from a perceived threat.

Arms of the Abyss

Arms of the Abyss is another power that seems mundane only to people who have the benefit of reading the rulebook. Characters in the World of Darkness see shadow extrusions longer than themselves come to life and act without apparent effort on the part of the vampire who created them. Remember that it doesn't take active concentration to maintain the arms once evoked. Since it takes three levels of Obtenebration to create arms at all, even the weakest shadow tentacles are (unless their creator chooses to weaken them) stronger and faster than the average mortal. With sustained practice, even the meekest 13th generation Lasombra can draw out tentacles capable of beating humanity's best warriors in a fair fight, as if fighting against extruded shadow powered by dead blood could be fair under any circumstances.

Arms are of course useful in fights, but they also serve noncombat functions. Crippled Lasombra like Andrew Emory use Arms of the Abyss to carry them around; two tentacles can do the job. A shadow tentacle can pass through very thin openings (though its creator needs some other way of seeing where it's going after that) and loses no strength or speed as a result of the constriction. An arm need not be a "tentacle" in the sense of a simple flexible cylinder. It can spread out into a fan, or break up into a knot of intertwined fibers, or spread flat over a square foot of any surface (or open space), or take on nearly any other shape its creator imagines. Thus an arm can lie in wait until its creator brings it forth. A latecomer won't see the blood or concentration it took to create the arm and may not realize the arm's connection to the vampire.

Lasombra in frenzy often subconsciously create Arms of the Abyss to help defeat the offending targets.

Optional Rule: The vampire may spend one blood point to gain faint but clear sensory impressions from an Arm of the Abyss. This requires one blood point per tentacle and covers touch, taste, pressure, temperature and the like but not sight, sound or smell. This way the vampire can use the arm to explore beyond its creator's sight. If the arm bursts into flame, for instance, the vampire might suspect that sunlight waits around the corner.

Black Metamorphosis

This power reflects a great deal of the Lasombra's self-image. When thinking about how a character's appearance changes in the metamorphosis, review the above sections about Lasombra conceptions of their legacy and individual natures. A Lasombra who regards her powers as expressing original sin takes on elements of religious iconography, with a combination of very confessional, personal and thoroughly codified symbols of the sins that drive her. A Lasombra who regards herself as heir to the gods of darkness may become rigid and stylized in appearance, like a cave drawing of some evil spirit or a statue of a bloodthirsty goddess. A Lasombra who favors a Lovecraftian approach to the Abyss may take on non-Euclidean angles and peculiar spatial distortions. In any event, no two Lasombra, not even sire and childe, look quite the same while undergoing the Black Metamorphosis.

The metamorphosed vampire doesn't look like many people's conventional notion of a vampire. She can walk down a city street and probably get not one response along the lines of "look at that vampire!" Lasombra interested in keeping the populace scared of supernatural menaces in general therefore favor the Black Metamorphosis as a psychological weapon. It's good for appearing to mortals who think they're dealing with demons, too: With Shroud of Night to mask an entrance and a sudden appearance in metamorphosed form, a Lasombra can convince most would-be occultists that their summoning ritual worked.

Optional Rule: The Black Metamorphosis also draws on the mental states of bystanders. Any mortal who's been the victim of a vampire's advanced Dominate powers (Conditioning or Possession in particular) suffers a +1 difficulty penalty to rolls to resist flight. The residue of the vampire's power inside the mortal's head combines with the current transformation to produce a particularly horrifying result. Any mortal who botches a Courage roll not only flees but suffers partial amnesia, unable to recall any details of the scene except that they have witnessed something desperately, hideously wrong.

MET: Victims of previous advanced Dominate uses suffer a -1 Trait penalty on their Courage checks. If this reduces their Courage to zero, they panic automatically and suffer partial amnesia.

Tenebrous Form

This power marks the threshold between control of shadow and identification with it. A Lasombra in Tenebrous Form has, for the moment, ceased being human at all, even in form. She's now a disembodied will operating in the world as a force of nature, or rather a force of unnature. Some Lasombra prefer to spend as much time as possible in this condition and arrange the steady flow of victims necessary to keep the Tenebrous Form active. Some particularly diligent elders even get infusions of blood into their chambers so that they remain shadowed forms nestled in pools of blood during the day.

As with Black Metamorphosis, the Lasombra's outlook affects many details of the Tenebrous Form. A Lasombra who regards Obtenebration as sin made tangible transforms with a series of eruptions, skin and bone shattering as the darkness gushes forth from her heart and mind, or becomes suffused by darkness as if her veins pumped a poison throughout her body. A Lasombra immersed in occult studies who regards the Abyss as the First Substance may collapse as if into a black hole, her body sucking itself away into the Abyss and leaving only animated shadow behind. A Lasombra who identifies shadow-stuff with some primal state of matter may transform all at once in a flash of darkness after three turns' meditation, or fade into translucence and regain opacity in shadow form.

Note that the Tenebrous Form cannot fly, but can swim, and that since it lacks substance, it suffers no harm from increased pressure. Nor can any confinement keep it in or out of a location, as long as there's an opening a few molecules wide.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the optional rules for the intimidation value of Black Metamorphosis may also apply to Tenebrous Form.

Combination Disciplines

Shroud of Absence (Dominate •••, Obtenebration •••)

This power refines Shroud of Night and combines the Abyss's intrusion into the world with psychic manipulation of bystanders. Instead of a highly visible cloud of blackness, Shroud of Absence creates a region into which nobody looks. Bystanders don't think to linger in the area. Anyone scanning the scene just keeps looking, her eyes not resting on the shrouded zone. It is a darkness as much of the mind as of the world.

System: The player spends a blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7). Success creates a blind spot about ten feet across, located anywhere within the line of sight of its creator and capable of moving at up to the vampire's walking speed. Anyone wishing to peer inside must earn more successes on a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) than the creator achieved on the Shroud of Absence roll. Otherwise, he just doesn't think to consider it. Note that this power is wholly supernatural in origin, and most mortals will not have had the experience with the occult to even consider that they can try to see what is so malevolently forcing their attention away.

MET: Make a Static Social Challenge against seven Traits to create the Shroud of Absence. Anyone seeking to peer in must win a Willpower Challenge against the Shroud's creator. The creator can spend Social Traits to raise his Willpower total for this purpose.

The Abyss

Most vampiric powers affect either the vampire himself or the surrounding material world — mostly the perceptions and mental states of nearby human beings. Like necromancers and thaumaturges, vampires using Obtenebration reach outside the world into a different sort of space and bring back dark gifts with them.

For many Obtenebration practitioners, the Abyss is simply the conceptual realm from which they draw shadow-stuff. A handful of Lasombra probe deeper, finding layer upon layer of mystery in that endless blackness. The Lasombra Antediluvian sometimes claimed that the Abyss was the state of all creation before an interfering God made light, and that as the perfect master of Obtenebration, the Antediluvian

incarnated that primordial essence on Earth. Whether it was right or not, study of the Abyss repays the diligent student.

Intelligence exists in the Abyss. It does not possess self-awareness or even identity in any comprehensible sense. Fragments of knowledge and passion come together for a time, then break apart. The mind within the Abyss is in some ways more like a computer capable of emotion as well as logic than like a sentient entity, a pool of resources executing instructions provided by some unknown force.

Calling the Thing in Darkness

Actual manipulation of the Abyss requires a total of at least five dots in Obtenebration and Occult (Abyss), with at least two dots in each. Below that, students learn only pragmatic lessons on applying Obtenebration in the physical world.

Arms of the Abyss can draw out portions of the Abyss intelligence, when coupled with proper occult preparation. This requires a one-hour ritual, one blood point and a successful Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 7). Then the summoner invokes Arms of the Abyss with the player making the usual Manipulation + Occult roll (difficulty 7). When used this way, only a single arm manifests. It has its regular physical statistics and one dot of Mental Attributes per dot of Obtenebration the summoner possesses. The summoner can decide how to allocate the dots. Each success beyond the first on the ritual Intelligence + Occult roll provides another dot, as does each additional blood point spent at the time of invocation.

The Abyss creature possesses at least one powerful derangement and an obsession that resembles one particular sin from a Path of Enlightenment (usually level six or higher on the Hierarchy of Sins) chosen by the Storyteller. Each Abyss creature emerges driven to do something, which may or may not fit with the summoner's plans. The creature can move independently at the summoner's running speed and exists for the duration of the scene or one hour. Intense light (strobe lights, stage lights and so on) dispel the creature immediately.

The summoner can repeat the ritual steps to reinforce the creature's presence. If all steps succeed, the creature remains present for the rest of the night. The summoner can try to summon the same creature again, and three successes in a row allow it permanent presence as long as the summoner feeds it (10 – the character's Obtenebration rating) points of blood each night.

The summoner can attempt to absorb the manifestation into himself. This requires the summoner to defeat it in combat, reducing it to zero health levels. This done, the summoner can drain its darkness into himself. He gains half the creature's dots in each Attribute added to his own for the duration of the night. He also gains the creature's derangement and cannot spend Willpower to resist its effects.

If the creature succeeds in reducing its summoner to torpor, it can invade his body and control it for the rest of the night. It can also return the following night and try again, and if it defeats him this way three nights in a row, it can possess him until driven out. The dispossession requires some other practitioner of Obtenebration to reduce the invaded vampire to torpor and go through the steps of the summoning ritual. If they all succeed, the Abyss creature returns to the void and never returns again with quite that combination of Attributes.

Descent Into Darkness

An expert in Obtenebration can actually enter the Abyss. As with calling Abyss spirits, this requires an hour-long ritual, one blood point and a successful Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 7). The vampire then uses Shadowstep (see **Guide to the Sabbat**, p. 111). If each step works, he passes into the Abyss, in the Obtenebration equivalent of Psychic Projection. He also risks encountering Abyss spirits.

Every (the character's Obtenebration rating) turns, make a Perception + Obtenebration roll (difficulty 8) for the character to sense coalesced fragments of Abyss intelligence in the vicinity. If the roll fails, a creature approaches with statistics equivalent to one called with the summoning procedure described above. The more skillful the traveler is, the more powerful the entity that wants to possess him — distribute its Attribute dots as if the player had scored the character's maximum number of successes on the summoning. The creature attempts to possess the traveler.

If the roll botches, a creature immediately possesses the traveler, and he falls out into the nearest dark place.

Treat the game mechanics of the Abyss like the "astral plane" (**Vampire: The Masquerade**, Revised Edition, p. 152). The character moves at up to a thousand miles an hour and can peer into any environment in total or near-total darkness — the Night Sight Merit or Flaw comes in handy for this purpose. If a character loses all of his Willpower in astral combat, no "silver cord" is severed but the Abyss spits the character out into nearest dark place in the material world.

Chapter Three: New Shadows

If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!
— Matthew 6:23

From the most august, genteel and wicked elder to the basest shovelhead, the Lasombra share one trait: pragmatism. Whether this manifests as a cunning skill with manipulation or a simple meanness, the Lasombra are direct in their desires. It is no wonder, then, that many Cainites, some Lasombra included, see the Keepers as the counterpart to the Ventrue. But where the Ventrue master Presence, the Lasombra hone their prowess with Dominate. Where the Ventrue ask and cajole, the Lasombra proclaim their wills and woe to he who fails to obey.

With that in mind, watch your tongue and keep your wits about you as you peruse the gallery of masters set before you. Know that with them, the end justifies the means — and that *your* end may well *be* the means.

The Accuser

Quote: *You have no secret sins. Everything you do, we see. We know.*

Prelude: All your life, a peculiar guilt weighed on you. You had a privileged life, from parochial school to the Ivy League to Fortune 500 management. You married a fellow manager and raised two fine children (with a lot of help from nannies and others).

Inside, something gnawed at you. The parochial school nuns, with their talk of endless fire and brimstone, impressed you in a way that escaped your classmates. You believed their talk of judgment much more readily than homilies about mercy. An inner need to atone drove you to charity, to efforts at socially responsible corporate engagement. None of it sufficed, because the stain didn't just come from what you did but from what you *were*.

You weren't exactly surprised when unseen voices began whispering your sins to you. You always knew that demons watched. In the morning, they spoke to you from the bathroom mirror. At night, their words emerged from shadows in the corners. You were surprised when they began whispering about others' sins as well. You realized nobody could help you because everyone around you was damned, too. The demons began manifesting physically, unseen claws raking your flesh in darkness and shadows coming alive with ominous motions.

It was too much. You threw yourself over a bridge... and landed in a web of living shadow.

A devil in female form waited for you on the ground below. She told you how hell had at last claimed you, chosen you to judge and punish the wicked. You drain the life from sinners and tell them why they suffer. You move unseen through boardrooms and back offices, learning sins that you later make public. You accuse your targets in their secret places. You drive them toward the pit, and when they choose to die, you do not interfere as that devil interfered with your death. Hell has you and your kind, and doesn't need the souls you feed it to minister to the earthly kingdom.

Concept: Your packmates find your conviction of demonhood peculiar. They can't deny your effectiveness in dealing with mortals, so you're the one who does the work they cannot. As part of your routine for torment, you make your victims procure the physical goods you and your packmates need. Thus do sinners support hell. Then you carry on with your work. You are the face that doesn't show in the mirror, the Satan in its original Hebrew meaning, the "accuser."

Roleplaying Hints: Lot was right about Sodom, and every modern city is Sodom. Not one righteous person graces this world. Everyone deserves suffering and death. This knowledge reaffirms the pain that gnawed in you when you were alive. You correctly judged yourself; now you correctly judge others. In time you'll help your fellow demons, who think of themselves as vampires, to understand their true nature. In the end, when the light of the universe goes out forever, no illusions will remain. Hasten the night.

Equipment: Expensive suits, attaché case with dossiers on your current targets

VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE

Name: | Nature: Judge | Generation: 13th
Player: | Demeanor: Judge | Haven:
Chronicle: | Clan: Lasombra | Concept: Accuser

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●●○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●●●○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Computer	●○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Finance	●●●○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Etiquette	●●●○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Empathy	●●○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	●●●○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○
Intimidation	●●●○○	Performance	●●○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Security	●●○○○	Occult	●○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Politics	●○○○○
Subterfuge	●●○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Disciplines		Virtues	
Contacts	●○○○○	Dominate	●●●○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Resources	●●○○○	Obtenebration	●○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○

Merits/Flaws

Humanity/Path: ●●●●●○○○○○

Willpower: ●●●●●●●○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool: □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□

Health: Bruised □; Hurt -1 □; Injured -1 □; Wounded -2 □; Mauled -2 □; Crippled -5 □; Incapacitated □

Experience

Conscience/ Conviction
●●●○○
Self-Control/ Instinct
●●○○○
Courage
●●○○○
Blood
●●●●●●●●●●●●○○
□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
Willpower
●●●●○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Name
Character Angry Young Man
Chronicle
Clan Lasombra
Generation 11th
Age
Nature Sociopath
Demeanor Architect

Path/ Humanity
Path of Night
●●○○○

Physical
Stalwart x2
Wiry

Social
Expressive
Intimidating
Persuasive x3

Mental
Attentive Vigilant
Knowledgeable x2
Patient
Shrewd x2

Abilities
Computer Leadership
Expression Occult
Firearms

Backgrounds
Contacts x1
Generation x2
Influence (Political x1)
Resources x2

Influences

Disciplines
Obtenebration x2 (Shadow Play, Shroud of Night)
Potence x2 (Prowess, Might)

Merits & Flaws

Conscience/ Conviction
●●●●○
Self-Control/ Instinct
●●○○○
Courage
●●●○○
Blood
●●●●●●●●●●○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
Willpower
●●○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Name
Character Accuser
Chronicle
Clan Lasombra
Generation 13th
Age
Nature Judge
Demeanor Judge

Path/ Humanity
●●●○○

Physical
Agile
Nimble
Resilient

Social
Commanding x2 Persuasive
Dignified x2 Witty
Eloquent

Mental
Clever Knowledgeable
Determined
Discerning
Insightful

Abilities
Etiquette Investigation
Finance Law
Intimidation

Backgrounds
Contacts x1
Influence (Church) x1
Resources x2

Influences

Disciplines
Dominate (Command, Mesmerism, Forgetful Mind)
Obtenebration (Shadow Play)

Merits & Flaws

The Angry Young Man

Quote: *There's always someone else who thinks he's escaped his just desserts. He's wrong.*

Prelude: You grew up one more typical smart suburban kid, physically comfortable and inwardly filled with angst over life's minor indignities. That all changed the day before your sixteenth birthday. During your last driver's education lesson, you made a perfect U-turn, only to run headlong into a drunk driver on the wrong side of the road. Your instructor died instantly. You lived, but the impact shattered the top of your skull, sending bone shards deep into your brain. You might have recovered fully were it not for someone's fumbling on the third of three operations to extract the shard. You emerged with permanent damage to the nerve centers that controlled your legs, and never walked again.

Teen angst darkened into lasting rage. You poured out your frustrations onto paper — clumsily at first, gaining polish with practice. The hospital's zealous cover-up of whoever crippled you became a symbol of everything wrong with modern life. Your essays caught the attention of a vampire with literary ambitions of her own. She liked your style and set about testing you. So many things went wrong for you in your early twenties, from denied grants to correspondents turning hostile. Occasionally you stepped to the brink of paranoia. Your sire was pleased that you never quite went over the edge, always coming back to a sane if nihilistic rage. After tormenting you for five years, she decided you were ready.

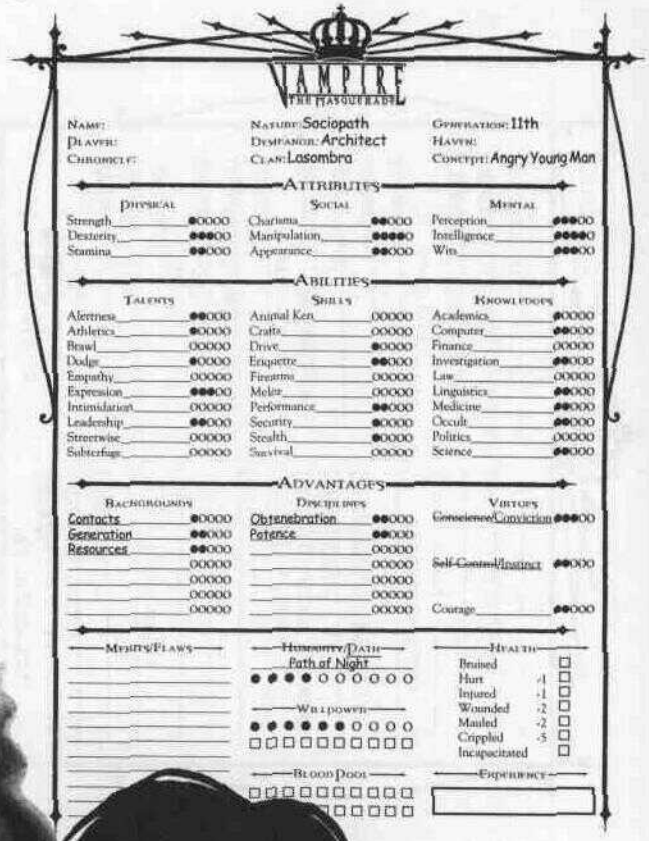
On the tenth anniversary of your original accident, your parents took you out for dinner. As you drove home in a van modified for hands-only control, everything went dark. You swerved off the road, through the roof of a warehouse below. You regained consciousness dangling upside down, watching your parents die from lacerations across their faces and necks. A woman drew you from the wreckage with living shadows. She smiled at you. With fangs. She told you that if you were ready to leave the day behind, she could give you the power to wreak the vengeance you'd dreamed of.

You knew that if you lived, nothing awaited you but more of the same. You accepted the woman's offer and felt almost nothing as she drained your life away, then gave you back some of hers. You soon discovered that you didn't need legs, not when you can make shadows carry you. And an entire society awaits, ready to work with you to pull down the world you've left behind.

Concept: You're the thinker, the one who weighs options and checks for hidden flaws. You're completely dedicated to the Sabbat's ultimate triumph and have broadened your list of enemies to include supernatural foes as well as the kine. You hope that if you survive, you can rise through the ranks. You expect that you will.

Roleplaying Hints: You want to see humanity's leaders cower in the rubble and beg for mercy, and die in fear when mercy does not come. Now that you've learned about the Camarilla, you want the same thing for them, and for the Antediluvians behind them. Your fellow Sabbat don't always understand how it all fits together, so you have to explain it to them, and you protect them from their own ignorance. The cause needs you just as you need it.

Equipment: Wheelchair, laptop computer, wheelchair-equipped van



VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE

Name:	Nature: Sociopath	Generation: 11th
Player:	Demeanor: Architect	Haven:
Chronicle:	Clan: Lasombra	Concept: Angry Young Man

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●●●○	Intelligence	●●●●○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	●○○○○
Athletics	●○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Computer	●●○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Finance	○○○○○
Dodge	●○○○○	Etiquette	●●○○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Expression	●●●○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	●●○○○	Medicine	●●○○○
Leadership	●●○○○	Security	●○○○○	Occult	●●○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	●●○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Disciplines		Virtues	
Contacts	●○○○○	Obtenebration	●●○○○	~~Conscience~~/Conviction	●●●○○
Generation	●●○○○	Potence	●●○○○		
Resources	●●○○○		○○○○○	~~Self-Control~~/Instinct	●●○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●●○○○

Merits/Flaws	Humanity/Path: Path of Night	Health	
	●●●●○○○○○○	Bruised	☐
		Hurt	-1 ☐
	Willpower	Injured	-1 ☐
	●●●●●●○○○○	Wounded	-2 ☐
	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐	Mauled	-2 ☐
		Crippled	-5 ☐
		Incapacitated	☐
	Blood Pool	Experience	
	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐		
	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐		

The Baleful Avenger

Quote: *Something's under your bed, in your closet and looming up behind you. It's me.*

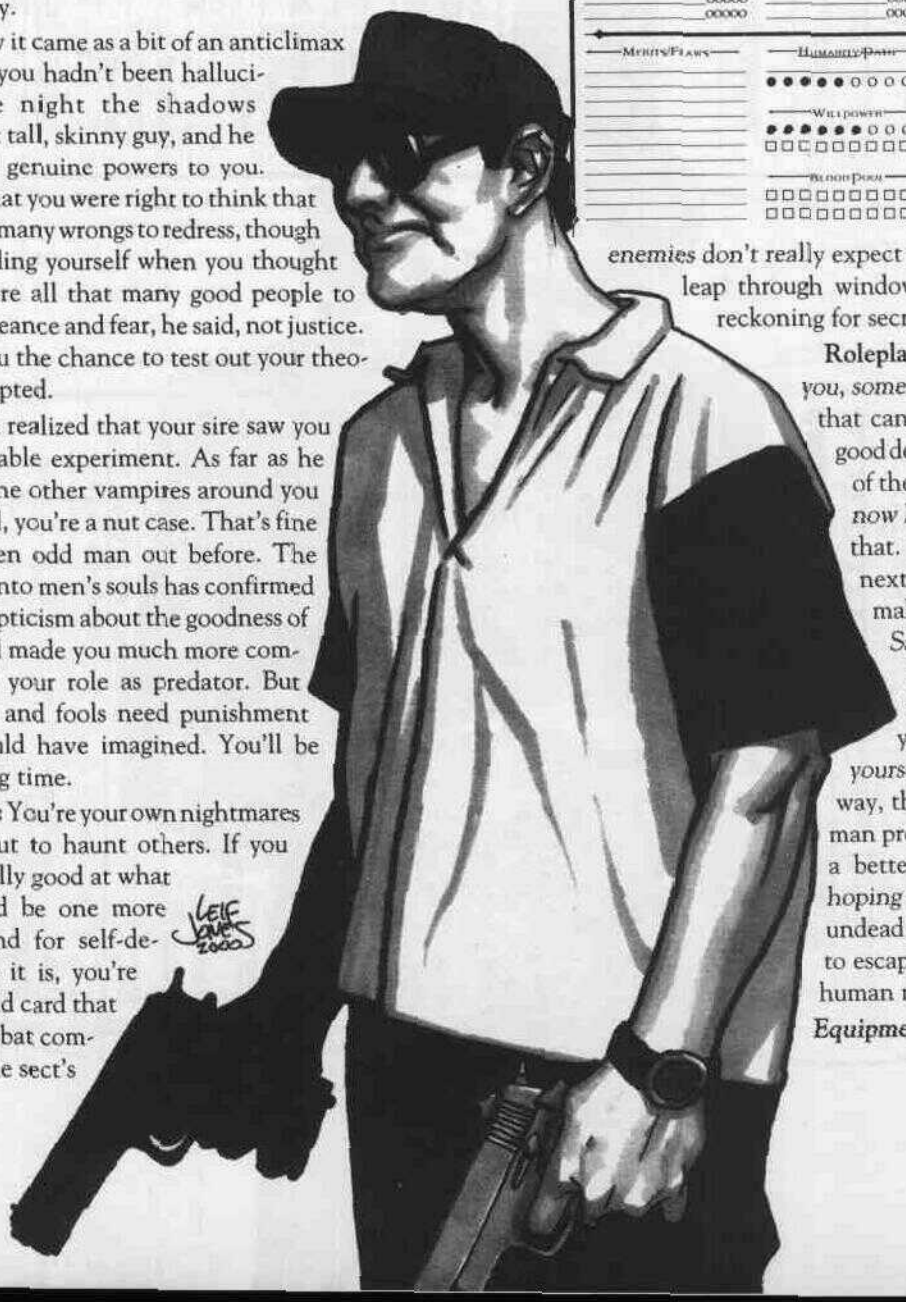
Prelude: As a child, you lived in a vivid fantasy world and dreamed of being a superhero. You continued to visit that realm in daydreams as you matured. It kept your hope alive amid crumbling family and personal circumstances. Visions of secret power kept you stable through two divorces, the suicide of one sibling and the murder of another, two roommates convicted for felony fraud schemes and a whole lot of other complications.

Your future sire never explained just how he noticed you in the first place. In a bookstore? Overheard conversation among friends? Random selection? All you know for sure is that gradually this tall, skinny guy began showing up more and more often on the fringes of your social scene. The nightmares began not long thereafter. Antidepressants couldn't keep the vivid hallucinations about animated shadows at bay.

Somehow it came as a bit of an anticlimax to learn that you hadn't been hallucinating. One night the shadows disgorged that tall, skinny guy, and he demonstrated genuine powers to you. He told you that you were right to think that the world had many wrongs to redress, though you were kidding yourself when you thought that there were all that many good people to protect. Vengeance and fear, he said, not justice. He offered you the chance to test out your theories. You accepted.

You soon realized that your sire saw you as an expendable experiment. As far as he and most of the other vampires around you are concerned, you're a nut case. That's fine — you've been odd man out before. The power to see into men's souls has confirmed your sire's skepticism about the goodness of humanity and made you much more comfortable with your role as predator. But more sinners and fools need punishment than you could have imagined. You'll be busy for a long time.

Concept: You're your own nightmares come true, out to haunt others. If you weren't actually good at what you do, you'd be one more buffoon bound for self-destruction. As it is, you're the sort of wild card that keeps the Sabbat competitive — the sect's enemies don't really expect to see cloaked avengers leap through windows, shouting about the reckoning for secret crimes.



Roleplaying Hints: Deep inside you, *something* yearns for a peace that can only come from doing good deeds, as you once thought of them. But the world as you *now know* it has no place for that. You've settled for the next best thing and try to make the most of it. The Sabbat often horrifies you, but then so did the material world as it ground you down. You remind *yourself* that in its own brutal way, the mass slaughter of human predators makes the world a better place, and you keep hoping that something in the undead condition will allow you to escape the whole deep sea of human misery, sometime.

Equipment: matched pair of .45s

VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:
Nature: Martyr
Demeanor: Judge
Clan: Lasombra
Generation: 13th
Haven:
Concept: Baleful Avenger

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●●●	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	●●●●○	Crafts	●○○○○	Computer	●●●○○
Brawl	●●○○○	Drive	●○○○○	*Finance*	○○○○○
Dodge	●○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Firearms	●●●●○	Law	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○	Security	●●○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Streetwise	●●○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Disciplines		Virtues	
	○○○○○	Auspex	●○○○○	Conscience/~~Conviction~~	●●●○○
	○○○○○	Dominate	●○○○○		
	○○○○○	Obtenebration	●○○○○		
	○○○○○	Potence	●●○○○	Self-Control/~~Instinct~~	●●○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●●●●○

Merits/Flaws

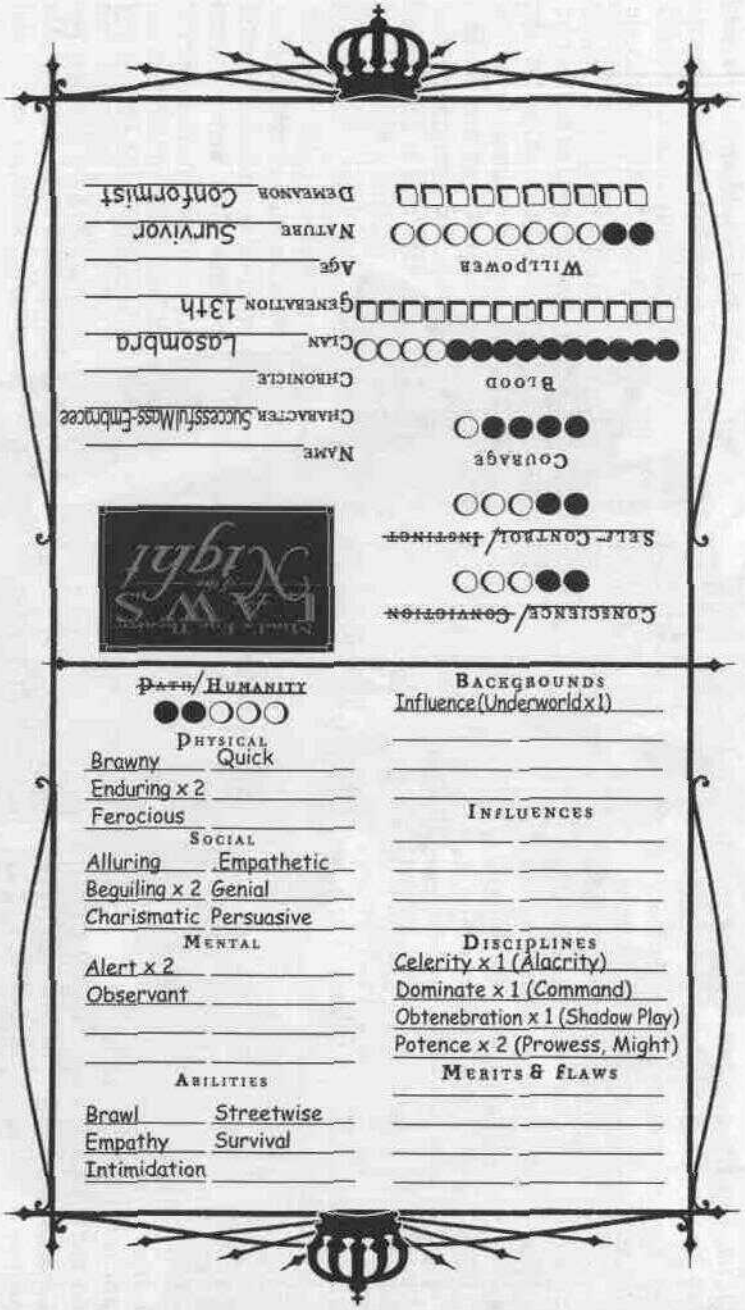
Humanity/Path: ●●●●●○○○○○

Willpower: ●●●●●●○○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool: □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□

Health: Bruised □; Hurt -1 □; Injured -1 □; Wounded -2 □; Mauled -2 □; Crippled -5 □; Incapacitated □

Experience



Conscience/~~Conviction~~ ●●○○○

~~Self-Control/Instinct~~ ●●○○○

Courage ●●●●○

Name

Character Successful Mass-Embracee

Blood ●●●●●●●●●●○○○○

Chronicle

Clan Lasombra

Generation 13th

Willpower ●●○○○○○○○

Age

Nature Survivor

Demeanor Conformist

~~Path~~/Humanity ●●○○○

Physical

Brawny, Quick, Enduring x 2, Ferocious

Social

Alluring, Empathetic, Beguiling x 2, Genial, Charismatic, Persuasive

Mental

Alert x 2, Observant

Abilities

Brawl, Streetwise, Empathy, Survival, Intimidation

Backgrounds

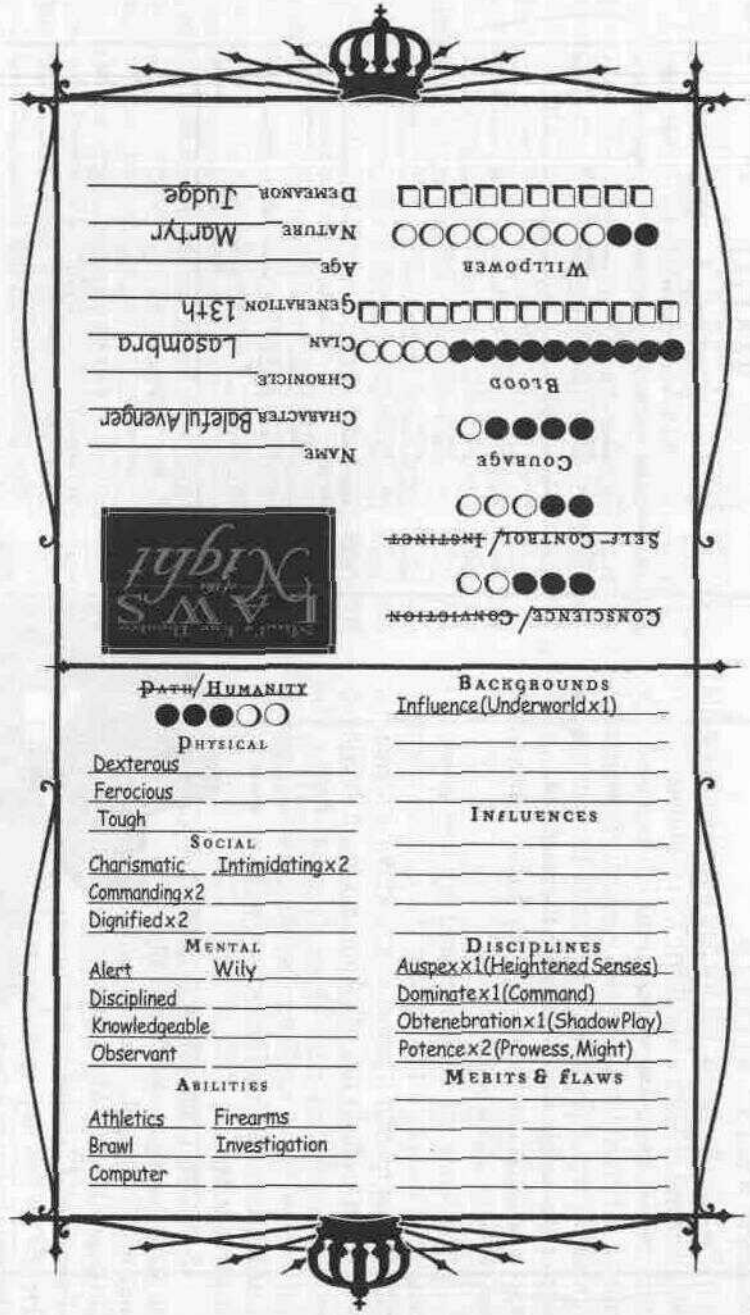
Influence (Underworld x 1)

Influences

Disciplines

Celerity x 1 (Alacrity)
Dominate x 1 (Command)
Obtenebration x 1 (Shadow Play)
Potence x 2 (Prowess, Might)

Merits & Flaws



Conscience/~~Conviction~~ ●●●○○

~~Self-Control/Instinct~~ ●●○○○

Courage ●●●●○

Name

Character Baleful Avenger

Blood ●●●●●●●●●●○○○○

Chronicle

Clan Lasombra

Generation 13th

Willpower ●●○○○○○○○

Age

Nature Martyr

Demeanor Judge

~~Path~~/Humanity ●●●○○

Physical

Dexterous, Ferocious, Tough

Social

Charismatic, Intimidating x 2, Commanding x 2, Dignified x 2

Mental

Alert, Wily, Disciplined, Knowledgeable, Observant

Abilities

Athletics, Firearms, Brawl, Investigation, Computer

Backgrounds

Influence (Underworld x 1)

Influences

Disciplines

Auspex x 1 (Heightened Senses)
Dominate x 1 (Command)
Obtenebration x 1 (Shadow Play)
Potence x 2 (Prowess, Might)

Merits & Flaws

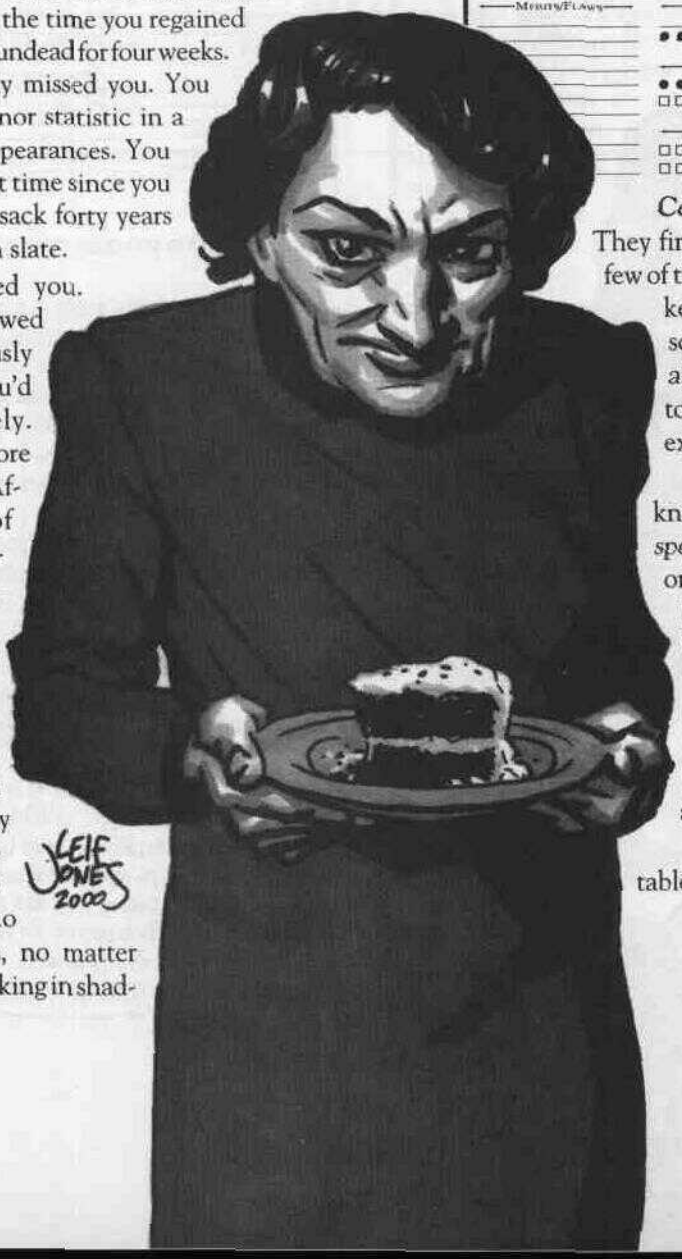
The Successful Mass-Embracee

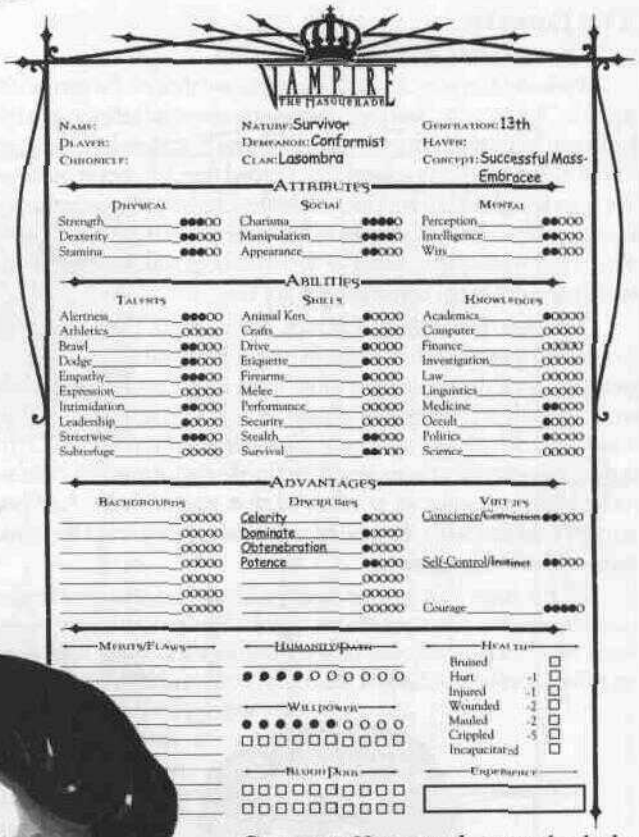
Quote: *Dearie, punch it a few more times first. The flush makes it taste better.*

Prelude: Sixty years of life, and what did you get? A deadbeat husband who drank himself into the grave, two worthless children incapable of living without you to bail them out, the one boy with promise dead long ago in some two-bit war and a clutch of grandchildren already busily spawning brats when they're not selling themselves, drugs or both. You lost your home when the freeway came through and shuffled around a series of cheap apartments after that. Everyone you ever cared about was dead or gone.

It can always get worse. One summer night, a gang of young people grabbed you off the boulevard, hit you with a shovel and buried you. You managed to dig yourself out. Your assailants sent you and the other survivors into some big rumble you never really understood. You were one of two to remain standing at the end of it all. The other one didn't make it, but you did, albeit locked in a sustained manic fit. By the time you regained self-control, you'd been undead for four weeks. You found that nobody missed you. You were just one more minor statistic in a county report on disappearances. You realized that for the first time since you said "I do" to that sad sack forty years earlier, you had a clean slate.

The Sabbat suited you. Amused mentors showed you how to consciously control the powers you'd exercised instinctively. You listened to the lore and studied the rites. After two years of "apprenticeship," the local bishop decided that you had prospects and let you join one of the local packs. Sure, some of the vampires have been undead a lot longer than you, but you *lived* longer than they did. Sixty years of working-class existence taught you things no snot-nosed kid knows, no matter how long he's been skulking in shadows as a parasite.





Concept: *You watch over the kids.* They find this funny but let you do it. A few of them even recognize that your care keeps them from losing those last scraps of humanity. You don't care about grand crusades — you want to protect the society that gives your existence some value.

Roleplaying Hints: Momma knows best. Momma knows how to spot easy targets and recognize tricky ones, how to hide the bodies later, how to bless the cups for the Vaulderie. Oh, sure, you've got a lot to learn, but you're doing well and enjoying it. There's a woman at the top of the sect, you hear. Maybe some night there will be another.

Equipment: Sturdy clothes, portable cooking gear, station wagon

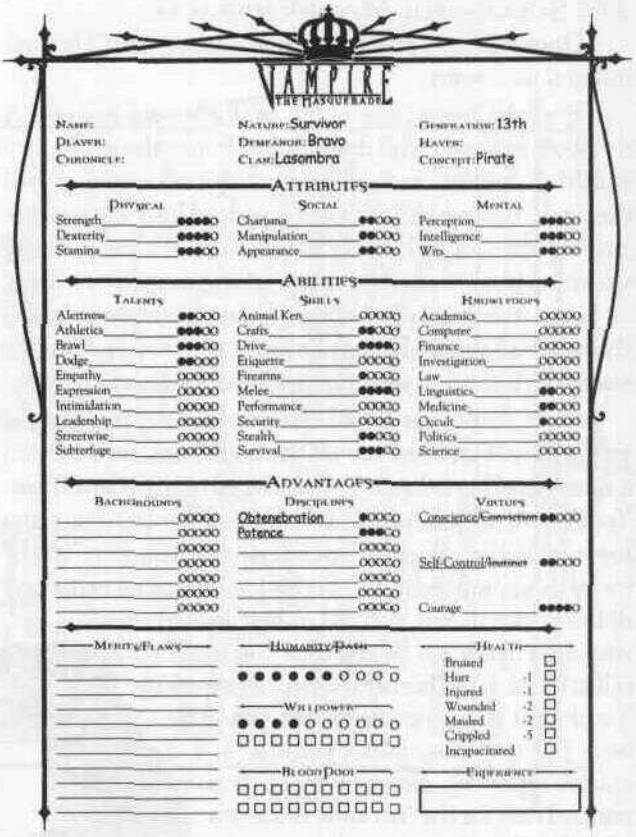
The Pirate

Quote: *Hand it over. Now.*

Prelude: You were conceived in rape, and that set the pattern for your life. Your mother was the priestess of some tribal religion in what had been a remote African valley. Poaching and industrialization forced her people into a coastal city. Beyond that, you never quite got the story straight. You don't know whether she turned to prostitution or was simply seized at random by sailors on a drunken rampage. Doesn't matter much either way, really — you were born with the taint of the syphilis she got at the same time she got you.

You grew up in war-zone squalor. Three or four nations claimed to rule your area at different times. In practice they were all well-armed gangs, favoring their respective tribes at the cost of everyone else. You were violently and sadistically abused, or coldly abused in a detached manner, and that's how you could tell one regime from the next. Any outside peacekeeping forces were either ineffectual or in active collaboration with one gang or another, so that was no help. And you remembered that what they did to your mother, they could do to you sometime, if they wanted to.

By the time your mother died, you'd learned enough to make yourself useful to petty waterfront tyrants. You escaped some of the worst abuse meted out to less talented children and might have gone on to lead (by the standards of the docks) a reasonably decent life. If it weren't for the syphilis, that is. Early signs of madness manifested before your 18th birthday, and your increasingly erratic behavior cost you what marginal protection you once enjoyed. You never talk about the few years after that.



Gradually you became aware of a persistent voice in your mind, somewhere in the mental fog, an amused and curious probing. In your moments of lucidity, you learned about the pirate captain with a taste for amateur physiology. He fed you the blood that let you recover your sanity and kept the disease at bay, and also made you preternaturally strong. The cost for all this was service, and you gave it gladly. You soon joined his crew and pillaged throughout the Indian Ocean. When he lost one of the mysterious crewmates who only came out at night, he held a lottery to replace him. You won. Then the fangs came down.

You continue to serve your captain. Your existence gives you lots of opportunity to hurt people and moments of solitude in which you don't have to think much about anything in particular. Both suit you fine.

Concept: You're a pirate, and a good one. You know how to foil dozens of security measures, jam distress signals, fence loot and so on. The workings of the Sabbat seem nebulous to you; you know only the routine on your ship. But others who think you naïve are setting themselves up for trouble.

Roleplaying Hints: The world has hunters and hunted, nothing more. You hunt. You're good at it. With practice you may become much better at it. As you gain distance (physical and psychological) from your mortal days, you're beginning to wonder what else vampires do and are taking your first steps out into larger Sabbat society. You'll always be a pirate, but you realize that that may not preclude being other things as well.

Equipment: Seaworthy clothes, knives, books of Sabbat history

~~Path~~/Humanity
●●●○○

Physical
Brawny
Tenacious
Nimble x 2
Tough x 2
Quick
Vigorous

Social
Charming
Commanding
Intimidating

Mental
Attentive
Wily
Cunning
Patient
Shrewd

Abilities
Athletics
Melee
Brawl
Survival
Drive

Backgrounds
Influence (Underworld x 1)

Influences

Disciplines
Obtenebration x 1 (Shadow Play)
Potence x 2 (Prowess, Might, Vigor)

Merits & Flaws

~~Conscience~~/~~Conviction~~
●○○○○
~~Self-Control~~/~~Instinct~~
●●○○○
Courage
●●●●○
Blood
●●●●●●●●●○○○○
Generation 13th
Willpower
●●○○○○○○○○
Demeanor Bravo

Name
Character Pirate
Chronicle
Clan Lasombra
Age
Nature Survivor

~~Path~~/Humanity
●●●○○

Physical
Agile
Steady
Energetic
Wiry
Stalwart

Social
Charismatic x 2
Magnetic
Diplomatic
Persuasive x 2
Eloquent

Mental
Knowledgeable
Reflective
Wise

Abilities
Firearms
Politics
Investigation
Subterfuge
Law

Backgrounds
Generation x 2
Influence (Political x 1)

Influences

Disciplines
Dominate x 2 (Command, Mesmerism)
Obtenebration x 2 (Shadow Play, Shroud of Night)

Merits & Flaws

~~Conscience~~/~~Conviction~~
●○○○○
~~Self-Control~~/~~Instinct~~
●●●○○
Courage
●●●●○
Blood
●●●●●●●●●●●○○
Generation 11th
Willpower
●●●●○○○○○○
Demeanor Visionary

Name
Character Revolutionary
Chronicle
Clan Lasombra
Age
Nature Rebel

The Revolutionary

Quote: *If you could take the larger view, you would see that your death validates the revolutionary struggle as your life validated the existing order. But I see you have too much blood in the way.*

Prelude: You grew up not very far from the brink of starvation in Sicily. Your family lost a lot of its land in "reforms" after World War II and never recovered from it. When you were old enough to leave home, you set out to make your fortune elsewhere. After a year of wandering, you ended up in Rome.

Rome wasn't the greatest place to be poor during the 1960s. The combination of rampant corruption and clerical interference kept everyone without connections constantly on edge. You could be arrested on trumped-up charges and put to work on someone's estate, or simply harassed into leaving a particular neighborhood because the cops didn't like your style. Had they deliberately set out to make a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary of you, they could scarcely have done a better job.

You suffered a crisis of conscience after kidnapping and torturing an innocuous South American businessman. It's one thing, you reasoned, to strike at the agents of tyranny. While in important ways all bourgeois are collaborators, was this actually helping your cause? When you asked questions, your comrades were only too happy to beat you within an inch of your life, frame you for drug charges and let the police haul you away. Rome wasn't a good place to be imprisoned during the '60s, either.

So it was, twenty years after leaving home, that you ended up back in Sicily. You were still driven to do *something* but had no clue as to *what*. Your parents were long dead by this time, and your relatives didn't want to see you. You wandered the island, visiting tourist attractions. And you started hearing voices. Shadows spoke to you as you camped outside old castles, telling you of a great war that your Marxist revolution couldn't begin to approach. You were pretty sure you were going insane, but you listened and sometimes carried out the daylight tasks the shadows asked you to.

One night, the shadows came alive to reveal a nattily dressed old man, who told you the rest of the story. He explained about the Antediluvians, for whom capitalists are only the most recent pawns, and about the Sabbat, the ultimate vanguard party in all of history. He showed you how the dialectic of history made sense only in light of facts that dialectical materialism couldn't allow. Then he offered you the opportunity to join the struggle. Of course you accepted.

Concept: You're a neonate amid elders. Still, you show the fervor that makes Sabbat founders smile, and if they seem sometimes like part of the problem, that's a matter for another night. From Sicily, you and your fellow neonates strike out at Camarilla targets all around the Mediterranean. You don't really belong to a permanent pack yet—your mentors are testing combinations for maximum efficiency. You aim to prove yourself worthy — who knows, someday you may strike against these elders as they struck against theirs.

Roleplaying Hints: There's so much to learn! Everything you assumed about the world seems false. You try never to admit your fear, only your ignorance: You're quite willing to ask honest questions in search of answers. You also seek to find suitable allies, the ones who show themselves most flexible and determined. Let th

Equipment: Disguises, collapsible firearms

VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE

Name:	Nature: Rebel	Generation: 11th
Player:	Demeanor: Visionary	Haven:
Chronicle:	Clan: Lasombra	Concept: Revolutionary

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○	Charisma	●●●●○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●●○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	●●○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	●●○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Finance	○○○○○
Dodge	●●○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Firearms	●●●○○	Law	●●●○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	●●○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○	Security	●○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Politics	●●●○○
Subterfuge	●●●○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	●●○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Disciplines		Virtues	
Generation	●●○○○	Dominate	●●○○○	Conscience/~~Conviction~~	●○○○○
	○○○○○	Obtenebration	●●○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Self-Control/~~Instinct~~	●●●○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●●●●○

Merits/Flaws	Humanity/~~Path~~	Health	
	●●●●●○○○○○	Bruised	☐
		Hurt -1	☐
		Injured -1	☐
	Willpower	Wounded -2	☐
	●●●●○○○○○○	Mauled -2	☐
	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐	Crippled -5	☐
		Incapacitated	☐
	Blood Pool	Experience	
	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐		
	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐		

Broker for the Damned

Quote: *It's all about leveraging your core competencies.*

Prelude: All your life you had a very simple goal: You wanted to be rich. You got off to a good start, with a decent enough middle-class upbringing and an okay college education and a better business school and a lucky break at a big Wall Street brokerage. You flourished in the '80s, exploiting regulatory chaos with the best of them and twice managing to change jobs *just* before the SEC ruined the party. You almost wondered *if someone were looking* out for you, some God of Leverage.

Then things got interesting, when the weirdoes started calling you in for nighttime consultations. Their money was good so you didn't mind, but when you asked if they were vampires or what, they didn't exactly laugh. What the hell. You kept working for them.

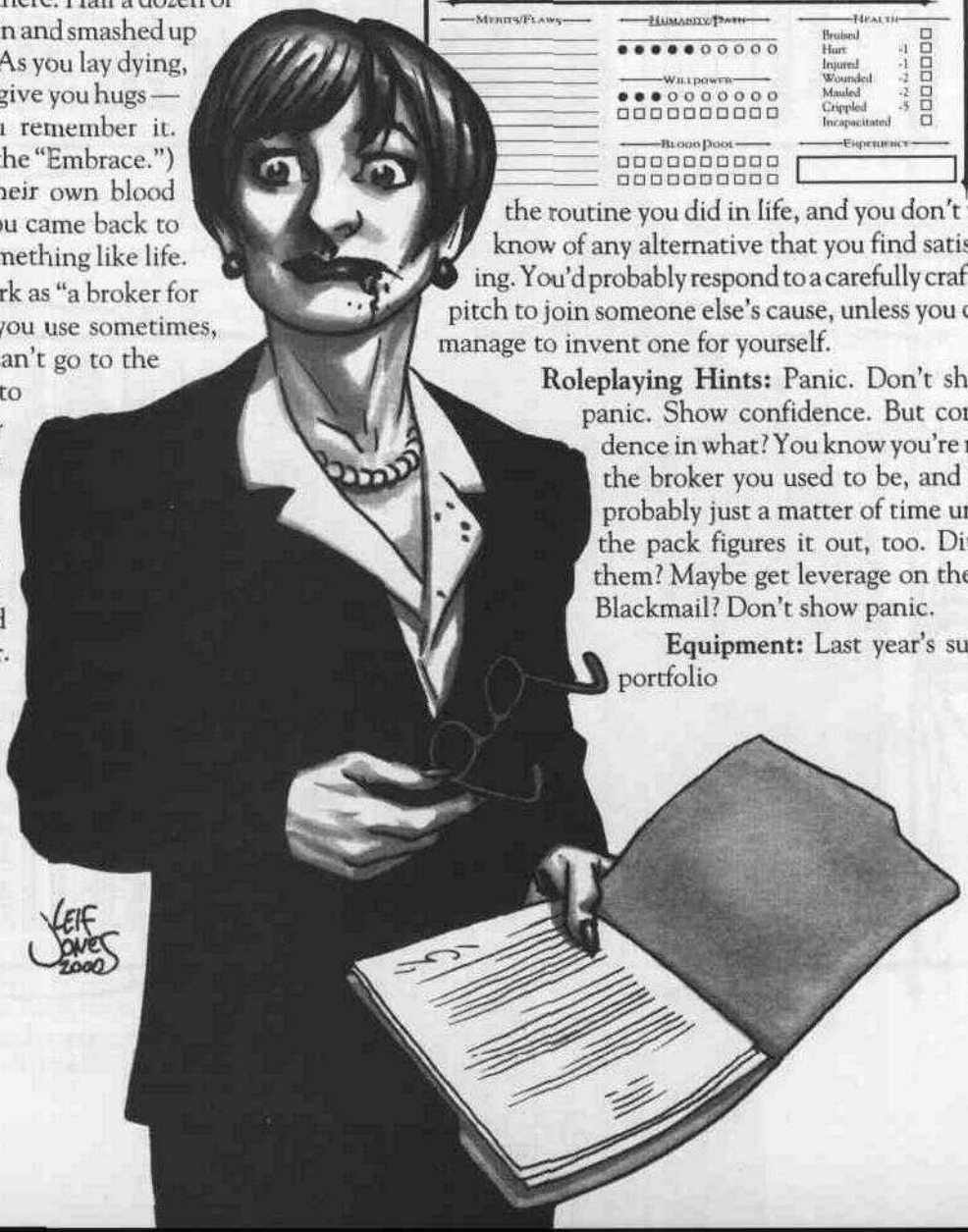
Then came the night when it all changed. One of the weirdoes actually burst into your office and fucking drank your blood. Right there. Half a dozen of the other weirdoes came in and smashed up that first one pretty bad. As you lay dying, they debated whether to give you hugs — at least that's how you remember it. (You've since learned of the "Embrace.") They poured some of their own blood down your throat and you came back to life, or at least back to something like life.

You'd like to still work as "a broker for the Damned," the title you use sometimes, but it's hard when you can't go to the market floors and have to break off a planning session just because the sun is rising. The guys you used to work with are doing a lot better than you are, and they're going to keep pulling ahead because you can't. Ever. Catch. Up.

Concept: You're a vampire on the edge of a nervous breakdown. You cannot maintain the routine you did in life, and you don't yet know of any alternative that you find satisfying. You'd probably respond to a carefully crafted pitch to join someone else's cause, unless you can manage to invent one for yourself.

Roleplaying Hints: Panic. Don't show panic. Show confidence. But confidence in what? You know you're not the broker you used to be, and it's probably just a matter of time until the pack figures it out, too. Ditch them? Maybe get leverage on them. Blackmail? Don't show panic.

Equipment: Last year's suits, portfolio



Conscience/Conviction ●●●○○
Self-Control/Instinct ●●●○○
Courage ●●●○○

Laws of the Night

Name
Character Broker for the Damned
Chronicle
Blood
Clan Lasombra
Generation 12th
Willpower
Age
Nature Thrill-Seeker
Demeanor Conformist

Path/Humanity ●●●○○

Physical
Quick
Tireless
Vigorous

Social
Beguiling x 2 Magnetic
Charming Persuasive
Expressive x 2

Mental
Insightful
Intuitive
Knowledgeable x 2
Shrewd

Abilities
Etiquette Investigation
Expression Law
Finance Subterfuge

Backgrounds
Generation x 1
Influence (Underworld x 1)

Influences

Disciplines
Dominate x 3 (Command, Mesmerism, Forgetful Mind)
Obtenebration x 1 (Shadow Play)

Merits & Flaws

Conscience/Conviction ●●●●○
Self-Control/Instinct ●●●○○
Courage ●●●○○

Laws of the Night

Name
Character Crusader out of Time
Chronicle
Blood
Clan Lasombra Antitribu
Generation 12th
Willpower
Age
Nature Fanatic
Demeanor Gallant

Path/Humanity ●●●●○

Physical
Ferocious Magnetic
Graceful
Nimble

Social
Commanding Magnetic
Diplomatic
Eloquent x 2

Mental
Attentive
Determined
Reflective

Abilities
Brawl Security
Drive Streetwise
Expression

Backgrounds
Contacts x 1
Generation x 2
Influence (Church x 2)
Resources x 2

Influences

Disciplines
Dominate x 1 (Command)
Potence x 3 (Prowess, Might, Vigor)

Merits & Flaws

The Crusader Out of Time

Quote: *It's never too late to mend! Or, in your case, break.*

Prelude: You were one among thousands of Spanish peasants who joined the 1930s civil war on the anarchist side. When recruiters came to speak of a new society, built on the rubble of hierarchy and power, it was like a revelation. You *had* to do your part to help.

The reality of war was less glamorous. You fought first against Nazi-backed royalist forces, then against your own ostensible allies when Stalin decreed that good Communists should now extirpate anarchists like yourself. Two years after enlisting, you found yourself rotting in a cell somewhere outside Madrid, waiting for your turn in front of the firing squad. For company, you had only a raving old man who babbled of ancient masters who would come to rescue all deserving Spaniards.

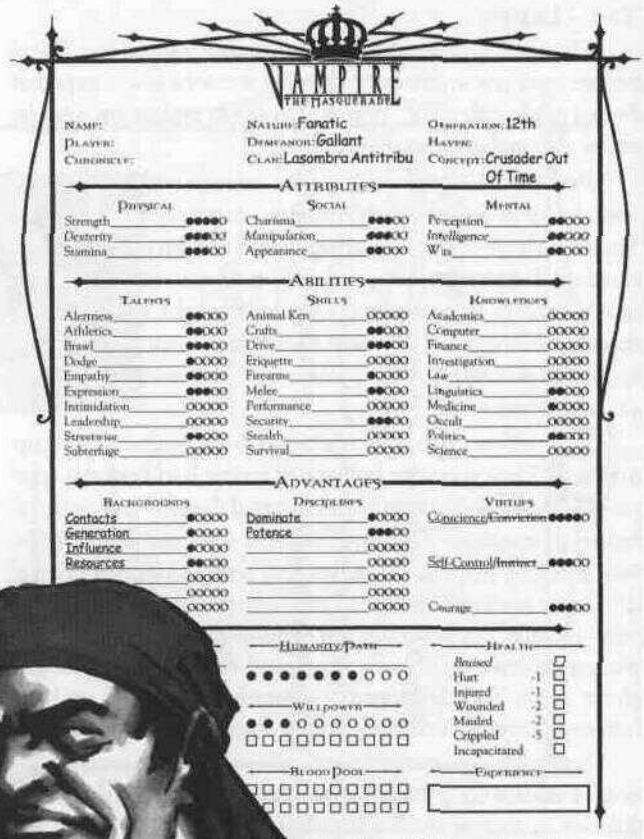
You still remember with perfect clarity how surprised you were when an ancient master *did* come to rescue the old man. A foppish young dandy in archaic clothes shattered the prison wall with his bare hands, scooped you and the old man up and ran off at superhuman speed. By the time you regained your composure, you were safe and resting in some seaside manor looking out toward the Balearics. Over the next few nights, the young man, who proved to be more than eighty years old, explained the secret history of the world to you. It was, in many ways, just what you expected. Could anyone look at the history of Church and State and be surprised to know that immortal bloodsuckers were behind it all?

When the dandy offered you the power to fight the secret masters on their own ground, you readily accepted. Things went well enough, until the fateful night in 1941 when a crippled bomber unloaded its cargo before plummeting into the sea. The dandy, the old man and all the others in that seaside manor perished. You were buried, trapped in torpor for more than half a century, until workers building a new resort accidentally dug you out. Now you're back among the Lasombra *antitribu*, trying to make sense of the strange new world and get back into the fray.

Concept: You're an anachronism as well as an idealist. You remember the world without computers, the world with Hitler and Stalin. You bring a level of practical experience with extremely dirty warfare that makes you valuable to your allies, valuable enough for them to put up with your limitations. Perhaps they also find your revolutionary zeal encouraging, an artifact of a time and place when the world seemed more malleable.

Roleplaying Hints: This is terrible! Fifty years went by, and what good did your clanmates do? Not a drop, as nearly as you can tell. They need you to show them how to do it right. It's time for bold deeds and strong words. While you're not about to explain vampires to the masses, surely it's right and proper to rekindle the fire of self-determination. Skeptics call it rabble-rousing. You know that the rabble are the only people ever worth bothering with. And as for the malefactors of great wealth, well, you have ways of dealing with them, too.

Equipment: Rugged clothes, assorted small firearms and knives, maps, anarchist propaganda



VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE

Name: | Nature: Fanatic | Generation: 12th
Player: | Demeanor: Gallant | Haven:
Chronicle: | Clan: Lasombra Antitribu | Concept: Crusader Out Of Time

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●●○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●●○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	●●○○○	Crafts	●●○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Brawl	●●●○○	Drive	●●●○○	Finance	○○○○○
Dodge	●○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Empathy	●●○○○	Firearms	●○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Expression	●●●○○	Melee	●●○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Medicine	●○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Security	●●●○○	Occult	○○○○○
Streetwise	●●○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Politics	●●○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Disciplines		Virtues	
Contacts	●○○○○	Dominate	●○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Generation	●○○○○	Potence	●●●○○		
Influence	●○○○○		○○○○○		
Resources	●●○○○		○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○

Humanity/Path: ●●●●●●●○○○

Willpower: ●●●○○○○○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool: □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□

Health: Bruised □; Hurt -1 □; Injured -1 □; Wounded -2 □; Mauled -2 □; Crippled -5 □; Incapacitated □

Experience: □

The Harpy

Quote: *So you assert that your sire taught you nothing. This is perhaps more convenient than admitting you are a fool, except that the end result is the same. Here is your sire to explain just what he taught you, and what you have failed to do.*

Prelude: You grew up in pretty average middle-class circumstances in one of South America's more prosperous cities. You didn't have to live in a garbage heap (though you knew that people did, not very many miles from where you were). You never dealt in drugs or found yourself caught in a drive-by shooting. None of the northern stereotypes about your country applied to you, really. Your parents were successful professionals, and so were you.

Ironically enough, your life began to fall apart during a trip to Rome. *There* you were kidnapped by the Red Brigades (not yet crushed by police assault and internal dissent) and tortured before your release. The psychological scars ran deeper than your therapist realized, as you became obsessed with analyzing the "status markers" that led to such a terrible fate for you and other victims. You became a sort of business anthropologist, tracing the cues that invite attack and warning your peers about them. You developed a reputation as a kook and became increasingly marginalized within your hometown.

Your sire discovered your work when she emerged from a decade-long torpor. She was intrigued — she'd dabbled in such semiotics herself, unsuccessfully. When she offered you the opportunity to pursue your work through all ages, what could you do but accept?

Once you mastered the basics of unlife, your sire presented you to the local Camarilla. She was of the Lasombra *antitribu* and an honored participant in her city's secret affairs. You rapidly earned a place for yourself. Your idiosyncratic studies came in very handy tracing out the maze that is prestation in any flourishing court. You don't always agree with what the vampires around you do, but they never become dull.

Concept: You're the model *antitribu*: intelligent, gracious and above all well behaved. You show up the failings of your clan by comparison, and were it not for the stain of your heritage, you'd simply blend in with the Camarilla. Your ongoing studies lead you to travel, so that you can compare the workings of as many Kindred as possible.

Roleplaying Hints: In a sense, you're reverting to your ancestors' attitude of noble superiority, back when they received grants of total power over the aboriginal tribes in your part of South America. It bothers you sometimes to feel your attachments to humanity slowly drain away, but the Kindred make such fascinating subjects. Always ask politely, but never fail to ask. Understand what's going around you. Once you understand, you can judge with wit and precision.

Equipment: Fine clothes, extensive notebooks (gradually being abandoned in favor of a handheld computer)

Path/Humanity
●●●○○

Physical
Enduring
Graceful
Wiry

Social
Diplomatic
Elegant x 2
Empathetic

Mental
Clever
Discerning
Insightful
Knowledgeable

Abilities
Empathy
Etiquette
Finance
Investigation
Law
Politics

Backgrounds
Contacts x 3 Fame x 1
Influence (High Society x 1, Media x 1, Political x 1)
Resources x 2

Influences

Disciplines
Dominate x 2 (Command, Mesmerism)
Obtenebration x 1 (Shadow Play)

Merits & Flaws

Conscience/Conviction
●●●○○

Self-Control/Instinct
●●●○○

Courage
●●●●○

Blood
●●●●●●●●●●○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Willpower
●●○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Laws of the Night

Name
Character Harpy
Chronicle
Clan Lasombra Antitribu
Generation 13th
Age
Nature Perfectionist
Demeanor Traditionalist

Path/Humanity
Path of Night
●●○○○

Physical
Agile
Dexterous
Robust

Social
Charismatic
Magnetic
Commanding x 2
Intimidating

Mental
Attentive
Rational x 2
Disciplined
Vigilant
Intuitive
Knowledgeable

Abilities
Academics
Occult
Athletics
Science
Intimidation

Backgrounds
Generation x 4
Influence (Church x 1)
Mentor x 1
Resources x 3

Influences

Disciplines
Obtenebration x 4 (Shadow Play, Shroud of Night, Arms of the Abyss, Black Metamorphosis)

Merits & Flaws

Conscience/Conviction
●●○○○

Self-Control/Instinct
●●○○○

Courage
●●○○○

Blood
●●●●●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Willpower
●●●●●●○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Laws of the Night

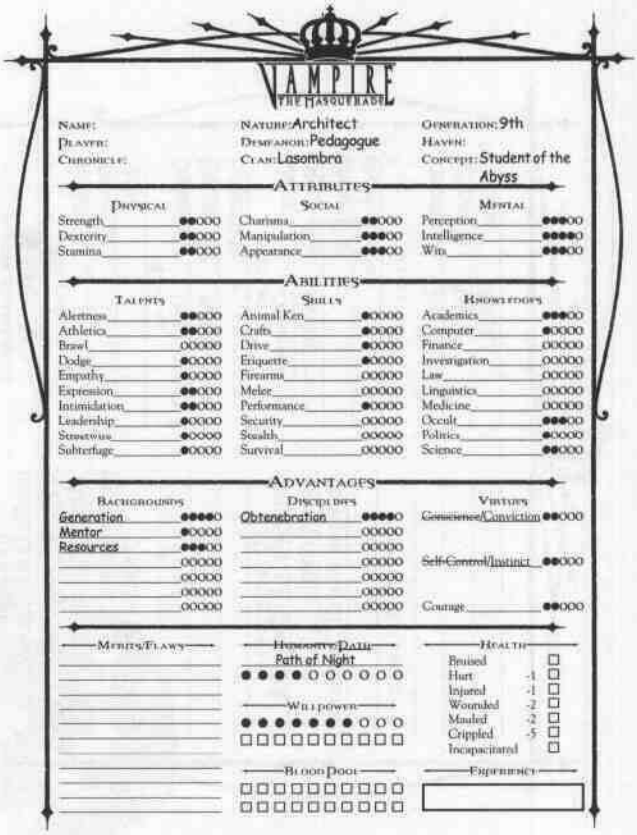
Name
Character Student of the Abyss
Chronicle
Clan Lasombra
Generation 9th
Age
Nature Architect
Demeanor Pedagogue

The Student of the Abyss

Quote: *Dammit, if you'd just shut up for a second, you could learn something useful. The Abyss will wait forever, but I could be off doing something worthwhile if you're going to keep this up.*

Prelude: All your life, you wanted to know something more, to understand the next layer beneath what you could see. In school, you didn't always get very good grades, because you preferred to spend the time studying interesting topics to wading through pablum. Once out of school, you pursued your interests as an autodidact, ranging freely through the sciences and humanities alike. You found few close friends, simply because a lot of folks seemed confused by the notion of being simultaneously concerned with, say, quantum mechanics and Hermetic alchemy. Their loss.

With the Internet, you could reach out to the other one-in-a-million eclectic seekers and find some companionship, albeit at a distance. Somewhat to your surprise, you even found ways to parlay your approach to the world into freelance writing of various sorts. Not bad for someone accustomed to being the odd girl out.



VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE

Name: | Nature: Architect | Generation: 9th
Player: | Demeanor: Pedagogue | Haven:
Chronicle: | Clan: Lasombra | Concept: Student of the Abyss

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●●●○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Animal Ken	●○○○○	Academics	●●●○○
Athletics	●●○○○	Crafts	●○○○○	Computer	●○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Finance	○○○○○
Dodge	●○○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Empathy	●○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Expression	●●○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○	Performance	●○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○	Security	○○○○○	Occult	●●●○○
Streetwise	●○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Politics	●○○○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	●●○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Disciplines		Virtues	
Generation	●●●●○	Obtenebration	●●●●○	~~Conscience~~/Conviction	●●○○○
Mentor	●○○○○		○○○○○		
Resources	●●●○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	~~Self-Control~~/Instinct	●●○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●●○○○

Merits/Flaws

~~Humanity~~/Path: Path of Night ●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower ●●●●●●●○○○ □□□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□

Health: Bruised □; Hurt -1 □; Injured -1 □; Wounded -2 □; Mauled -2 □; Crippled -5 □; Incapacitated □

Experience

At first you didn't notice just how systematically your life was going bad. Harassment on the job, your family becoming even more stupid and truculent than their norm, net acquaintances disappearing or abruptly changing personalities... it didn't add up for a while. At first you just did your best to cope with each fresh obstacle as it arose. The awareness of calculated harassment rose gradually, and when you took your initial steps toward identifying the perpetrator, everything got worse. Credit fraud and worse went on in your name, with very plausible evidence. You came close to the brink, but never quite broke.

After five years of this, the mastermind presented herself. She didn't take long to establish that she was the one responsible — she had the sort of proof it took to convince you — and she essentially dared you to accept the power that would let you compete with her on an even footing. You accepted. She's gone now, and you remain. On to the next challenge: probing the mysteries accessible to you now that you're no longer among the living.

Concept: You're a highly individualistic vampire. Your sire was Sabbat in all but name, really, and you're not comfortable with the vapid protestations of morality that characterize the Camarilla. You associate primarily with anarchs, when you're not in the company of your clanmates who share an interest in Abyss mysticism. You pursue knowledge as the pathway to power. As power comes, you'll figure out what to do with it.

Roleplaying Hints: Above all, behind all, after all, you want to *know*. You want to experience reality. While you were alive, you went as far as living sensation could take you. Now you delve into unliving sensation. The Abyss fascinates you, though not to the exclusion of other interests. You'd like to share what you find, but so few vampires can see beyond the next feeding. Sometimes you try to break through their ignorance. Other times you let them stew and get on with things.

Equipment: Occult tools, extensive library of science and history books

Sample Brood: Black Eagle Consulting, Inc.

Modern technology makes it easy for a widespread group to remain in regular contact. The Sabbat pack that operates as Black Eagle Consulting actually gathers for face-to-face meetings only a few times a year, at great rites and as pack members' concerns warrant. Nonetheless, most members are in touch via e-mail, online chat and telephone several times a week.

The original incarnation of the pack dates back to 1877 and a series of Sabbat attacks on telegraph stations in the Midwest. Some forward-thinking templar realized that a fast communication network would give her cause a competitive advantage against the Camarilla's vastly superior social ties. It wasn't enough, of course. The Camarilla stomped organized Sabbat presence in the Midwest flat. But the Nighttime Messengers pack survived, and has continued to update its organization and membership to reflect new technology. The pack added radio engineers in the 1920s, motion picture projectionists in the '30s, TV camera operators and station engineers in the '50s. The pack Embraced its first electronic networking specialist in 1980 and its recruiting has become increasingly net-oriented since then.

Part of the pack's success is that its members don't make easy targets. A lone vampire can take advantage of cover that doesn't work for half a dozen of them together. Pack members attend carefully to security in their communications, working through relay systems often set up years or even decades ago. On the occasions when law enforcement agencies have tried tracing one pack member's contacts, they've gotten nowhere. Some nomadic packs reject a lot of the modern world and rely on their innate abilities. Black Eagle represents the modernist response, exploiting the modern world to make fixed havens largely unnecessary.

Using Black Eagle Consulting

This pack can appear in a chronicle in two distinct ways: with just one of its members or assembled as a group.

See below for descriptions of the currently active pack members. They all travel, and all enjoy seeing new sights. A couple of them actually work on a fairly regular basis in mortal society, keeping up the appearances necessary to make Black Eagle Consulting a viable disguise. The rest don't do any real business with the kine, but do study mortals and spend time with them. Any community with a high-tech industry of note, or a good university with scientific research facilities, or for that matter an interesting fine arts scene may attract a Black Eagle's attention.

When traveling alone, Black Eagles who encounter other vampires claim Caitiff and anarch status. Earlier versions of the pack mounted bold challenges against Camarilla courts and anarch alliances. After the third time when more than half of the pack perished in the ensuing carnage, the survivors decided not to do that anymore. Now a Black Eagle on his own is just one more abandoned vampire who would be ever so grateful for a little shelter and of course willing to trade his technical expertise for the favor.

Once out of imminent danger of destruction, a Black Eagle generally makes himself useful. Successful spies know that as much of their cover should be real as possible. The best way to convince others that one is a good security specialist is to provide good security for one's customers. The Black Eagle maps out his hosts' weaknesses and *then* calls in the rest of the pack.

Black Eagle attacks aren't like other Sabbat raids. Most of the time, the pack seldom if ever confronts any of its targets directly. The Black Eagle method aims at exposing targets so that other forces do the destruction on the pack's behalf. Over the course of several nights, the pack implements some or all of the following dirty tricks:

- Automatic signal splitting, so that private communications (encrypted cell phone conversations, direct e-mail connections and so on) get copied to appropriate sources. Depending on the city in question, recipients may include the local prince or bishop, government intelligence agencies, churches who show interest in monster-hunting, the local press and so on.
- Signal destruction. Simply losing messages in transit does a great deal of harm. Forging plausible

replacements is fun, but takes time and requires preparation, a luxury the pack rarely enjoys.

• Framing. Black Eagles commit crimes, leaving behind just a very few clues that point to the targets. Vampires only leave fingerprints in oily substances, to take one case in point. A helpful Black Eagle may spend a lot of time showing her targets how to use a new computer system which, of course, she keeps meticulously clean with various maintenance oils. Gradually, she can assemble plausible composite prints, and leave a few behind. A few hairs in the right place can keep a dedicated forensic investigator going a long time. So can traces of blood. The trick in each case is to avoid overdoing it, and instead tantalize mortal investigators.

In the end, all Black Eagles perish, just like the vast majority of other Sabbat. Lone Black Eagles sometimes screw up, and by a wrong word or action reveal their underlying convictions. Or they may just anger a host and get destroyed for petty reasons. The pack as a whole has had several close brushes against targets who were more technically competent than the Black Eagles realized, and the pack had to break off its siege and flee. The Black Eagles should be tough, interesting nemeses for non-Sabbat vampires and equally interesting mentors for technically inclined Sabbat neonates, but they are emphatically not unstoppable engines of destruction.

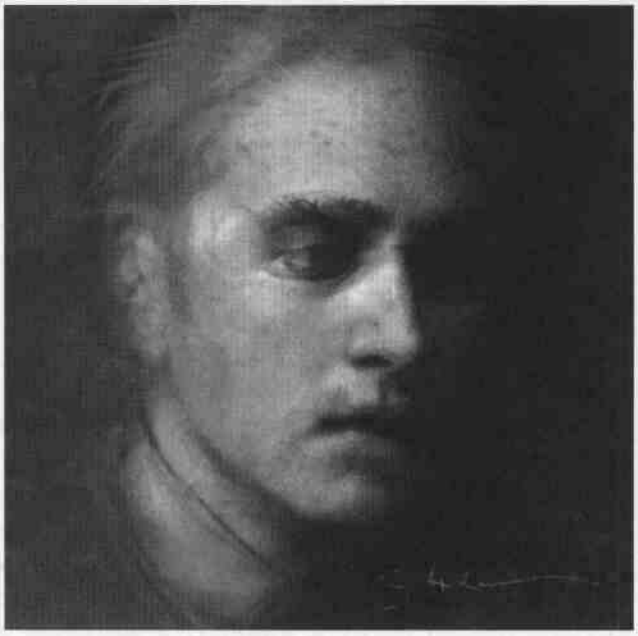
The Cainites

The members of Black Eagle Consulting get along pretty well, in part because they don't spend a great deal of time in each other's presence. They all maintain Vinculum ratings of 4-7 with each other, and thus feel committed to each other's well-being without having to do much for each other night in, night out.

In terms of Lasombra outlooks, the Black Eagles straddle the line between simple factionless views and the Kings and Queens of Shadow. They can operate well enough among mortals, but feel no ideological commitment to doing so. This is just how they pass the years, putting to use the parts of their old lives that still interest them while also pursuing distinctively vampiric projects.

Richard B. Weinstein, Ductus

Background: Richard is the eldest surviving member of the Black Eagles, apart from rumors that one or two of the 19th century bunch are still



in torpor in some Camarilla-controlled city. Details of his mortal life are not so much vague as inconsistent. While Richard doesn't yet have full-blown multiple-personality disorder, it's just a matter of time. Richard himself is intermittently aware of the problem. As nearly as he knows, he's suffering from internal trauma associated with diableries he committed during the Third Sabbat Civil War.

Most of the time, Richard remembers being an engineer at Los Alamos during World War II, working on early computer projects for the Navy after the war. Consulting trips took him from his native San Francisco down to Los Angeles, where he met engineer and occultist Jack Parsons. (Richard believes he must have met the young L. Ron Hubbard then, but cannot now recall any such encounters.) During one of those trips, Richard ran afoul of an anti-Semitic gang loosely associated with the newly reorganized Nation of Islam and received the scalp burns that make his hair such a patchy mess.

Parsons' Crowley-imitating occultism proved fascinating, and Richard soon surpassed his teacher. His amateur attempts at demon summoning through human sacrifice came to the attention of a Lasombra Abyss mystic, who studied him for several years before arranging Richard's Embrace in 1954. The new vampire won distinction during the 1957 insurrection and joined the Black Eagles pack not long thereafter. Under a variety of cover identities, he continued to do some mainframe design and programming up through the 1970s.

Now unable to keep current with his field, he focuses on the welfare of the pack itself.

Sometimes Richard remembers two other stories.

In one, he's a Bostonian literary critic who learned about computers by having early programmers as roommates. His burns were purely accidental, inflicted at an autumn bonfire at which Richard got a little too drunk. He attracted Lasombra attention for his elegant, cynical dissection of several local poets, culminating in the scandalous suicide of one of them on the night after her engagement was announced. In the other story, he's once again a programmer, this time shuttling between aerospace projects in Denver and Raleigh-Durham. He had no interest in the occult — he simply came to the attention of a Lasombra sire who recognized that the Sabbat would need members who understand computers. He received the burns on the night of his Embrace, in a slightly bungled effort to fake his death.

In the early '80s, Richard came to the conclusion that unitary identity is a mortal weakness that Cainites can overcome, and he stopped worrying about his conflicting memories.

Image: Richard stands just over six feet tall. His most distinctive feature is his scarred scalp and the mess it makes of his hair — for a while he was annoyed to find himself treated as an obvious punk music fan, and in recent years a wave of punk nostalgia has brought the compliments back again, even more annoying this time around. He points without much result to his immaculate regimen of suit and tie, or (for possibly messy field work) untagged versions of his old Army kit.

Roleplaying Hints: You used to miss humanity. Not any more. The world that once absorbed is, whatever it actually was, gone now. The Sabbat defines your existence, and you're satisfied with it. You take vicarious pleasure in the accomplishments of your packmates and do what you can to discipline them so that they can do, well, *almost* as well as you did in your prime.

Sire: probably Almira Veracruz, then Bishop of Oakland
Nature: Director
Demeanor: Judge
Generation: 11th
Embrace: 1954
Apparent Age: mid-30s
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 4
Talents: Alertness 3, Dodge 1, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 3
Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 2, Security 4, Stealth 2
Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 2, Finance 4, Investigation 2, Law 2, Occult (Abyss) 3, Sabbat Lore 3, Science 3
Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Resources 2
Disciplines: Celerity 1, Dominate 4, Obtenebration 2
Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 3, Courage 4
Morality: Humanity 5
Willpower: 7

Geoffrey Armor, Priest

Background: Geoffrey actually served as an unwitting pack member for three years while he was still alive. Richard discovered him exploiting very subtle weaknesses in CompuServe in 1982, when Geoffrey was seventeen and using his parents' computer to grind out high-quality warez. Geoffrey showed an aptitude for trivia and problem solving that stood out even in the crowd of extremely diligent, utterly bored teenage hackers he belonged to. Richard was still active in the BBSing scene then, under two prominent handles, and passed specific chores to Geoffrey as a sort of test, both of aptitude and morality. The boy showed wide-ranging competence and an utter disregard for ethical issues, and by 1984 he drew a regular stipend from Black Eagle Consulting for help on encryption and networking chores.

In 1984, Geoffrey went through a round of chemotherapy for leukemia. It ended successfully with the disease in remission, but Richard decided not to take a chance on losing a valuable asset. Geoffrey was fascinated by the whole notion of vampirism and took immediately to the Sabbat — he already regarded the vast majority of humanity as boring prey, so it wasn't much of a stretch for him. He studied the occult with the same determination he applied to hacking, cataloging a huge body of lore with an eye for unexpected correlations. The Embrace didn't do anything to relieve his hot temper and deep-seated conviction of personal correctness, and he had some close scrapes in his early years. Eventually he learned how to stifle the most egregious insults, and things went better thereafter.

Geoffrey has served as pack priest since 1993. His detached attitude means that he has no personal agenda to push, and his knack for careful questioning makes him quite useful as a spiritual advisor.

Image: Geoffrey still looks like a teenage geek — he's very likely to get carded for any purchases with age restrictions. He hopes that eventually he can work permanent alterations in his appearance, because he's tired of the hassles. In the meantime, he generally dresses casually, but when the situation calls for a dandy, he's the one the Black Eagles send in. He has by far the pack's most extensive collection of really fine suits and knows how to wear them properly.

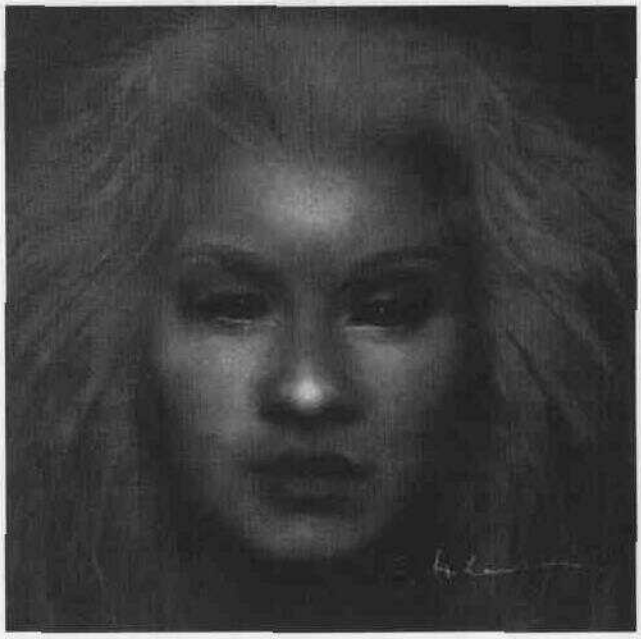
Roleplaying Hints: Unlife is the hack that never ends. Hacking's always been a means to two ends for you — superior knowledge and superior status. Well, you know things that your former peers could never dream of (or cope with if they did), and you're one of the secret masters of the world. Hot damn! This is a great way to go. You love your existence and will go to any lengths to protect it.

Sire: Richard Weinstein
Nature: Thrill-Seeker
Demeanor: Thrill-Seeker
Generation: 12th
Embrace: 1985
Apparent Age: late teens
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 3, Leadership 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4
Skills: Firearms 3, Security 4
Knowledges: Computer 4, Investigation 4, Occult (Abyss) 4, Science 1
Backgrounds: none
Disciplines: Dominate 1, Obfuscate 1, Obtenebration 2, Potence 1
Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 3, Courage 4
Morality: Humanity 4
Willpower: 6

Angelica Shawn

Background: Angelica says little about her mortal life. Her packmates know that she came of age somewhere on the West Coast in the 1950s, and that she earned a reputation early on as a deviant of some sort. They know that she spent time in mental hospitals undergoing elaborate drug therapies and even electroshock. They know that she became a vampire while in prison for the attempted murder of her family, a desperate effort on her part to avoid more medical assaults. She never discusses the rest.

In fact, Angelica was transgendered. Her family interpreted her desire to become physically as well as mentally female as evidence of psychosis. She accepted the Embrace in part because the Sabbat pack preying on her cell block happened to use Vicissitude in her presence. She offered to pay any price they cared to name for the power to change her form that way. She spent the next decade in the midst of danger, performing whatever grunt chores the pack assigned her in



exchange for the occasional fix of Vicissitude. When, ten years on, they deigned to work a permanent transformation on her, she diablerized the pack leader and fled.

As a mortal she'd studied mathematics, and while she had no applied experience with computers, she found herself crossing paths with Black Eagles more and more often during the '70s thanks to shared interest in some sorts of mortal targets. Gradually she went from loner status to pack member. She could in theory challenge Richard for leadership, but she prefers to let someone else deal with the Sabbat hierarchy whenever possible. This way she gets to work with the group she cares about and dodges the hassles.

Image: Angelica chose an exotic combination of features for herself; observers sometimes make out traces of African and Caribbean ancestry, but the product is uniquely her own. She has alert gray eyes and long white hair. Most of the time she favors functional, casual clothing, but when the pack needs "social engineering," she can compete with Geoffrey for the honor of best-dressed member.

Roleplaying Hints: Humanity has potential, but so does dirt. You remain consumed with rage at the society that made you suffer. Never mind the grand crusade for the future of the world, you just want to make the bastards who hurt you bleed. And you want to make the sheep who acquiesce to their tyranny bleed, too. No amount of human misery will satisfy you. It's only among vampires that you can calm down long enough to pursue your chosen science.

Sire: Warrior
Nature: Visionary
Demeanor: Competitor
Generation: 11th (originally 12th)
Embrace: 1962
Apparent Age: 30
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4
Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Expression 3, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2
Skills: Animal Ken 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Performance 1, Security 2
Knowledges: Academics 3, Law 3, Linguistics 1 (Spanish), Occult 2, Science 4
Backgrounds: none
Disciplines: Dominate 3, Obtenebration 3, Potence 2
Virtues: Conviction 4, Instinct 2, Courage 4
Morality: Path of Night 4
Willpower: 8

Katherine Schmidt

Background: Katherine grew up in a household steeped in both arts and sciences. Her father was a famous geologist, her mother an equally famous illustrator. Quite early in life, Katherine decided that she'd combine the two, and developed her skills as a scientific and technical artist. Her parents enthusiastically supported her, though she won enough scholarships to pay her own way.

Her first brush with the Sabbat occurred in Paris. A pack of Toreador *antitribu* preyed on students the year she studied at the Sorbonne, destroying anyone whose work failed to entrance them. Katherine woke up one night to find three confused vampires peering at her gorgeous drawings of snail shells and carefully inked diagrams of bolt configurations, at once overwhelmed by her talent and totally bored by the subjects. For a long time she said nothing. They did not speak. In the end, they left, leaving her to wonder if it was all just a hallucination.

Years later she had her second encounter. By then she was well established at a university press, mounting occasional (usually successful) exhibitions of her personal illustration projects and dabbling in arts and crafts from gem polishing to

candle making. She was taking down pictures after a show when a vampire murdered the gallery owner, turned to Katherine— then froze, entranced by her work. A second vampire entered the gallery. He killed the first, murmured, "Until later," to Katherine, and dragged the corpses out.

She wasn't good for much after that. She saw supernatural apparitions everywhere. Her work suffered, becoming what critics called uninspired. In truth, she'd lost her faith that science and logic mattered to the world that forced itself on her in the night. She struggled back to a point of poise, abandoning scientific work for disturbing surrealistic work on horrific subjects.

The Black Eagles discovered her then. They watched her recovery and her growing occult fascination, and decided that they'd benefit from having an artist in the ranks. Three members of the pack appeared to her one night and told her the rest of the truth. She had a single question: "Will I be able to hunt down the ones who stalked me?" When told that she could, she accepted the Embrace. She's still coming to terms with her condition and goes through bouts of intense self-loathing for which she compensates with ever more fervent efforts on behalf of the pack.

Image: Katherine is a short, stout woman with curly brown hair. She doesn't actually need glasses, but she wears them out of habit, along with many-pocketed coats and trousers stuffed full of drawing tools.

Roleplaying Hints: The artist must always portray what she knows. How can you turn back on the challenge of whole new categories of experience? Soon, you hope, you'll be able to render your new knowledge in suitable media. In the meantime, you work with your new "colleagues" and appreciate the opportunity to make things harsh for the Toreador and their allies. The worst poseur that ever lived was not one-tenth the threat to real art that those creatures are. The Jyhad cannot come soon enough for you.

Sire: Richard Weinstein
Nature: Perfectionist
Demeanor: Conformist
Generation: 12th
Embrace: 1997
Apparent Age: late 30s
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1
Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2
Talents: Alertness 2, Dodge 1, Expression 4
Skills: Crafts 3, Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 1, Performance 3
Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 1, Law 2, Linguistics 2 (French, German), Occult 2, Science 4 (Geology)
Backgrounds: none
Disciplines: Dominate 2, Obtenebration 1, Potence 1
Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 3, Courage 3
Morality: Humanity 4
Willpower: 5

Lasombra of Note

Cardinal Monçada

The mastermind of Clan Lasombra has been destroyed. For nearly a thousand years he led much of his clan and sect toward a vision of Cainite mastery, under the dark banner of Heaven's wrath. He brokered truces, persuaded some antagonists and destroyed others, all the while staying a dozen moves ahead of would-be challengers. The Cardinal originated many of the policies that now define the Lasombra's position in the Final Nights, from rapid expansion into the New World to building brood havens on imperial frontiers.

For centuries, his mirrored chambers beneath Madrid were the epicenter of Lasombra culture. Monçada led his clan far more often than the Friends of the Night gathering in the ruined Sicilian stronghold and other places important in clan history.

Hubris took him, in the end. A combination of unforeseen circumstances destroyed him in an Assamite attack on his haven. An Abyssal guardian summoned long ago to guard his innermost sanctum turned on him, thanks to a peculiar conflict of imperatives which none of the survivors understand very well (or even at all). Now he's gone on to find the eternal punishment he always expected.

The surviving portions of the Cardinal's haven have become a pilgrimage destination for devout Lasombra, and even for some devout Cainites of other clans. They travel to see the spot where the greatest advocate of Cainites' role as tools of divine vengeance fell, and to ponder their own uncertain futures. A small coterie of elder Lasombra protect pilgrims in and around Madrid, shielding them from would-be predators.

Lucita

The most famous independent member of Clan Lasombra faces her own difficulties. She took part in the Assamite assault on her sire the Cardinal, and believed that his destruction would at last bring her peace. It hasn't. His presence within her mind is now gone forever. His legacy of ideas and challenges remains.

Lucita hadn't fully grasped the extent to which her existence was a series of negatives. She'd acted, more often than she realized, in whatever way would most displease her sire and interfere with his plans. Now it doesn't matter. He doesn't see or care. (At least, none of the mediums or necromancers she's spoken with find any lingering trace of his soul.) Offending and sabotaging her sire's aims was never her only motive, but with the Cardinal gone, the others jumble together in unfamiliar patterns.

Now Lucita finds herself seeking out the company of other vampires on occasions besides the start or end of a contract. In a variety of disguises, she listens to how fervent neonates in both the Camarilla and Sabbat define their senses of purpose, and to how elders worn down by recent struggles discuss what to do next. For the moment, she's stepped away from Fatima, whose attention to Assamite clan affairs offers no insight to the problems Lucita wrestles with.

Lucita-spotting is a centuries-old hobby among the Lasombra. In recent nights, rumors put her in so many interesting locales. For even half of them to be true, she'd have to spend all of her time traveling and then slipping up in ways that make her visible. In fact, the vast majority of her real appearances among other vampires go altogether undetected. At least a few ambitious neonates and ancillae sometimes impersonate her. She finds this amusing and lets them do it, knowing that the penalties for being caught will in time weed out the crowd.

Zarathustra

Beyond the Sabbat and the *antitribu*, some Lasombra regard all sect labels as so much transitory fluff. Of these, Zarathustra is one of the most active. A native of Antioch (in modern Turkey), he was Embraced by a veteran of the post-Thera dispersal while in central Asia with Alexander the Great's army. After a mortal lifetime's worth of wandering, he settled in his home town and set about protecting and improving it. He continues to do so in the new millennium, when not in torpor.

Zarathustra is of the fifth generation. He can trace his offspring all the way down to 14th generation neonates created since the Gulf War. At various times, his lineage has included more than a hundred active members. Thanks to unsuccessful crusades and a wave of successful vampire hunting by Sunni Muslim nationalists, only forty or so members of the lineage walk the modern nights. Zarathustra himself remains unchallenged as secret father of the city.

He owes much of his success to a single-minded focus: Only events that affect Antioch concern him. When the Crusades brought invading armies through his city, he learned enough about mortal politics and religion to effectively direct his childer to route marauding hordes elsewhere. When Ottoman forces overwhelmed Turkey's western shores, Zarathustra and his childer studied Islam and learned how to help their favored mortal families adjust. When Attaturk's nationalism brought Turkey into contact with the Western powers, Zarathustra learned the language of imperialism and oversaw a combination of diplomacy and covert manipulation that protected Antioch, albeit at the cost of leaving other parts of Turkey vulnerable to exploitation. They weren't his concern.

Antioch was a commercial port long before Zarathustra's own time, and his lineage includes many merchants and traders. In the Final Nights, some members of the line oversee brokerages in Chicago and commodity exchanges in Shanghai, while a complex network of overlapping directorates manages thousands of tons of shipping each year for the lineage's benefit.

Zarathustra survived the early Sabbat efforts to wipe out all Methuselahs through a combination of prudence and good luck. He allowed his lineage to take part in some Sabbat efforts, if they wanted to, and resorted to bribery as well as intimidation to direct war parties at other targets. (In the course of thirty years or so in the mid-15th century, he used the Sabbat to eliminate at least a dozen of his most serious rivals in coastal Turkey.) When necessary, he simply withdrew into shadow with arts unknown to neonates and waited until their fervor burned out.

Once or twice a century, Zarathustra agrees to serve on a Court of Blood. He's adjudicated matters for both the Sabbat and the *antitribu*. No younger vampire quite understands how he chooses cases, but the other judging Friends agree that each time Zarathustra serves, he acts within the code of conduct accepted by the participants rather

than imposing his own views. He also meets with promising neonates — rumor says he sends childer and grandchilder out to wean ambitious Lasombra away from the Sabbat. He doesn't presume to tell the rest of Caine's offspring how to run their affairs, but when asked he makes a potent case for simple independence.

Demba Makemba Adoula, "Conrad"

Background: Makemba Adoula grew up amid one of the great atrocities of the 19th century, the Belgian occupation of the Congo. Under King Leopold, a literal army of soldiers and a sprawling mob of opportunists swarmed over the landscape in search of precious metals and any other loot. Disease took a horrendous toll — many settlements lost 90% of their European population *every year* — but more young men were always willing to risk it all in the pursuit of wealth. Elaborate machinery rusted. Fanciful buildings rotted. Livestock sickened and died. The European presence became a scene of constant entropy.

Diseases swept through the native populations as well. Soldiers massacred whole villages. Panicked natives went to war with each other as well as with the invaders, and religious fervor kindled fanatical crusades of all sorts. This was life when Makemba grew up along the banks of the Congo.

As a young woman, she fell under the sway of one of the countless charismatic conquerors who carved little personal empires for themselves out of the jungle. She learned something about European technology and culture, and watched an icy dark passion consume her mentor from the inside. ("Icy" was itself a foreign concept to her, and the notion of water stripped of every property she associated with it fascinated her.) When he died, she threw herself into a blind panic and raced away from the river, toward some fresh illumination.

Elias Bruylant was a two-hundred-year-old Lasombra who came with some of the very first European explorers in the 1860s. He built a haven for himself in ruins on the Sangha tributary of the Congo River and gathered select natives who showed leadership potential. He'd watched Makemba's mentor with interest and marked his student as a woman who might go far, if liberated from her mortal constraints. When she fled, he followed and brought her to his haven. There he explained very politely what he was going to do, and forcibly Embraced her.

Unlife wasn't altogether a shock for the new vampire. She already despaired of life, and following her mentor's darkening philosophy found it somehow quite suitable to now be wholly dependent upon others as a parasite. Gradually she explored the scope of her new powers. When she and Elias agreed she was ready, she went to Europe to investigate her mentor's homeland. She's never returned to the Congo, though she occasionally visits other parts of Africa.

Europe dazzled her. Here were empires and philosophies such as she'd never dreamed, and not a one of them could resist her blood-granted powers. She traveled the continent, making the acquaintance of her fellow Lasombra and gradually joining in the Sabbat's cause. Cardinal Monçada made her a personal project for several years after World War I, hoping to convince her to adopt his theology, but she had no use for his notion of God. She parted with him after explaining that as far as she was concerned, his God was her Devil and she didn't need to worship one power of darkness with two faces.

In the 1920s, she began calling herself "Conrad" in a quiet personal nod to a Polish-English writer who made a deep impression on her. He'd been to her homeland and seen the same horrors she had, and captured them in prose that spoke to her soul. In moments when she felt purposeless and truly dead, his written anger would rekindle her desire to reshape the world.

During the Great Depression, she came to the New World in search of fresh opportunities. Her natural flair for rhetoric gives her many opportuni-

ties in black communities, from North American ghettos to poor districts in South America. She loves to stir up trouble and see which souls show enough fire or ice to endure when official persecution descends. From time to time, she dreams of organizing a coordinated Sabbat effort to provoke white governments in more tyrannical states, to see if American empires would breed more people like herself, but so far nothing's come of it.

When she tires of personal ventures, she spends time instructing new recruits in Lasombra history and powers. Herself a product of destructive novelty, she remains curious about the opportunities that the new century's chaos may bring forth. The notion of impending Gehenna seems ludicrous to her — somebody's world is *always* ending, and from it comes new vampires.

Image: When she's not in disguise, Conrad is a tall slim woman with an extremely dark complexion. *Her face is scarred with ritual marks, overlaid with* garbled Westerns symbols she picked up from her insane mentor. She prefers to dress simply, in shirts and trousers that give her room to move freely, though she can match the heights of fashion when she chooses to. When she deals with mortals, she uses Obfuscate to very slightly shift her features, just enough so that she seems to belong in whatever community she's manipulating.

Roleplaying Hints: You have a deep and spreading hatred for mortal society. You hate the conquerors who destroyed your hopes, and you hate your own people for lacking the spiritual strength to resist. You now find hope only in individuals who prove they can overcome, and dedicate yourself to finding them, then releasing them from the prison that is life. You "grew up" outside the Sabbat, and even now it isn't quite so central for you as it is for Sabbat-created neonates. With time, whether you will it or not, your personal crusade intertwines more closely with the Sabbat's great war. You're not sure whether you like that or not.

Sire: Elias Bruylant
Nature: Visionary
Demeanor: Architect
Generation: 10th
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2
Skills: Animal Ken 1, Crafts 2, Etiquette 1, Firearms 3, Stealth 3, Survival 3
Knowledges: Linguistics 3 (Belgian, English, French), Medicine 1, Occult 2, Sabbat Lore 2
Backgrounds: none
Disciplines: Dominate 2, Obfuscate 3, Obtenebration 5, Potence 1
Virtues: Conviction 3, Self-Control 3, Courage 5
Morality: Path of Night (Cold Path) 6
Willpower: 7

Lin Baloh, the Bloodthirsty Prophet

Background: Lin Baloh grew up in a China torn by unrest. The governing Qing dynasty lacked widespread legitimacy — its emperors were Manchu, rather than Han Chinese, and in a time that called for quick response and intelligent seizing of opportunities, they could only ossify Confucian orthodoxy and bar the door against intruders. But in the early 19th century, the invaders didn't just come on horseback or with scrolls proclaiming dangerous ideas. They came with guns.

Baloh came to manhood during the Taiping Rebellion, in which a southern Chinese man proclaimed himself Jesus' younger brother and rightful emperor, gathering millions together into an army that the Qing could defeat only with Western mercenaries. Baloh's family was ethnically Chinese but Jewish in practice, an offshoot of a centuries-old Jewish enclave there. They had no faith in the Taiping leader's divinity but supported him as a more vigorous alternative to the

Qing. Baloh's father and three of his brothers joined the revolt, and all died in battle or were executed once the rebellion failed. Baloh stayed home to tend the family farm outside Nanking and thus escaped punishment.

Baloh didn't escape the pervasive despair that followed. He became an opium addict in a search for distraction from life's grinding routine. When tax collectors took the last of the family estate, he wandered to the city, doing just enough day labor to pay for more opium.

A few opium users sometimes slip into rages rather than stupor while under the influence. Baloh proved to be one of these. He came to the attention of Nanking's Lasombra brood in a particularly artistic and violent rampage along the waterfront, in which he used spilled perfumes and spices to create huge calligraphic insults directed at the port authorities. The brood was impressed by his courage and resolve even while exhausted and drugged, and brought him into their care. He served them as a ghoul for more than a decade, doing daytime errands and learning how to apply his blood-given powers to acts of creative destruction.

He won the Embrace during a dock strike, when he was trapped with his soon-to-be sire in a burning warehouse. Baloh persuaded the vampire to let Baloh work out an escape, one that required true vampiric might. The vampire accepted. Baloh did in fact escape and never had to explain what happened to the desiccated corpse left behind. The other members of the brood saw Baloh's obvious burns and assumed that the older Cainite wasn't quite fast enough to escape a falling roof beam or something of the sort.

The Nanking Lasombra had been *antitribu* ever since they received word of the Sabbat's existence. Baloh played a decisive role in changing that. His own act of sire destruction fed his appetite for more, and he carefully set about making contact with the Western Sabbat who sometimes sheltered in his port. He finally struck in 1889 (exploiting a brief panic among Westerners in the port that Jack the Ripper had come there from London), leading a pack of shock troops. Half the existing brood joined the Sabbat. The other half perished.

Baloh became one of the youngest Lasombra invited into the Friends of the Night since the first great Sabbat revolt, not long thereafter, and he still plays a crucial role in keeping the scattered Asian Sabbat in touch with each other and in accord with sound doctrine. He continues to spend most of his time in Nanking, but travels several times a year to meet with his fellow warriors in convenient ports throughout the region. He managed to forestall many potentially sect-disrupting problems during World War II through an aggressive program of establishing Vinculum bonds, which continues to tie diverse packs together. The news of mysterious chaos in India and Bangladesh not long ago roused him to even more fervent effort. He believes the great war is coming, and he intends to remain standing at the end of it.

Image: Baloh is five and a half feet tall, and somewhat gaunt. He wears his black hair closely cut and often shaves his head. He began unlife with a long queue, but got it caught in an awkward moment once too often. He dresses in Western jeans and flannel shirts, looking very much like a textbook example of a "Westernized hooligan" as found in Chinese police manuals. While he doesn't deliberately go looking for fights, he certainly does nothing to avoid them, and prefers to dress functionally for the purpose. He often wears wraparound sunglasses, having been impressed by Arnold Schwartzenegger's look in *Terminator*.

Roleplaying Hints: Unlife is wonderful! In a particularly perverse way, you have become the well-balanced man of Confucian lore, balancing physical, intellectual and aesthetic exertion into a single harmonious whole. Of course, Confucius didn't think of the whole being directed toward the subjugation of all living flesh, but that's sages for you. You like who and what you are, and you take great satisfaction in strengthening the Sabbat in this land, far from the sect's birthplace. The recent omens worry you, but you compensate by being that much more attentive to preparations. Victory will be yours.

Sire: Unknown

Nature: Competitor

Demeanor: Guru

Generation: 11th

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Expression 3, Intimidation 4, Leadership 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Security 3, Stealth 3

Knowledges: Finance 1, Investigation 3, Linguistics 3 (English, Japanese, Vietnamese)

Backgrounds: Contacts 3

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Celerity 2, Dominate 4, Fortitude 2, Obtenebration 3, Potence 3

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

Morality: Humanity 3 (preparing to adopt Path of Night (Hot Path))

Willpower: 8

LASOMBRA™

Name:	Nature:	Generation:
Player:	Demeanor:	Sire:
Chronicle:	Concept:	Haven:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Finance	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Security	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Disciplines		Virtues	
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●○○○○

Merits/Flaws

Humanity/Path

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Blood Pool

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Health

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

Weakness

Casts No Reflection

LASOMBRA™

Other Traits

00000	00000	00000
00000	00000	00000
00000	00000	00000
00000	00000	00000
00000	00000	00000
00000	00000	00000
00000	00000	00000

Rituals

Name	Level

Experience

Total: _____

Total Spent: _____

spent on:

Derangements

Blood Bonds/ Vinculi

Bound to	Rating	Bound to	Rating

Combat

Weapon	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

Armor

LASOMBRA

Expanded Background

Allies

Mentor

Contacts

Resources

Fame

Retainers

Herd

Status

Influence

Other

Possessions

Gear (Carried)

Equipment (Owned)

Feeding Grounds

Vehicles

Havens

Location

Description

LASOMBRA™

History

Prelude

Appearance

Age _____

Apparent Age _____

Date of Birth _____

RIP _____

Hair _____

Eyes _____

Race _____

Nationality _____

Height _____

Weight _____

Sex _____

Visuals

Coterie Chart

Character Sketch