
Children of the
INQUISITION

From the ashes of Hell arise the darkest angels

By Dan Greenberg

CREDITS

Author: Daniel Greenberg

Editing: Robert Hatch

Layout: Richard Thomas, Sean Chupp

Art Director: Richard Thomas

Art: Tim Bradstreet, Dough Gregory, Tony Harris

Border Art: Josh Timbrock

Front Cover: Dough Gregory

Back Cover: Christ McDonough

Photography: Amy Evans, Kevin Brauch, Kristin Lee and Alan Lapp

Brad's Models: Dan Ryan, Mat Casalt, Cindy Fliege, Alex Colby, Kristen Lee

Doug's Models: Eyveste, Raoul, Pierre, Karma, Ben Jody, Craig, Molly, Pipa, Malcolm, April, Tracy, Mark, Paul, Lauren, Jason, Cam

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*Cain slew Abel, Seth knew not why
For if the children of Israel were to multiply
Why must any of the children die?*

Randy Newman, "God's Song"

INTRODUCTION

You may have seen them – suave, harsh, cool, wild, brash or savage. But never dull. And always dangerous.

They are vampires. And they are very real. This is their story – a story fraught with falsehoods and outright lies.

The Damned

Any mortal bitten by a vampire is doomed to die and become a vampire in turn.

Falsehood. If this were true, the world's undead would quickly outnumber the world's living. A vampire usually takes a small quantity of blood from a victim and releases him alive and without memory of the incident. To create a new vampire, the undead must drain the victim to the point of death and then feed the victim a dose of its own blood.

Vampires have powerful supernatural abilities; they can turn into animals, control people and disappear into mist.

Truth. However, not all vampires have the same powers. Supernatural gifts and power levels vary tremendously according to clan and age. Vampires usually control humans through their Discipline of Domination, or by offering them power. They control other vampires through the Blood Bond, a mystical infatuation induced when one vampire feeds its blood to another vampire three times in succession.

Vampires can only feed on human blood.

Falsehood. Vampires can subsist on animal blood, and can also consume the blood of other vampires. As vampires become very old, even human blood loses its allure, and regular consumption of other vampires' blood is required to stay "alive." This is a source of conflict between the vampire generations.

Garlic and crosses stop a vampire, and a stake through the heart kills it.

Lie. Vampires gleefully promote nostrums like these. Garlic and crosses have no effect on vampires, though a wizard may use herbs in a spell to fight a vampire, and a holy person may use a religious symbol to focus divine wrath. A stake through the heart only paralyzes the vampire. To fully destroy a vampire, one must decapitate it or utterly destroy the body. Before a vampire dies, it goes into a state of suspended animation called torpor. Very old vampires whose blood has thinned also go into torpor.

There are no such things as vampires. They're myths.

Lie. That's what they want you to think.

The World of Blood

Behind our cheerful world of bright morning colors lies another world. A world of silence, shadows and sudden screams. A world of vampires.

Perhaps you know one.

You met her at night. Her presence was intoxicating, exciting, disturbing, unsettling and frightening all at once. Afterward you felt disoriented, lightheaded, uneasy. And exhausted. Always so very tired afterward. Drained. Maybe you felt cheap. Mistreated. Used. But you also felt exhilarated. Like you wanted more. If you could only remember what happened...

You might have met a vampire.

Many of us have. They are far more common than we believe. And they have been with us since the very beginning. But they haven't always been so discreet.

Children of Caine

Vampires lurk in every corner of the earth. They call themselves the Kindred, and they trace their lineage back to the man and the third human – Caine.

After the Fall from the Garden of Eden, Caine slew his brother Abel. The first murderer, cursed to wander the earth forever, could no longer derive sustenance from food, but had to live off the death of his brethren. Blood was his crime, and blood his legacy.

He created three children, his childer, who bore his curse. They too sired children, usually numbered at thirteen, before Caine looked upon their acts with horror and forbade further progeny. The first vampire then founded a great city of mortals, which fell into a terrible cataclysm. The thirteen childer of the third generation, now called Antediluvians, escaped Caine's control and each founded a great clan. The create of subsequent generations, each weaker than the last, allowed the immortal Antediluvians great control over their offspring.

Anarch War

Caine's blood thinned over the millennia and he fell into a state of supernatural sleep called torpor. The clans of Caine spread over the earth unchecked and tyrannized the world.

When vampiric abuse of mortal civilizations grew too oppressive, humans rose up to overthrow their tormentors. But human society rarely has a memory longer than a lifetime, and the immortal vampires always stole back into power.

The Kindred have ravaged the whole world, fighting each other for power and ruling over human kingdoms with undead fury. Clan has battled clan for territory, and young vampires, called anarchs, have fought the old vampires, called elders. At stake: nothing less than the right to self-determination and power over mortal society.

The anarchs discovered a terrible secret. If they could kill and consume an elder, they could absorb his power. They attacked their progenitors whenever they could, and inter-generation warfare decimated the clans. They even consumed powerful Antediluvians.

The Inquisition

By the Middle Ages, vampires flaunted their power over mortals' lives with impunity. They brazenly terrorized the fearful, superstitious people of the world. However, such could not go on forever. Mortals rose up in an organized Inquisition, determined to flush out and destroy the monsters. Hundreds of vampires fell in the fiery, apocalyptic slaughter that followed. The Kindred and their mortal allies managed to save themselves by tricking the Inquisition into attacking the poor and powerless. Hundreds of thousands of innocent mortals perished in the ensuing crusades and "witch trials."

But though the vampires survived, they were never the same again. Torn apart by mortals from without and anarchs from within, the clans had to band together to avoid destruction. Seven clans joined together in an organization known as the Camarilla, and hid from humanity behind a great Masquerade. They pretended to be mortals, and taught mortals to embrace cold science and reject intuition and superstition. Soon most mortals believed vampires were nothing more than myths.

The remaining clans of anarchs, who had succeeded in killing elders and Antediluvians alike, formed the Camarilla's primary rival, the brutal sect known as the Sabbat. A group of elder, independent vampires, disgusted with the Camarilla and Sabbat alike, formed the mysterious sect known as the Inconnu in order to seek Golconda, a state of grace and salvation for vampires. But to gain power the would-be transcendentalists bargained with a demon, and soon must face the bitter consequences.

The Present

Today, most vampires have chosen their side in this epic struggle. On one side stands the Camarilla, composed of the Brujah, Gangrel, Malkavians, Nosferatu, Toreador, Tremere and Ventrue. While it ostensibly includes all vampires, only a few independents have joined. On the other side is the Sabbat, made up primarily of Lasombra and Tzimisce vampires, though it also includes a large number of *antitribus*, or vampires of the Camarilla clans who have changed sides.

Watching from the sidelines are the independent vampires. Most famous of these are the members of the Inconnu, those vampires powerful enough to stay alive without joining any side. Also remaining free are the Assamites, Followers of Set, Giovanni and Ravnos.

The End

Vampire Scholars fear an impending apocalypse, which they refer to as Gehenna. On the eve of Gehenna, the learned whisper, the Antediluvians will arise to consume their wayward progeny. Even the elders fear that fateful night, and though many Kindred consider Gehenna a myth, recent signs and omens point to its rapid approach. Here, then, are the stories of thirteen vampires who radically changed the shape of history during the time of the Inquisition.

Vlad Tepes: Dracula

Member of the Ancient Inconnu

*And when we fell together, all our flesh was like a veil
That I had to draw aside to see the serpent eat its tail.
Some women wait for Jesus, and some women wait for Cain,
So I hang upon my altar, and I hoist my axe again.
And I take the one who finds me back to where it all began,
when Jesus was the honeymoon, and Cain was just a man.
And we read from pleasant Bibles that are bound in blood and skin,
That the wilderness is gathering all its children back again.*
Leonard Cohen, "Last Year's Man"

No horror story chills us to the marrow like the myth of Dracula. Everything we consider wicked, perverse and frightfully seductive lurks behind his regal bearing and fanged smile. Most people think the vampire Dracula existed only in fiction. Very few know he was a real flesh and blood prince who ruled in Transylvania during the age of the Crusades, and that he ended the lives of a hundred thousand people. Fewer still are aware of his continued existence, or that he wields greater power in undeath than he ever did in life.

The Impaler Prince

To primitive people, Dracula is a chilling fable used to frighten and discipline children. To civilized people, Dracula is a cheap entertainment used to frighten and thrill adults. Those few people who are familiar with the historical life of the enigmatic Prince Vlad Dracula scoff at the notion that he became a vampire. Even some of Vlad's fellow vampires consider the Dracula story to be a mere fable. That's exactly the way Dracula likes it. He's hiding in plain sight.

The Dracula legend is gruesome indeed. Eyewitnesses called him Vlad Tepes (tsepesch), or Vlad the Impaler, and accused him of killing tens of thousands of innocent people in ghastly public executions during the high Middle Ages. Accounts of his atrocities surfaced in Russia, Turkey, Germany, Hungary and his native Romania. Superstitious people around the world gleefully spread tales of his bloodlust, his fondness for slow deaths, his blood drinking and the macabre humor with which the vampire prince carried out his executions. All of it is true, except for one minor detail. His bloodthirsty tortures all occurred *before* he became a vampire.

The rest of the Dracula legend is factual. The Wallachian prince Vlad cruelly tortured and impaled tens of thousands of people on blunt stakes during his bloody reign in the lands near Transylvania. After his death, he became one of the greatest and most influential of all vampires. Indeed, he dared challenge the supremacy of the ancient progenitor vampires, the Antediluvians, and became their potent enemy. Few vampires beside Vlad have been a member of the Camarilla, the Sabbat and the mysterious Inconnu.

Though the Germans, Hungarians, Russians and Turks concur Dracula was the most vile of rulers and a butcher prince, his native Romanians still speak of him with reverence, calling him a man of utmost honor. This devotion has baffled scholars, who

point out that Dracula was just as likely to impale whole towns of his own people as he was to torture the Turks against whom he fought. Vampires and the few mortals in whom Dracula has confided share the same high respect for him, speaking in glowing tones of his great honor and ethical conduct.

To understand these contradictions, we must look at the times during which Dracula ruled as a prince and as a powerful vampire. We must examine the sacrifices necessary to protect a tiny nation trapped between two colossal warring empires, and the sacrifices necessary to protect a tiny planet caught in the grip of powerful, invisible, ancient evil.

Bloodthirsty butcher or honorable gentleman? Or both?

Vlad's life, death, unlife and motivations past and present have been shrouded in mystery. Until now.

We shed some light into his tomb.

The Dragon's Tale

Prince Vlad Dracula, second son of Vlad Dracul, ruled the realm of Wallachia in southern Transylvania (now known as Romania) during the fifteenth century. The Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund invested both father and son with membership in the secret monastic and military organization called the Order of the Dragon. This secret society gave the elder Vlad the surname Dracul (Romanian for Dragon) and charged him with fighting the enemies of the Church, both natural and supernatural. Vlad called his sons Dracula: son of the Dragon, or little Dragon. Only later in life would the younger Vlad earn the name Tepes - the Impaler.

In those dark times, only the fragile states of Serbia, Bulgaria and Transylvania stood between the Christian Holy Roman Empire to the north and east and the Islamic Ottoman Empire to the south and west. Life in this vulnerable no-man's land was always dangerous and more than slightly schizophrenic. The Turkish sultans constantly pressured the Transylvanian rulers to convert to Islam, while the Christian kings demanded the Transylvanians defend the faith and act as a fire wall against the sweeping religious inferno to the south.

Fear, instability and constant violence filled this fragile border kingdom as both empires resorted to treachery, assassination and outright conquest to claim the strategically vital land in Transylvania. Wallachian rulers constantly faced bad options and no-win situations. To further complicate matters, the tiny nation bordered the Orthodox Christian east and the Catholic west, and often felt the heat of the intense feud between the two rival Christian factions. The local Germanic boyar nobles clung tenaciously to power in Wallachia, and constantly undercut the traditional authority of the prince. Meanwhile, all these forces were caught in the crossfire of various covert wars fought by vampire clans, who used nobles, clergy, princes, kings and nations as pawns. Few princes lasted long here. By the fifteenth century, Transylvania was a bubbling cauldron ready to erupt in fury.

The Elder Dragon

Vlad's grandfather, Mircea the Great, ruled in Wallachia as prince and voevode (warlord) for a record thirty-two years. Against all odds, and against the wishes of the boyars, he repelled the powerful Turkish invaders by unifying his people and building a

chain of strategically placed fortresses across Romania. Acting on information from the mysterious vampire Durga Syn, he flushed out and killed some anarch vampires of the Tzimisce clan who had been terrorizing his villages.

As nearby Serbia and Bulgaria began to fall to the encroaching Turks, he petitioned the powerful Holy Roman Empire to send crusaders. However, the meager forces the Christians sent were unseasoned and refused to take advice from Mircea and his experienced legions. Serbia and Bulgaria fell, and the Christians suffered losses so catastrophic that the Holy Roman Emperor gave up on protecting his southern border, instead focusing his resources on fighting heretics within Western Europe.

Mircea tenaciously fought on alone and held his throne without the help of the Empire he defended. In the end, he was forced to pay tribute to the sultan, but unlike Serbia and Bulgaria, feisty Wallachia kept its religion, power, throne and lands.

The Father Dragon

After Mircea died, the difficult task of ruling Wallachia fell to his son, Vlad Dracul, Dracula's father. Dracul ascended to the throne of a land abandoned by Christians and under constant assault by Turks. He had to squander a lot of precious time and energy squabbling with the boyar nobles over policy as they maneuvered to control more state functions. He also made war on the Tzimisce vampires who plagued the countryside, rooting them out of their secret lairs and impaling them. He received some support from his fellow members of the Order of the Dragon, as well as from Durga Syn, but Europe complacently ignored the "less civilized" kingdoms on its extreme border.

The Holy Roman Empire's official representative in the area was Hungarian regent John Hunyadi. Though he crusaded more for money than for ideals, Europeans considered him the greatest crusader of the day, and he controlled the resources of the Empire in the war against the Turks. Hunyadi disliked the rightful Wallachian leader and wanted to put his own puppet on Vlad Dracul's throne. Thus, while he promised to support the Wallachian prince, Hunyadi instead did nothing, leaving Dracul to slowly twist in the wind as the Turks seized each of Mircea's fortresses.

The armies of Sultan Murad II closed their jaws around Transylvania, brutally slaughtering all the peasants they found. Finding himself alone against the Moslems he had sworn to destroy, Dracula's father made a pact with the Turks. Wishing to spare his people the agony of utter destruction, the wily Vlad Dracul agreed to help conquer his own people. He and the very young Dracula rode with the Turks as they massacred, looted and burned their way into Wallachia.

But Dracul outfoxed the sultan, attacking the least loyal areas of Transylvania and allowing the townspeople to surrender rather than be carried off into Turkish slavery. While tying up a huge part of the sultan's army in pointless raids against small villages, Vlad secretly directed his eldest son, Mircea the Younger, to lead lightning strikes against important Turkish positions. The young man successfully reclaimed the entire line of vital Transylvanian fortresses built by his grandfather.

As Turkish conquests of Transylvanian villages left Wallachia more firmly in Christian control than ever before, the sultan began to question Vlad Dracul's loyalty. In 1444, he summoned the prince and his three sons to partake of the hospitality of his court. Vlad smelled a trap, but felt he could outsmart the sultan. He left Mircea at home, knowing his eldest son could continue to rule if he was executed.

Just as Dracul suspected, the sultan ambushed the prince and his two young sons, and took them prisoner. Murad allowed the chastised Dracul to return, but held the boys as hostages to ensure Vlad's loyalty. Dracula was only eleven.

During Dracul's times of trouble, the greatest Christian crusader had done very little. The Pope and the people of Europe called for Hunyadi to unfurl the forces of Christendom. However, rather than feeling bolstered by Wallachia's successful reconquests, Hunyadi took Dracul's victories as sharp and painful reminders of his own inaction. When he could no longer hold out against the pressure, he finally planned a major crusade.

Hunyadi assembled an army he thought sufficient and left the safety of Hunedora Castle to mount the Varna Campaign. However, when he brought his troops to Wallachia, an appalled Vlad Dracul admonished him, pointing out that "the sultan goes hunting with more troops."

Nonetheless, Vlad disregarded his own judgement and the advice of a mysterious old soothsayer, and sent his son Mircea the Younger with five thousand troops. Despite Mircea's brilliant tactics (including the first Romanian use of cannon), the outnumbered Christian army was slaughtered.

Mircea helped the beaten Hunyadi retreat to safety, but then demanded that the regent be held accountable for his tactical blunders. The courts agreed and sentenced Hunyadi to death. But the powerful Hunyadi used his high connections to revoke the sentence. He contacted Dracula's cousin, Vladislav II of the Danesti family, and promised to make him prince in Wallachia if Vladislav would kill Prince Dracul.

Vladislav dispatched assassins to ambush and kill Vlad and Mircea while they were fighting Turks. However, the assassins failed to get near the prince until some Tzimisce vampires offered to help.

Tzimisce Kindred, who hated Dracul because of his successful vampire slayings, used supernatural powers to hunt the prince and his son. Working with the Danesti, the undead captured Mircea the Younger and buried him alive, but the elder Vlad eluded his pursuers long enough to create a secret legacy.

He bundled up his Order of the Dragon medallion, the Toledo blade given to him by Emperor Sigismund, and a letter, and gave the relics to a loyal supporter. He commanded the villager to deliver the package to his heir. Within hours, the assassins caught the elder Vlad in the marshes and killed him. The Tzimisce, acting through Hunyadi, placed Vladislav II on the throne of Wallachia, believing the family of Mircea the Great exterminated.

Son of the Dragon

The cowardly assassination of the wise, daring and cowardly voevode shook the Christian world, but the sultan received the news with glee. Hunyadi had disposed of the only ruler ever to outfox him, installing a weak and incompetent pretender in his stead.

In case Vladislav showed any spine, Murad began to groom Dracul's heirs to serve as puppet rulers. He had some of the greatest scholars in the world educate the boys in statecraft, science, languages, Turkish battle tactics and ancient Greek philosophy. Vlad Dracula was especially impressed by the philosophy of the Cynics, who held that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest. He also learned the mysterious ways of the Sufis and other holy mystics of the Arab world, who taught the opposite point of view.

His unique position in court gave him an ideal vantage point to assess the politics of the Ottoman Empire and determine who really controlled the land. He saw how powerful vampires of the Assamite clan manipulated weak men and thus controlled the important affairs of state. Only the enlightened mystics seemed to clearly understand the extent of the vampire clans' influence.

Dracula's studies sustained him through the ordeal of his captivity and abandonment. He refused to be swayed to the sultan's cause and routinely terrorized his captors, who were forbidden to punish him. By contrast, Dracul's younger son Radu enjoyed the opulence of their gilded imprisonment. He relished the refinements of the sultan's court and became very Turkish in outlook. He especially savored the royal harem, considered a wicked extravagance by Christendom.

Though Radu would have made a more subservient ruler, the sultan decided that retaking the Wallachian throne required Vlad's ferocity and strong leadership. He released the twenty-year-old prince with an Islamic retinue to reclaim his rightful throne. Vlad triumphed over the usurper and ascended to the throne in 1448, ruling as an Islamic puppet.

Loyalists soon informed him Hunyadi's assassins were coming to kill him. After only two months on the Wallachian throne he fled north to Moldavia, where he found asylum with royal relatives. Hunyadi put the Danesti pretender back on the Wallachian throne, and the exiled Vlad continued his studies under the tutelage of learned Christian monks. This exposed Dracula to the humanist culture of the Renaissance, which was emerging in Europe, and the secret lore of Christian mystics.

During Vlad's self-imposed exile, his father's loyal supporter found him, and bestowed upon the young prince the Order of the Dragon medallion, sword and letter. The letter revealed many secrets of ruling the Wallachian state, including vital information on the Christians, Moslems, Gypsies and Tzimisce; the letter even revealed the locations of secret vampiric lairs. The elder Dracul revealed as much to his son that the Order of the Dragon knew much secret lore about fighting evil spirits like vampires.

Dracul wrote, "Seek you the council of the vampiress Durga Syn. Only she, among all the devil's children, loves the land as I do. Yield not to the boyars, the Mohammedans, nor the vampire Tzimisce, for none have Love for you. Rather, resist them all, and employ one against the other in the name of your People... To ascend the Throne in Wallachia is to ascend the Cross. Those who do not willingly accept the sacrifice find only torture there.

"Though agony was mine to betray my sons to the Sultan, I gladly sacrificed you and your brother to the Throne that is the Cross. If you would not employ your own family so, the Throne will destroy you. But if you understand why this was done, and done joyfully, you will flourish on the Throne of Thorns. And if you willingly sacrifice all you have, all you are, and all you believe to the Cross, you will have life everlasting."

His letter instructed Vlad to purify himself, ally with a powerful patron, visit the Order of the Dragon, and reclaim his throne. Vlad swore on the relics of rule that he would do so, and avenge his father's murder.

The Dragon Coils

Back in Wallachia, Hunyadi's usurper prince Vladislav II was unprepared for the agonizing strain of ruling the bloody border kingdom, and fared badly. A few years of pressure from the sultan cracked him like an egg, and he turned from Christian toady to

pro-Turkish vassal. Even the local boyars ran roughshod over him, taking more control than they were due.

As the Christian world grew dissatisfied with the Wallachian pretender, Dracula took a risk worthy of his father. He left his peaceful Moldavian asylum and fought his way to Hunedoara Castle. He survived ambushes and assassins to reach the court of the most powerful Christian leader in the region. To the shock of the Christian world, he pledged his unswerving loyalty to John Hunyadi, murderer of his father.

Vlad's sly gamble paid off handsomely. His courage and daring impressed Hunyadi's timid court like nothing before. The aging Hunyadi's failures had cost him his regency over Hungary, and he sorely needed strong followers. He wanted a bold ward more than he wanted further revenge on the Dracul family, so he took in the young prince and schooled him in the ways of Western warfare and anti-Turkish tactics.

Dracula learned three important secrets during his tutelage at Hunyadi's court. He mastered the hit-and-run guerilla warfare strategies of the Protestant heretics, and learned techniques for making armored battle wagons, the tactical use of which eerily resembled modern tank warfare. Dracula, an expert in Islamic battle tactics, eagerly absorbed these two Christian crusader strategies.

The third secret was information about the immortal vampires who controlled much of the destiny of mortal men. In secret talks with Gypsies and captured heretics, he learned many of the customs and powers of the Tzimisce clan. Hunyadi's men dismissed such stories as superstitious ravings, but Vlad trusted his father's word. He learned all he could about the newly formed Camarilla and Sabbat from old Romanian sages.

He made several important pilgrimages across Europe in search of occult knowledge. He even went as far as the ancient court of Byzantium seeking lore about the ubiquitous vampires. When he learned all he could from outside sources, he made a pilgrimage to the Order of the Dragon chapel in the imperial fortress at Nuremberg.

He joined the twenty-three other members of the inner circle, pledging to protect Christendom from the forces of the devil. From that day on he wore the dragon medalion, showing a dragon swallowing its own tail, crucified on a double cross. Vlad received the three cloaks of the order: green for the dragon's scales, red for the blood of martyrs, and black for the mystery of Christ's passion, all of which he wore proudly.

After five years as ward to Hunyadi, Vlad mastered everything his mentor could teach him and made secret preparations to reclaim his heritage. Less than two weeks after Hunyadi's sudden death, Vlad assaulted Vladislav II and seized the Wallachian throne.

The Dragon Reigns

The twenty-five-year-old prince and voevode lost no time consolidating power in Transylvania. His father tried to serve two masters and wound up serving none. Vlad was determined to avoid that fate, instead pledging fealty to none but himself and the Romanian people. Moving with relentless speed, he solidified his alliances with important officials in the Christian west, paid tribute to the sultan, stirred rebellion against the Turks along his borders, and whipped his army into shape.

All the forces around him, from the emperor to the sultan to the local boyars to the Tzimisces, all looked hungrily on the untested young prince. His most immediate threat came from within. The boyar nobles, upset at the thought of a strong-willed voevode on the throne, created the same problems they caused for his father and grandfather.

They had spent generations gaining more and more power by pitting Dracul's family against the Danestis, and were eager to start whittling away at Vlad.

But Dracula did not wait for them to inflict their death of a thousand cuts. He moved quickly to flush out and kill the members of Vladislav II's private army and any male heir who could one day make a claim to the throne. In one such attack, he seized a castle outside of his lands through subterfuge and turned it over to the Turks, since he could not defend it. These violent moves took the entire court by surprise and sobered local politics considerably.

While the court was off balance, Vlad built a powerful military force of mercenaries loyal only to him. He hired men of all ethnic groups - even Turks and Gypsies - and demanded they cooperate with one another. He instructed them in the ways of Christian and Moslem combat, and taught them the art of vampire slaying. He conscripted the best of these into an elite unit, his trusted "Axes," and turned them into master impalers.

When the boyars mounted a challenger to Dracula's rule and sent a private army against him, Dracula ambushed the usurpers and killed them all. Then he called the guilty boyars in for an Easter feast, dined them in grand style, and asked them how many Wallachian princes they could remember. Some remembered as many as thirty. Dracula blamed the rapid attrition of princes on the boyars' "shameful intrigues." He called for his Axes, who impaled all the older boyars and their wives and manacled the young ones.

Vlad's forces marched the young boyars to the mountains, where he commanded them to build Castle Dracula. Their fine clothes shredded to rags, they worked until they died. Vlad filled the sudden vacancies in the nobility with his most loyal troops, elevating commoners to exalted, landed positions. He installed more free peasants as nobles than any other ruler. The remaining boyars never quite recovered from the audacity of this move, but exhibited far greater loyalty.

The castle, a masterpiece of defensive engineering which included a secret tunnel to the mountains, expressly violated prior treaties with the emperor and the sultan, who forbade vassals to defend themselves against their lords. Like his grandfather Mircea the Great, Dracula built a line of walls and fortresses to brace against the coming storm from the Islamic south. He also built small mountain fortresses in hidden locations and stocked them with provisions.

He won the loyalty of the local clergy with his generosity and love of ritual. He tithed large donations, founded monasteries (complete with torture chambers and secret escape tunnels), and always gave his impaled victims Christian burials. He made sure not to challenge the Tzimisce vampires yet, but sent his Axes to spy on their activities. He also sent riders in search of the vampiress Durga Syn, but could not find her.

In court, Dracula was a strong ruler - decisive and unyielding. His commanding ways won the direct loyalty of his troops, his household and the Romanian people, who saw a lot of his grandfather and father in him. He made the welfare of his people a high priority, knowing he would need their blessing if he was to survive and flourish.

With his power base at home more secure, Vlad turned to foreign affairs. He saw the throne as a mad machine that crushed and tore princes apart with conflicting loyalties. But Vlad heeded his father's advice and knew what to expect. He used his loyal retinue to ferret out the spies of the Holy Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire and Wallachian nobility, and made sure to feed the spies plenty of false information. He received vital intelligence on their plots from his spies and from his fellows in the Order of the Dragon, many of whom were princes and heads of state.

Vlad knew each power group would seek to make him its vassal and resolved to stand against them all. Rather than prepare to resist the inevitable pressure they would exert on him, he turned the tables on them all, making immediate demands on them. When their diplomats refused to comply, as he knew they would, he had them killed in merciless, bizarre and darkly humorous executions. This gave him an instant reputation as a strong leader and a man not to be trifled with.

When the Germans sent forty young men to Wallachia to "learn the Romanian language," Dracula asked them why they traveled all the way to Wallachia when they could learn Romanian in Hungary or the parts of Transylvania that border on their lands. They could give no convincing answer, so Dracula had them all impaled as spies.

German Saxons in Wallachia rose up to overthrow Vlad, so he led a series of retaliatory raids on the Saxon holdings and impaled every villager he found.

The more his enemies closed in on him, the more elaborate his tortures became. A rival Danesti named Prince Dan III marched a private army into Dracula's lands and commanded the people to rise up against Vlad, whom he accused of selling out to the Turks. But the Romanian people were loyal to Dracula for his refusal to pay tribute to the sultan, and the revolt failed. Dracula had Dan III dig his own grave while a priest read a mass for the dead.

Dracula's final rival for the throne was Vlad the Monk. Dracula put German monasteries to the torch to flush him out and impaled the entire town that was hiding the monk.

All this led to the most important confrontation yet - not with the Turks, but with the vampires. Dracula knew disguised Tzimisce vampires roamed freely in his court, trying to put Danesti rulers on the throne. He kept an eye on the vampires, but he did not let them know he knew their secret.

When a young man who fought with the strength of ten men and shrugged off wounds from swords interrupted a late-night impaling session in the rebel Dan III's holdings, Dracula's Axes knew what he was and what to do with him. They fought the vampire with wooden spears and impaled him through the heart. Then they raced him back to Castle Dracula, where Dracula chained the vampire in the dungeon, removed the stake and feasted on his blood. A fiery strength flooded through Prince Dracula, stoking his passion for further conquest. He rewarded his loyal Axes with smaller draughts of the vampire's blood and planned their glorious future.

This is why impaling was Vlad's favorite means of execution. He knew that when vampires were rounded up, his men had to kill them without inflaming superstitious fears in the peasantry. The locals had lived with flagrant vampire attacks for centuries and would be terrified if they thought Vlad was stirring up the undead. Vlad impaled three more Tzimisce vampires during this time and drained them of their blood as well.

Though the Tzimisce clan favored the Danesti and disliked Vlad's abuse of their neonates, they admired his daring and resourcefulness, respecting him more than other claimants to the throne. Some wanted revenge on him and others wanted to make him a Tzimisce vampire. Having just joined the Sabbat, however, their war against the elders kept them too busy to take more than passing interest in Vlad's audacity.

Thus began Dracula's fascination with blood. His courtiers witnessed him dipping his bread in the blood of tortured enemies. Though many said he did it just to intimidate his foes, he really had developed a taste for blood, even weak human blood.

With his kingdom finally secure from internal threats, his western flank secure through treaties, and his personal strength secure through regular doses of vampire blood, Dracula planned his war against the Turks.

The Dragon Strikes

The new sultan, Mehmed II (mech-med), was running out of patience with the Wallachian ruler. Even though Vlad stood up to the German Holy Roman Empire, he made it clear he would not be a puppet of Islam. When the Pope called for another crusade against the unified Ottoman Empire, the divisive European leaders answered with little enthusiasm. Only Vlad was ready to go to war, a fact which caused the Pope to look favorably on him.

When a delegation from the sultan came to exert pressure on him to secure his aid in conquering the rest of Serbia, Vlad demanded they remove their turbans. They replied that they never removed them. Vlad told them he would help them keep their customs, and ordered their turbans nailed to their heads.

He then contacted the Serbian leaders and revealed the impending secret invasion. He had already stopped paying tribute to the sultan, and fought the Moslem troops who raided his villages for young boys to be made into janissary troops.

He did all this to provoke the sultan, who demanded that Vlad travel to Constantinople to "discuss" the situation. Dracula laughed at the transparent attempt to kidnap him, and wrote back that he had no money to make payment, and that if he left his kingdom, his Saxon enemies would take over.

He stalled until winter, when the Danube river was frozen, and then agreed to go to the Sultan. He asked Mehmed to send an important Moslem pasha to rule Wallachia while he was gone. The sultan complied, but sent a spy to make the journey with Dracula.

Vlad impaled the pasha, the pasha's troops, and the spy. Disguised as the pasha, Vlad brought his army to the great fortress built by his father. Speaking perfect Turkish, he demanded that the Moslem guards open the gates and let his army in. They did so, and Dracula's hordes spilled in, slaughtering all inside. Then he raced his troops across the frozen Danube for a lightning raid on Turkish holdings.

Word of Vlad's successes electrified the Christian world, but Europe sent no support. The sultan massed one of the largest forces in the history of the Ottoman Empire to conquer the tiny Wallachian army once and for all.

Dracula mustered his troops from the many different peoples that made up his kingdom, and he rallied them with glorious and inspiring speeches. He generously rewarded any men wounded in battle, and impaled all who ran away or were wounded in the back. He set up a powerful network of scouts along the Danube to keep him apprised of enemy movements.

His troops made hit-and-run attacks on the Turks, inflicting great damage and disappearing when the Turks rallied. One of these attacks came frighteningly close to the sultan's tent. The Turks scoured the countryside, but could never find Dracula's hidden camp.

The Turks captured one of Dracula's peasant troops and offered him land and a title for information. The peasant refused, and also refused to betray his country when threatened with a slow death by torture. For the first time, the sultan began to fear his opponent.

Dracula drew the sultan's men deeper into Wallachia through strategic retreats. He began a "scorched earth" policy, burning everything in his path, poisoning wells, driving off livestock, and diverting rivers into the path of the Turks. He put all displaced peasants under the protection of his armies and sent plague-ridden peasants into the Turkish camps to spread pestilence.

The Turks found themselves advancing into a wasteland of ashes and mire and disease. As stragglers left the Turkish army to forage for food, Dracula's men swept down and killed them. He continued his midnight raids on the main body of troops, reducing their vast numbers by attrition. The vampiric blood coursing in his veins gave him superhuman strength and courage, and inspired his troops to acts of great bravery.

These tactics took their toll on the Turks. Their fear grew as their numbers diminished and morale plummeted. Though they laid siege to several important fortresses along the way to Dracula's capital, they could not capture one of them. When they reached Dracula's fortified capital, they found themselves at the mouth of hell. Lining the road was a "forest of dead" - a mile of impaled corpses.

Impaled the highest were the ghoulish remains of the pasha and the spy. The stench was overpowering, and the horrified sultan, still rattled by the nearly successful attempt on his life, yielded to fear. He had his troops dig a massive trench around their camp for the night to keep out Vlad's forces, and the next morning he ordered a massive retreat.

Vlad's stunning victory against impossible odds made him a great hero in the Christian world. The enraged sultan knew he could not defeat the prince through conventional warfare, so he used a trick common to the Wallachian boyars. He supported a claimant to the Wallachian throne with a massive force and sent the usurper to destroy Vlad's rule from within. Though Vlad had ruthlessly exterminated nearly every claimant, there was one whom he had not killed - his brother, Radu.

Dragon Fall

Backed by a massive contingent of Turkish troops, Radu told the local boyars they could be rid of the powerful Prince Dracula if they supported him. The boyars stirred up anti-Dracula sentiment in the nation with propaganda. They accused Vlad of trying to impale everyone in Wallachia, and painted a picture of life under Dracula as a constant state of deprivation and war with the Turks.

Though Dracula's boyar appointments remained steadfastly loyal, many older boyars defected and allowed Turkish troops past the fortresses and into Wallachian border towns. With his sealed borders leaking due to internal treachery, Vlad found his castle under attack. His mistress hurled herself from a tower window to her death rather than risk being taken prisoner.

Vlad was forced to flee his besieged castle through the secret tunnel. His Axes and loyal peasants helped him escape to safety in the north as his faithless brother Radu betrayed him by ascending the throne.

Without his loyal troops, and without fresh vampire blood, Vlad became as weak as any other mortal. He decided to go to Matthias, king of Hungary and son of Hunyadi, and petition for a new crusade. Unfortunately, the Europeans, divided and squabbling among themselves, could not ally on any point. They had become used to vampires covertly telling them what to do, but the Sabbat-Camarilla war forced the clans to neglect their mortal pawns to secure their own immortal lives. Consequently, Europe saw its leaders fall to indecision and futility.

Radu offered generous terms to Matthias for Dracula's arrest, and the weak king complied. He lured Vlad away from his loyal Axes by promising to help Dracula take back his throne; once Vlad was isolated, Matthias placed him under house arrest.

Vlad expected Christendom to react with outrage to his betrayal and arrest, but the outcry never came. The German boyars had carried out a massive propaganda cam-

paigned against him throughout Europe, painting him as a torturer and madman far more wicked than the Turks.

Stripped of the context in which they occurred, Dracula's actions looked like the work of a monster. Because "Dracul" means devil as well as dragon in Romanian, the servants of Vlad the Monk convinced most of Europe that Dracula was a minion of Hell rather than a crusader for the Church. To make matters worse, the Pope who admired Vlad had just died, leaving no authority to tell the truth.

Vlad suffered greatly in captivity and swore to retake his throne. Before long, Radu reneged on his promises to the West and allowed the Turks to decimate Wallachia. Matthias had no choice but to take Dracula out of prison and threaten to return him to the Wallachian throne. When the weak Radu soon collapsed to Moldavian troops, Dracula married into the Hunyadi family and secured enough power to retake his throne for a third time.

Dracula returned to Wallachia to find the tiny kingdom overrun with Sabbat vampires. Without a firm ruler, anarchs ran wild through Transylvania, seeking out fearful elders. Dracula had no difficulty capturing vampires for fresh blood. He quickly restored his Axes to superhuman strength and endurance.

Vlad launched new assaults against the Turks, routing them at every turn. But his triumphs left him dissatisfied. The luster of military conquest began to tarnish. His captivity had forced him to contemplate his mortality. The purpose of his life had become more important than achievement. He saw his mortal life as the briefest flash in history, and the vampiric life as an eternity of self-discovery.

So he sent out riders to find the vampire Durga Syn, as his father had commanded. He had been unable to find her before, but was determined now. This time, she unexpectedly came to him.

The mysterious old woman told the prince she had followed his career with interest, and the two spent a long time talking. After learning at the feet of the three greatest warlords of his day - Dracul, Murad and Hunyadi - he was grateful to become the protégé of a peacemaker.

Using insight gained from Durga Syn, he successfully spied on both the Sabbat and Camarilla, and began to manipulate the manipulators. When he learned that the Tzimisces had dispatched powerful vampires to kill him, he arranged for Camarilla Justicars to intercept the war party.

After the two groups tore themselves apart in battle, Vlad and his Axes descended. They took the two surviving vampires prisoner. The more powerful had entered torpor, but the younger, Lambach, was still conscious. Dracula took them back to his torture room in Castle Dracula and chained Lambach over a massive stake. His guards held a weighted mechanism that could force the stake through him at the slightest touch. Dracula informed the starving vampire that he would be allowed to live if he turned Dracula into a vampire while leaving him free of the Blood Bond. The desperate Lambach agreed, and Vlad felt the biting agony and the sweet passion of Rebirth.

Dracula, fresh from vampiric resurrection, consumed the eldest vampire's blood. Heady with newfound power, he fed his own vitae to his faithful Axes, who willingly became his ghouls. True to his word, Dracula released Lambach. He told the Tzimisces that the Sabbat could expect a visit from him soon.

The Eternal Dragon

Dracula found himself caring less and less for the petty courtly intrigues of the mortal world. He faked his own death and placed a puppet on the Wallachian throne. Durga Syn moved on, promising to return now and then.

Vlad spent time among the Sabbat and Camarilla during the early days of both groups. Though nominally a Tzimisce, he owed allegiance to no clan. He tended to side more with the Sabbat, preferring the freedom it espoused to the hidebound rules of the Camarilla. However, he enjoyed the company of the wise, thoughtful vampires of the Camarilla more than the wild, rebellious Kindred of the Sabbat.

After helping shape the courts of the Camarilla, he left the group in disgust. He told them that they were deliberately blind to the dangers of the Blood Bond and the Antediluvians. He worked with the Sabbat and fought many of his old allies in the Camarilla. However, he worked hard to accomplish Sabbat goals without clashing with his closest friends in the Camarilla.

He soon reached an impasse in dealing with the wild, anarchic Sabbat, and left its ranks. The Paladins who tried to punish him for leaving were torn into pieces no larger than an inch and deposited in a Sabbat safehouse.

Eventually, Dracula joined the independent sect of respected vampire elders called the Inconnu, who worked ceaselessly to cure vampires of their need for blood. In their quest for greater knowledge, these vampires allied themselves with demons. But then, Dracula always did make a career out of trading one evil for another.

Through the ages, Dracula grew less obsessed with personal power and more concerned with attaining Golconda - the enlightened state of being in which a vampire is freed from frenzy and the Beast. The more power he gained over others, the less his power pleased him, and the more he desired to conquer himself.

He saw parallels between Golconda and the Islamic, Christian, pagan and gypsy mystical traditions he had studied during his checkered career. He believed he and all beings could find freedom from their own inner demons, and swore to attain that state.

The Dragon In Hiding

Though Dracula tried to exist in anonymity, the propaganda efforts of his enemies had succeeded beyond their original hopes. Tales of the mad prince of Wallachia and his bloody stakes spread like wildfire throughout Europe and the Near East. Rumors of the enigmatic mystic of the Inconnu swirled throughout the vampire community as well; these rumors were often contrasted with the popular fables of his legendary mortal cruelty.

Despite his best efforts, Dracula could not shake his high profile and remained an easy target for his Camarilla, Sabbat and Inquisition foes. When he spread the word that the Antediluvians were a threat to the Kindred, the clans lashed back through human and vampire proxies. After he joined the Inconnu in the nineteenth century, human pawns of the ancient vampire progenitors came close to exposing and destroying him. Vlad kept them at bay with an ingenious scheme: he turned his real-life story into the Dracula myth.

Acting through a Romanian scholar, he fed the rich account of his life to the impressionable Victorian novelist Bram Stoker. Inspired by his dark muse, Stoker created a lush, nightmarish tapestry of evil that exploded onto the consciousness of his day. The

Dracula story touched such a strong chord in readers throughout the world that it effectively stymied the efforts of those who hunted him.

As long as vampires were the stuff of dark legends that lurked in the shadows of the cultural consciousness, Vlad's enemies could secure aid and assistance from a fearful citizenry. But when the undead became popular entertainment, even the most naive peasants became sophisticated cynics. In the minds of the masses, vampires existed in nightmares and shadows and midnight terrors. But a high-profile vampire seen in every cinema was little more than an amusing diversion and a fiction that could not possibly exist even in the bleakest hour.

Even superstitious peasants could feel superior to people seriously seeking an obvious myth like Dracula. Where Dracula's enemies once found frightened and cooperative people, they now found ridicule and mockery.

Ironically, educated people are especially predisposed to scorn even the most compelling proof of vampires, regardless of the strength of the evidence. By promoting the myth of Dracula, Vlad did more to protect the Masquerade than any other of his kind.

The Dracula story caught the imagination of the Victorians like little else. The mythic Dracula preyed on innocent, virginal young women of impeccable breeding. He symbolized the repressed sexual urges of a desexualized people - urges which manifest in twisted and perverse ways. If Jack the Ripper stirred the cultural imagination, the black-caped Dracula the vampire electrified it.

Thus assured of reasonable safety from his enemies, Dracula explored the magical history of the Earth, meeting creatures he never knew existed. Even today he strives for enlightenment and freedom from the vast darkness within him. He long ago withdrew from the world of men, and now searches for answers to the great riddles of Kindred and mortals.

Some elders maintain that Vlad has completed his quest, and has found the peace all Kindred so desperately seek. Others think he has not found Golconda, but is very close - closer than any other vampire. Still others think he is wasting his time even trying. And some think Golconda is a front for his real aim: conquest of the Antediluvians.

He fears the return of the Antediluvians and the subsequent harvesting of their children, and advises both Sabbat and Camarilla through the Inconnu. He believes all vampire groups. He believes all vampire groups see an incomplete picture of the great struggle, and are doomed until they see the whole.

Tyler

Brujah Elder of the Camarilla

*By theft and murder they took the land,
Now everywhere the walls spring up at their command.
They make the laws to chain us well
Their clergy dazzle us with heaven or they damn us into hell.
We will not worship the god they serve,
The god of greed who feeds the rich while poor men starve
Leon Rosselson, "The World Turned Upside Down"*

When tyranny breaks the spines of the people a brave few rise up to fight back. Though they tyrants may carry the day, rebels like Tyler make each victory costly and ultimately hollow.

From her humble peasant birth to her current position of power in one of the most vampire-infested cities in the world, Tyler has seen all sides of mortal and Kindred society. This touch, clever revolutionary works and fights for an end to all systems of enforced injustice, all the while holding a dark secret from her Camarilla allies.

Her Life

Tyler, born Patricia of Bollingbroke, lived her whole life immersed in the twin medieval horrors of squalor and brutality. Against all odds, she survived and overcame the trauma of plagues, famine and childbirth to raise five healthy children. Indeed, her great love of life not only enabled her to survive amidst the filth and poverty of feudal England, but gave her the courage to aspire to greater things. Huddled on her rough pallet after her husband and children fell asleep, she dreamed of flying.

Her world shattered around her when her husband risked poaching on the baron's lands to feed his starving during a deadly winter. The baron slaughtered him, abducted the children for castle servants, and sent his men to collect Patricia for a night of rough sport. Refusing to submit, she fled the butchers' knives.

Fortune brought her to the growing peasant rebellion of John Ball and Wat Tyler, who lead a revolt against the cruelty of the nobles. Patricia's old life was ashes, and she gladly cast it off in favor of a new life as a free and independent woman in a world where such creatures were virtually unheard of.

Though the peasants could not accept a woman as a leader, they did accept her as an impassioned supporter of the cause and a guiding spirit of the revolution. She glowed with an inner radiance that inspired and encouraged everyone she touched, and soon caught the eye of Wat Tyler. Beguiled by her passion and conviction, he took her as his lover and confidante; she in turn guided him with her fervor and righteous anger.

Patricia conceived the assassination of the Archbishop of Canterbury and helped execute the daring plan. The revolutionaries marched on London and took the city. In a moment of triumph, they put their demands to the terrified king. The king acquiesced, but retaliated by killing many of the revolutionaries' children and holding other children hostage. When Patricia of Bollingbroke tried to rescue her last living child, the king slammed the jaws of the trap around her, caught her, and sentenced her to death. Huddled in the fetid dungeon cell, she knew all her dreams had come to nothing.

Her Death

In Patricia's darkest hour, a stranger in a dun-green cloak mysteriously appeared in her cell. He introduced himself as Robin Leeland of the vampire clan Brujah, and told her of his work to bring wicked rules to justice. Robin offered her the Embrace and she unhesitatingly accepted. He made her pledge undying fealty – not to him, but to the cause of justice.

She broke free from the prison and struck back with a force derived from years of simmering, righteous anger. The first mortal blood on her lips gushed from the veins of the baron who killed her children, and the blood of many such men followed. She rejoined the rebel peasants and led them in decisive strikes against the king. For a year she reveled in her newfound strength and power, and left a wide swath of destruction in her wake. Despite her victories, her ranks dwindled, while her followers became more interested in violence than justice.

Patricia soon realized that the inner light which once inspired the peasants had ignited into a raging fire of frenzy. Her followers no longer drew inspiration from her. The example she set was revenge, and only bullies responded favorably.

Her peasants won some concessions from the lords, but lost the war. Bitterness and sorrow filled her heart. She exiled herself from her home and never returned to England.

Her Unlife

She arrived in Spain to see the unholy Inquisition decimate ancient vampire families. The older vampires eagerly sacrificed their young to the Inquisitors, and the neonates perished at an alarming rate.

The elders responded to the threat by hiding. Patricia argued that vampires should not flee from mortals, but should be paragons of justice and honor. The Kindred would be far safer if they crushed the mortals subjugating their fellow humans. Free, enlightened men and women would be eager to provide their lifeblood to their immortal benefactors.

Though many vampires relished the plan, they feared taking a strong stand at a time when the humans had them on the run. The Toreador Rafael de Corazon proposed the Masquerade, and the Ventrue Hardestadt proposed creating the Camarilla to enforce its laws. "Why should we do aught to better the lives of mortals?" the Ventrue elder demanded. "Do they not hound me and strike at me at every turn? I owe them nothing but ashes and spite, and would not stoop to help them even if we all became safer for it."

Revolted by this destructive logic, Patricia left the early vampire councils and sided with the rebellious neonates. These neonates, abandoned by their regents to destruction at the hands of the Inquisition, formed the anarch rebellion.

Patricia planned a daring raid on the Ventrue Hardestadt. He embodied all the smug elitism Patricia despised, and she saw no difference between his plans and those of the mortal barons who oppressed others in the same divine right.

She led a band of Brujah anarchists and human allies in a bloody assault on Hardestadt Castle. The Ventrue's defenses wiped out her ragtag army, but she managed to destroy and commit diablerie upon the Ventrue elder. Without Hardestadt's leadership,

the elders again fell to squabbling. This delayed the founding of the Camarilla for many years, and resulted in a weak and strife-torn organization.

Patricia's success electrified the growing anarch community and galvanized support for her cause. Young vampires, abandoned by their masters in the wake of the Inquisition, threw off their Blood Bonds and formed a huge, marauding gang called the Sabbat.

They begged Patricia to serve as their leader, but she found this new group as repugnant as the mortal bullies who flocked to her in England. She refused to accept their worshipful adoration and fled Europe for the New World. Powerful, vengeful Camarilla Archons followed, trying to destroy her.

She settled in Cartagena, where she served as assassin for the powerful vampire conquistador Helena. When the Camarilla closed in on her, she fled to the English colonies. To throw the Archons off her scent, Patricia changed her name to Tyler, in honor of her old lover. She reconnected with the Brujah Clan, which was now deeply ensconced in the Camarilla. She settled into her new home and became complacent over the centuries. Then a transforming phenomenon occurred: the first manned flights began.

Soaring through the sky fulfilled a centuries-old dream of freedom for Tyler, who immediately funded early experimental aircraft. Recognizing the great power of air travel, she moved to a city where she believed one of the biggest airports would be built. At the crossroads of America she took control of the burgeoning airfield in Chicago. By regulating the flow of Kindred into and out of O'Hare airport, she greatly strengthened her ability to defend against those vampires who still search for her.

Despite her contempt for the Camarilla, she joined it to work closely with her fellow Brujah. Most of them are ignorant of her past as Patricia of Bollingbroke, and know nothing of her fundamental role in founding the Sabbat. Those who know say nothing.

Her Nature

Tyler utterly disdains the corruption and unjust privileges of the wealthy. She opposes the powerful who rule by intimidation and the self-righteous who abuse their positions to smite the weak.

She relishes her role as assassin of powerful Cainites, and knows the incomparable exhilaration of consuming a member of an earlier generation. Killing Hardestadt gave her a taste for drinking the vitæ of powerful foes and toppling unjust lords. She exists for the day when she can replace all corrupt rulers, human or vampire, with just and compassionate ones. But her power has been blunted by doubts and misgivings about her achievements.

In bitter irony, her resistance to abuse of mortal power led to far greater abuse of power by immortals, as the Sabbat emulated the worst excesses of the mortal kings and sought to completely enslave the human race. Her ordeals have strengthened her convictions, but her losses have also blunted her edge. In her innermost heart, she fears her future successes will be tainted and perverted by groups like the Sabbat; thus, she is very cautious about all her plans and all her allies. Should she overcome her self-doubt, she could again transform the face of the world.

Karsh

Gangrel Warlord of the Camarilla

*I watched them as the battle closes,
'Midst the carnage and the din.
Seen their wounds like deadly roses,
Blooming crimson on their skin.
I've heard them coughing as they stumble,
Heard their moaning as they lie,
Heard frightened prayer turned to mumbles,
And final silence as they die.*

Garnet Rogers, "One Bullet (Left For Me)"

The enforcers of the Camarilla have their work cut out for them. Free-spirited an-archs, irreverent Sabbat Paladins, marauding Lupines and meddling vampire hunters stalk the land, endangering the Masquerade and every Cainite who seeks refuge in it.

Against these adversaries stands the unliving war machine Karsh, bloodthirsty warlord of Clan Gangrel. He leads the Camarilla legions against the rampages forces of the Sabbat. The warrior Archons and Justicars answer his call to arms, and he answers only to the very highest councils of the Camarilla. He loves the coppery taste of vampiric frenzy rising in his gorge, and does nothing to stave off the ascension of the Beast within. Indeed, he revels in combat, savoring the transformation from vampire to slavering monster.

His Life

Not every Moslem in medieval Turkey supported the reign of Sultan Murad IV. Some nomadic bands refused to submit to the despotic rule of the great conqueror, and fought endless hit-and-run skirmishes against the sultan's armies. These groups trained their young as warriors to prepare them for the harsh life to come. Many children did not survive. But some endured and grew exceedingly strong during the ordeal.

The feral child Hassan al-Samhir loved the warrior life. He spent his childhood in weapons training, raids and devotion to Allah. He carried a man's sword when he was five, killed an enemy soldier when he was nine, and received honors as one of the nomad group's most savage warriors at twelve.

When he was thirteen, the sultan's men caught the little nomad band and slaughtered them. None surrendered. The merciless troops killed the wounded adults and took the surviving children as slaves. Little Hassan's savagery impressed the troops, who placed him in the janissaries – an elite corps of Christian youths and war captives.

The janissaries put the boy through a punishing regimen of grueling physical labor, submission to Allah through the sultan, and constant combat training. Rather than breaking, Hassan flourished, and rose quickly through the ranks of the janissaries. He rapidly surpassed all his teachers and earned the fear and respect of his fellow warriors. His zealous worship of Allah impressed even the jaded officers.

A true warrior's heart beat in Hassan's bosom, and he lived for battle. He hated the interminable periods of peace and only felt truly alive when swathed in the blood of his

enemies, fearlessly hacking his way to the heart of each battle in the grip of an un-earthly berserker frenzy.

Tragically, he lived during the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and saw the great Empire shrink and contract despite all the battles he won. Court intrigue and palace corruption further weakened the state. Nevertheless, his faith was unshakable, and he remained loyal to his sultan as an expression of his loyalty to Allah. When the janissaries revolted, Hassan sided with Murad IV in suppressing them, and slew many of his closest friends. The revolt was put down and the rebel warriors returned to service. But many of them blamed Hassan for betraying them, and planned his destruction.

His Death

When the Empire signed a great peace pact with Persia, Hassan made no secret of his distaste for the sultan's decision. He was a powerful captain now, and accustomed to speaking his mind to the sultan's agents. He knew he could take the battle to the enemy capital, but agreed to submit to his sultan's orders with the same reverence with which he submitted to Allah.

Four of his fellow janissaries took advantage of the tense peace negotiations to exact revenge on Hassan for betraying their revolution. They assassinated three Persian diplomats and blamed Hassan for their deaths. Hassan protested his loyalty, but an enraged sultan ordered him put to death. To satisfy the outraged Persians' taste for blood, Murad IV offhandedly remarked that beheading was too good for the assassin, and that he should instead be thrown to starving wolves. The cruel solution appealed to the new Persian delegation, who considered the matter settled.

Abandoned by his lord but not by his god, Hassan turned his back on the rule of man and refused to submit to his sentence. He fought the wolf and killed it with his bare hands. The sultan hastily commanded that an entire wolf pack tear apart the young soldier. But Hassan prayed for strength, and entered into a berserker rage. He tore five starving wolves to pieces. The sultan was frightened by the failed execution, and feared the people would see it as a clear sign that Allah favored the warrior over the sultan. He demanded that his vizier, Mohammed Kuprulu, find wolves that could kill Hassan.

Acting on the advice of a wise man he met in the market, the sultan's vizier took Hassan to a desolate wasteland known to be haunted by evil wolf spirits. He bound Hassan in shackles and left him as an offering to the spirits. He hid near the body with a squad of troops, waiting for Hassan to be torn apart or die of starvation. After a night of blood-curdling howling, they returned to find Hassan covered with a thousand slashes and drained of blood.

His Unlife

The vizier respected Hassan and saw that the disgraced warrior's remains were properly buried. But Hassan still had many battles to fight, and clawed his way out of the grave that night. The undead warrior tore his way through the janissaries, slaughtering men who betrayed him. He decapitated the sultan and brought the head to the vizier. Taking the crown from the head of the last of the Murad line of rulers, he anointed Kuprulu as Grand Vizier of all the Ottoman Empire.

Hassan told the frightened vizier a chilling tale. A terrible djinn haunted the wasteland, a djinn who could take the aspect of a wolf and the form of a man. The wolf vis-

ited Hassan by night and offered immortal life in return for eternal service. He slashed the warrior, drank his blood, and returned a small measure of his own. Hassan was re-born as Karsh the Avenger.

The wolf-djinn was really a shapeshifting Gangrel elder who saw in Hassan the perfect candidate for Warlord of the Camarilla. The elder was also the mysterious wise man who advised the vizier to leave Hassan in the wasteland. As one of the earliest extensions of the Masquerade (and to complete the degradation of the ungrateful sultan), the Gangrel spread the rumor that the sultan had died of gout brought on by excessive drinking. Additionally, the Gangrel ensured the complete faithfulness of his new warlord by letting the fanatically loyal warrior complete his business at home.

The vampire gave Karsh a generation to finish his mortal affairs. He led the vizier's armies in great nighttime battles to shore up the borders of the Empire, and fought threats internal and external. Twenty-five years later the Empire was secure, and the wolf spirit came for Karsh and took him to Europe.

Karsh, now dedicated only to the Gangrel clan and the Camarilla, threw himself into his new life with a passion. He now leads Camarilla forces in bloody battles against all foes: mortal, vampire, Sabbat and demon alike. He dislikes fighting Lupines, but does whatever is necessary to ensure the safety of the Camarilla. He honors his God in service to his new lords, and takes great joy in fighting the godless Sabbat and the blaspheming Black Hand. The Camarilla elders respect the violent warlord; indeed, many fear him. They often seek his advice in matters of security and when planning attacks on enemies.

Though he has since seen the Great Ottoman Empire he helped secure fall to Western forces, Hassan feels no grief for it. Now and forever he is Karsh, and his heart lies with the Camarilla.

His Nature

Karsh is a man of few words. He speaks only when absolutely necessary, and in very terse phrases. At rest he is completely calm, stoic and slow to anger or respond. In battle he is a whirlwind of fury, reveling in carnage and bloodletting. As Warlord of the Camarilla, he executes the most dangerous missions. He carries out even the most suicidal tasks with unmatched zeal, as if each new foe were the hated sultan himself.

Karsh still prays to Mecca five times a day and, if he believes his soul is forever cursed, has told no one.

Vasantasena

Malkavian Antitribu of the Sabbat

*By feigning madness or diplomacy,
On battlefield or at the court,
By your efforts I have been raised
When everything had crumbled down.
Bhasa, *The Vision of Vasavadatta**

Lunacy casts a long shadow through the underground world of the Sabbat. The insanity of most Sabbat braves takes a form of darkness: a light extinguished. But in the illuminated madwoman Vasantasena, the madness takes the form of a light burning too brightly for her fellows to bear.

Even the most fearsome Sabbat leaders find the divinely inspired lunatic uncomfortably frightening. Her intensity and passion for the Sabbat cause stand in stark contrast to the dissension and fear she produces among the Sabbat ranks. Few understand her motives, but most members of the Sabbat agree that she strives for nothing less than the salvation of all vampires from the return of the ravenous Antediluvians.

Her Life

Near the end of the first millennium A.D., Rajaraja the Great ruled over a golden age of art and commerce in India. When the nobles of house Kalari at Panaji celebrated the birth of a daughter, they knew their little Vasantasena could grow up to expect an exalted marriage: perhaps to the son of Rajaraja himself.

Vasantasena grew into a beautiful and open-hearted princess, pampered but not spoiled. She studied the mysteries of Shradha ancestor worship, in which the living nourished their dead forebears with sacrifices, and became an adept pupil. Because of her high birth, skill in domestic rituals, and effervescent charm, Vasantasena attracted many suitors, each bearing gifts more lavish than the last.

Only her father and mother knew that an ancient, traveling holy man named Unmada had prophesied that the girl was destined to sacrifice herself in a manner that would take her out of the cycle of reincarnation.

Her Death

Though life in Panaji was idyllic for Vasantasena, a cancer ate away at the court. The Chamberlain of Calicut had secretly offered the nobles a chance to support his secret, private army. He promised security from the incursions of Islamic warriors who carved away at the outer edges of the empire, and a chance to conquer other lands. From most noble houses, he demanded money, quarters for his troops, and blood sacrifices made to his ancestors. From Vasantasena's father, he demanded the princess.

The Kalari court's response to the imperious visitor was divided. Some nobles wished to join him. Others disliked the chamberlain for his strange ways (he would only meet them at night), but liked the idea of owning a private army. Vasantasena's father, Prince Kalari, wished to expose the chamberlain to the Raj and see the usurper pulled

apart by elephants. Court politics became ugly and vicious; good men divided into factions over the state's course of action and turned on one another.

The chamberlain, a far-travelling vampire of the Tzimisce clan, took almost as much perverse pleasure in setting men against each other as he did in preying on innocent young princesses. He secretly visited Vasantasena's chambers and drank the princess' blood every night. He did not drain enough to kill her, but took enough to leave her spiritually wounded.

The girl's sudden pallor and depression frightened her family. The chamberlain insisted that Prince Kalari had insulted the gods by rejecting his offer, and that Kali punished the princess in retribution. Vasantasena, overcome with a profound lassitude, descended deeply into despair. Finally, on the verge of madness, she lapsed into the blessed relief of a coma.

Her distraught father finally decided to join the wicked chamberlain, willing to pay any prince to restore his precious daughter. Before he could announce his plan, the holy man Unmada returned to see Vasantasena. Prince Kalari resisted, fearing such a thing would vex the chamberlain. But he respected the wise old Brahmin more than he feared his tormentor, and relented. The ancient Brahmin examined the girl, and declared she was in a deep state of *Supta*, a dreaming sleep from which she would soon die.

Unmada, a devotee of mortification of the flesh, had a body punctured with hundreds of metal wires, wooden barbs and bone hooks. He withdrew a bronze wire from his chest, mixed his own holy blood into an elixir, and fed it to the sleeping girl. She immediately revived and told her parents of the chamberlain's great fangs and vile predations.

Unmada scolded the nobles for contemplating an alliance with a demon. "When a man is so evil the stench of duplicity rises from his every action, why would his promises tempt you? Can you not smell the lies?" He gave them an enchanted willow wand that could destroy the monster, and left the court.

Some nobles reacted with outrage, and called for the monster's head on a pike. But the cautious courtiers' greed overshadowed all other concerns, and they declined to take action against the chamberlain. "How do we know the wise man speaks the truth?" one asked. "Is it not said that he is mad? The chamberlain cannot be a fanged demon. He enjoys the support of the priests."

Other nobles, in their most secret hearts, knew the chamberlain was inhuman, but relished allying with a supernatural power. A few nobles could not make up their minds. Only Vasantasena knew that the demon had to be destroyed. In a court where the nobles were crazed with power lust, it took a princess on the brink of true madness to see clearly.

When the chamberlain returned to court to hear the nobles' decision, Vasantasena's presence shocked him. But he smiled politely to her and asked for the nobles to join him.

Vasantasena knew that killing the demon with Unmada's wand was not enough. She had to expose him and let the nobles know the truth about the creature they were sustaining. Moving with a speed born of clarity of purpose, she drew a sword from a guard's scabbard and plunged it through the chamberlain's unliving heart. The vampire did not die, but screamed in rage. His fangs grew long, and he turned on the princess. While the shocked courtiers watched he tore her delicate throat out with his teeth and greedily lapped up her warm blood.

The furious nobles could no longer deny the truth. They looked evil dead in the eye and were repulsed. They rose up against the chamberlain, who fought back like a de-

mon. Only Vasantasena's father was able to kill him by impaling him with Unmada's blessed willow wand.

Later that night, the holy man returned to survey the desolation. He took the chamberlain's body, promising to prevent the undying monster from returning. He also collected the body of the murdered princess. "Her sacrifice has placed her beyond the domain of such faithless fools as you," he said gravely. "Her spirit has attained a perfect state, free from the cycle of reincarnation that binds all others to the world of illusion. Know also that you faithless nobles are doomed to a thousand reincarnations as wingless insects in a garden of hungry birds."

Unmada, a vampire of the lunatic Malkavian clan, did not tell the nobles of Kalari that Vasantasena would be free from reincarnation because he would make her into a vampire.

Her Unlife

Hidden in his sacred grove, Unmada feasted on the defeated chamberlain's potent blood and gained great power from it. Then he fed his own vampiric blood to the princess. Vasantasena arose as one of the living dead. Because Unmada had fortified the princess with a draught of his own undead blood before the chamberlain killed her, Vasantasena "survived" her own murder.

Vasantasena spent centuries traveling with her Malkavian mentor Unmada. The two inseparable friends spread little pockets of their madness like seeds wherever they went. However, when they tried to venture into China, the mysterious Asian vampires effortlessly overwhelmed them and sent them quickly fleeing west. The pair headed to Europe, suitably chastened by the experience, and arrived just in time for the Inquisition.

Unmada called for the vampire clans to band together against the rapacious and reckless violence of the anarchs and genocidal zeal of the mortals. Few Malkavians cared, but he convinced the lunatic clan to join with the Camarilla. He prophesied doom for all his kind if they did not unite with their brethren. Without Unmada and Vasantasena's exhortations, the Malkavians would not have joined the Camarilla, and the clans would have had less of a chance to survive the anarchs' war.

Though Vasantasena worked with Unmada to unite the clans, she quickly grew disenchanted with the Camarilla. She found the other vampires, especially the Ventrue and Tremere, inexcusably blind to the truths of vampiric existence. She called the enforced Blood Bonding of anarchs at the Convention of Thorns "a thorn in the heart of all Kindred."

The night the Assamites were magically stripped of their ability to commit diablerie, she freed a host of captured anarchs and fled the Camarilla and her sire. She took her brood to join the unrepentant legions of the Lasombra and Tzimisce, and created the Sabbat from the ashes of the anarch rebellion.

The vital Camarilla secrets she brought to the Sabbat helped keep the fledgling movement alive long enough to consolidate power. Soon the Sabbat grew into a force powerful enough to challenge the Camarilla, and the Jyhad raged.

Her Nature

Due to her descent into madness and the infusion of Unmada's Malkavian blood, she gained strange and remarkable insights. She can mystically sense spiritual auras, divine the history of objects, and see the content of people's souls. These talents allow her to pierce the consensual illusions most mortals and vampires accept as reality and see things exactly as they are. This also makes her seem more insane than she really is.

Vasantasena's formidable senses tell her that as long as vampires remain Blood Bound in unbreakable lineages of Kindred, the Antediluvians can gobble them up like strands of pearls. She insists that when the Antediluvians awaken on Gehenna, they have but to command a single elder to submit, and said elder will thereupon present his entire family tree for leisurely dining – commanding his childer to command their childer to command their childer to offer themselves up.

She works in the evangelical wing of the Sabbat, spreading her madness among Camarilla camps and converting anarchists to her beliefs. New converts find it easier to pass the grueling Sabbat initiation tests after exposure to her peculiar brand of madness.

Though obsessive about the need for illumination, she derides the many Sabbat Paths of Enlightenment. She takes gleeful pleasure in disrupting their meetings and challenging their leaders with mind-bending arguments. Many within the Sabbat find her inexcusably disruptive, but the oldest members have the utmost respect for her, and reverently recall her crucial role in founding their order. The youngest Sabbat admire her as an unliving example to which they can aspire.

Rafael de Corazon

Toreador Elder of the Camarilla

"I will hide my face from then..." he said, "and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful."

The Bible, Deuteronomy 32:20

As the forces of the Inquisition and the legions of the anarchs surrounded the scattered, quarrelsome and indecisive forces of the vampire clans, one voice rose above the clamor. Rafael de Corazon called upon the vampire elders to forsake their direct ties to the world of men and pass forever into shadows and nightmares.

His Life

Bloody religious strife between Spanish Christians and Spanish Moslems tore apart the beautiful countryside of Navarre during the turbulent twelfth century. To the peasant caught in the endless civil war, the Church served as the only refuge from the emotional upheaval of the factional fighting. A cherubic peasant boy named Rafael de Corazon caught the eye of the Bishop of Navarre. The bishop lifted the sweet-voiced child out of poverty and into the exalted world of the Church. Rafael loved the opulent robes, musky incense and reverberating hymns, and found refuge in the dark, somber chambers lit by breathtaking multicolored stained glass windows.

He became an altar boy – the most beautiful boy in a building full of beautiful boys who resented Rafael's status as the bishop's new favorite. The boy tried to stay out of harm's way by keeping a low profile, but quickly learned to use his favor with the bishop to covertly lash back at his tormentors. It was his first taste of power, and he liked it.

Just as he was learning how best to exercise his dominance, younger, more attractive boys arrived, and the bishop's attention wandered. Rafael used his diminishing resources to protect himself from the older boys who were eagerly awaiting his fall. Before his influence completely ebbed away, he begged the bishop to put him in training for the priesthood instead of shunting him off into the monastery with the other aging altar boys.

Rafael had little talent as a priest, and was once again a small fish in a big, dangerous pool of men who had won their positions through hard work or political power. Because he could not distinguish himself through his works or talent, he again found great value in keeping a low profile. To advance his power within the clergy, he sought stewardship over high-profile projects. He lost many plum positions, like supervising new cathedral construction, but eventually won a lesser assignment overseeing the creation of cathedral mosaics and illuminated manuscripts.

Though the Church officially frowned on vanity, the bishop conferred great status on the priests and monks who created the most exquisite art, wine and music. Rafael claimed credit for the finest pieces created by his monks, and warned them not to challenge him. But the bishop ignored Rafael's works, and the young man again felt the sting of plummeting status. The monks he had mistreated quietly whetted their knives in preparation for his fall. He had cultivated too many enemies to hide in quiet anonymity again.

To regain the bishop's attention, Rafael took a great risk. He knew the bishop's tastes intimately, and brashly catered to them by making his artisans devise sexually explicit illuminated manuscript. The bishop loved the new works, and Rafael gloated over his renewed status within the cathedral.

His Death

Rafael's life changed forever during a late-night visit by a mysterious, unmarried noblewoman named Callisti y Castillo, who was rumored to be an immortal pagan witch of ancient lineage. Some clergy called her a spawn of Satan, given to public blood drinking and occult practices. The bishop knew that if he could convince her to convert, she would help the Reconquista to reclaim Spain for Christendom. Pagan practices were far less immediately threatening than the Moors.

His spies told him that Callisti dearly prized art, and leaned toward supporting the Moors only because of their rich artistic heritage. He planned to woo her favor with the cathedral's art offerings. Some priests scurried to make every detail of her visit perfect, while others railed against the corrosive influence of demonic outsiders.

She swept into the cathedral at midnight; a stunningly sensual woman with a phalanx of warriors and an entourage of sweetly attractive young male attendants. This scandalized the priests, who blithely accepted the extravagant displays of sexual licentiousness from men, but greatly resented sexual power in the hands of a woman.

Monks crept from their beds to catch a glimpse of the woman capable of rousing the church at so late an hour, and the priests scrambled to keep the celibate monks from stealing a glimpse of her provocative beauty. Callisti knew the scandal her presence caused, and smiled seductively.

The bishop browbeat the priests into making a great show of hospitality. He presented Callisti with gifts of mosaics, stained glass and their most exquisitely painted Bible. But she found them all wanting, and rejected conversion.

Rafael lusted after the arrogant woman, who radiated raw sensuality and wicked passions. During the uproar, he gave her explicit manuscripts depicting graphic nudes of Adam and Eve engaged in wicked fornication after the Fall of Man. She praised the great beauty of the work, and accepted full conversion to Christianity on the spot from an embarrassed, appalled and bewildered bishop. She made a sizable donation to the Reconquista, and offered the use of her fortresses.

Callisti asked to bishop for permission to take the talented young priest with her. He refused the unseemly request, saying it was not part of their original agreement. However, upon seeing Rafael grow pale and wan over the following days, he relented and let her take him. The bishop did not know that Callisti was a powerful vampire of the Toreador clan, and had drained Rafael's blood every night in his sleep.

Once Rafael was hers, Callisti Embraced him, turning him into her childe. He was shocked at the sudden reversal of his fortunes, but could do nothing to resist.

She demanded he paint more erotic art for her. The art he produced was mediocre at best and, when he admitted his deception, she flew into a rage and nearly destroyed him. As his precious blood drained away for the second time, he begged for his undead existence. He insisted that his deception showed a special kind of artistic talent, and that his very life was a work of art. Amused by his appeal, she spared him.

In another reversal of fate, he found himself the lowest of the low in an entourage of beautiful, talented, jealous male vampires. He again found comfort in anonymity, carefully disguising his aspirations and ambitions from the others.

His Unlife

When the Inquisition flared up, Callisti wanted no part of the war against the mortals. She had grown weary of Christian art, finding it increasingly arid and lifeless. She set off for India, where she had heard that a new erotic art style flourished, and left behind inter-clan politics. Rafael quietly volunteered to run her affairs while she was gone, and she consented with little interest or enthusiasm.

In her absence, Rafael shamelessly exploited her power, using her authority to propose treaties, form alliances and launch territorial fights. He created numerous children while hiding behind Callisti's authority.

His mediocre artistic talents gave him little status in the Toreador, so he became a great patron of the arts. He knew the talented Toreador did not respect him, so he covertly used his power to damage and embarrass them.

As the Inquisition and the anarch rebellion gutted even the greatest Kindred families, the remaining clans gathered to formulate a unified response. Some wanted to strike back at the presumptuous mortals and ungrateful neonates, greatly reduce their populations, and rule them with an iron fist. Others found all this suicidal, and proposed trying to trick the anarchs into fighting the Inquisition.

Rafael exploited his mistress' authority to address the elders. He stepped before them, and simply read the Fifth Tradition of the Kindred to them, saying "Thou shall not reveal thy true nature to those not of the blood." His words met with stony silence, so he read the Tradition again and again. The elders booed and called for him to be dragged from the dais. As they came for him, Rafael warned them away, railing against the elders for abandoning so sacred a tradition. He said, "WE are to blame for this! We have lost our claim of blood by living so conspicuously among mortals!"

Amid the shouts of elders clamoring for his blood, he cried out above the din, "Living openly among mortals has been our ruin! We violated the spirit of the Fifth Tradition, and we pay for it in blood! Mortals are too numerous and too jealous of our power. They will try to destroy us as long as they know of us! It has always been so! We must turn our backs on them. We must hide our faces away from their envious eyes!"

His impassioned speech reached even the closed minds of the Ventrue and Tremere elders. He turned the tide of thought from a craving for all-out war with the mortals to subtlety and subversion. The vampires went underground and covered their traces. They covertly changed the intellectual climate. Their human agents mocked eyewitness accounts of vampires and ridiculed the old legends. The vampires survived the Inquisition, and within several generations humanity turned to science and scoffed at superstition.

Rafael, the hero of the day, used his new status to help press the war against the anarchs and keep the neonates down. He hates them the same way he hated the younger, rival altar boys in the Navarre cathedral. But while he rides high on the respect of others, he lives in terror of the return of his sire, Callisti. He fears her anger over his abuse of her power. Thus far, she has not returned from India...

His Nature

Many Toreador consider Rafael the symbolic heart of the clan. Renowned for his extraordinary beauty and notorious for his cold, calculating style, the talentless vampire casts a long shadow over his fellow artists. Like his sire, Rafael surrounds himself with

a coterie of achingly beautiful male and female childer, all flawed in some way so as not to overshadow his own great beauty.

Though he is not the oldest, most powerful, or most talented of the Toreador, Rafael is the most influential. He won the hearts and minds of his clan during the Inquisition, and has not released his hold on Toreador thinking since.

The Camarilla venerates him for contriving the Masquerade. Many vampires believe that Kindred society survived the ravages of the Inquisition only because of his scheme to hide all signs of vampiric presence from mortals. Rafael finally has the admiration and respect he always wanted.

Gratiano

Lasombra Elder of the Sabbat

The last temptation is the greatest treason:

To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

T.S. Eliot, "Murder in the Cathedral"

Of all the crimes known to Kindred, only the destruction of the clan founder rocks all vampires to the core. When Antediluvians fall, bloodlines wither.

His Life

Born into the prosperous de Veronese family of Italy, Gratiano knew all the advantages of noble birth and showed the requisite haughtiness and base cruelty at an early age. Indeed, his father's few attempts to curb the boy's arrogance and pride only led to more hostility and anger. Still, Gratiano's ambition and accomplishments pleased his father; he quickly distinguished himself in war, commerce and politics. Entering the priesthood as a teenager, he also wielded this power well, and sought a bishopric while still in his early twenties.

The early part of the twelfth century was a curious age of Popes and Anti-Popes; of holy wars within Christendom; of the Italian nation trading happily with the German nation invading it. Gratiano battled with all his substantial might and power to keep Italy strong, knowing birth tied his power to its. Thus he used treaties, trade agreements and troops as weapons against the Holy Roman Empire.

But it seemed nothing could stem the tide of endless invasions. As the armies of the Empire came closer to seizing the Papacy from Rome, the Italians desperately sought a new strategy.

Amid high hopes for peace (and praise), the young Gratiano embarked on a series of diplomatic missions to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor to negotiate for greater autonomy. After months of futile bargaining, however, he realized his countrymen's insincerity in the negotiations.

That they sent him, him of all people, only to stall, was unbearable to the ambitious young man. His bitterness grew as he saw the dazzling wealth of the Emperor's court, and he slowly began adopting German customs. This, coupled with the lack of action on his investiture, began severing his ties to his homeland.

A German noble quickly noted Gratiano's dissatisfaction and began working on him. In short order, the Italian patriot agreed to betray his Pop and his people in return for a German estate and entry into the clergy of the Holy Roman Empire. He maneuvered the elderly patriarch of his family into signing away valuable territorial control to the Holy Roman Empire, and laid the groundwork for a siege of northern Italian cities.

His glee at how well the plan caught his family off guard knew no bounds, and his happiness would have been complete if not for the intervention of an ancient vampire.

His Death

Gratiano's base betrayal of his own family caught the eye of the founder of the Lasombra clan of vampires. Though long separate from the mortal world, the founder still covertly manipulated Italian politics. Gratiano's cunning and malice so impressed him that he decided to take the noble into his vampiric family.

Lasombra fervently believed his progeny should not be taken by force, but instead Embraced only when they wanted a vampiric existence as passionately and as desperately as they desired their next breaths. He believed, as do many other Kindred, that ties of true loyalty are far stronger than the supernatural ties of the Blood.

So, before Gratiano could savor his German estate, Lasombra arranged for him to return to Verona to hammer out the agreement's fine details. The young man feared an eleventh-hour return to the people he was betraying, but knew all his work depended on it.

Upon his arrival, he found his family waiting with manacles. They ambushed him, beat him and placed him under house arrest. When the armies of the Holy Roman Empire did not come to release him, he began to despair that all his plans had come to nothing.

Lasombra rose from his deep sleep to make a late-night visit to the imprisoned young man. Passing through the cell walls, the intimidating Antediluvian offered to intercede for the stunned youth in return for utter loyalty. To his surprise, Gratiano did not jump at the offer, and showed skepticism about joining the mysterious Lasombra. He already had plans for his own release, and felt confident his personal charm would win the day in a battle against his weakened family.

Still, Gratiano's doubts were assuaged by the continued presence of the ancient vampire, and eventually Gratiano accepted, seeing a sure path to safety and power. As the Antediluvian congratulated himself on a fine addition to his line, Gratiano began looking for ways to take his sire's place. He easily surmised that Lasombra was looking for an enthusiastic, eager son, so he put on a great display of enthusiasm and loyalty.

Gratiano's cleverness deceived the Antediluvian utterly, but the ancient vampire's elder childe, Montano, was not so easily duped. Montano, a powerful warrior and leader of Lasombra's elite Victory Corps, saw through the young man's duplicity. He warned his sire of his misgivings, but Lasombra scoffed, accusing the loyal Montano of rank jealousy towards his new brother.

For years Gratiano seemed to fulfill the Antediluvian's hopes. When the master was around, he was a loyal, fawning toady. When he was away from his sire, he constantly tested the practical limitations of his ties. Lasombra felt refreshed after taking a new son, and never suspected Gratiano of disloyalty, especially after Montano convinced him to ensure the Italian's loyalty with a Blood Bond. He never guessed Gratiano was the last son he would ever take.

His Unlife

The young nobleman traded the precarious world of Italian intrigue for the ferocious world of vampire politics. During the following centuries, he learned the ways of the Kindred and became adept at the stratagems they used against one another. He also bridled at the rigid status system locking Montano and Lasombra's other songs above him in a fixed, immutable hierarchy.

His daring had rocketed him to power in the mortal world, but now he found himself in a cold world where lifespans were measured in millennia and rapid ascensions were impossible. He wanted immediate respect and hated the thought that high status would

take centuries to earn. His hatred was further fueled by the successes of Montano, who enjoyed great popularity in the Italian court and military victories abroad. Gratiano continued to do as he was told, but his heart burned once more with traitorous venom.

The anarch movement came to Italy on stealthy wings, in knowing winks and subtle intimations. Intolerant and fearful elders snuffed out the few angry young prophets preaching the anarch creed, but the movement burned brighter with each attempt to smother it. Under Montano's leadership, the Lasombra clan proved especially adept at rooting out and crushing anarchs. The only place they did not think to look was at home.

When the anarchs made appeals to Lasombra's progeny, Montano and the other childer caught and killed them. Because Gratiano was the most recent of the Antediluvian's creations, the anarchs singled him out for special temptations. Publicly he battled them, but secretly he sought their attentions. When he learned they could break the compelling power of the Blood Bond, he agreed to join. In a secret midnight ritual, he shared the blood of twelve anarchs and shook off the ties to his master.

The newly freed Gratiano hatched a sinister plot to kill his sire. He brought special sacrificial anarchs before the Lasombra council in Sicily, claiming he caught them hiding in the Lasombra palace. The elders probed the minds of the anarchs and learned Montano, the eldest son of Lasombra, had brought them in to kill the other brothers. These images, planted in the anarchs' mind by Assamite allies, tore apart the court. Some of the Lasombra clamored for Montano's blood. Others called it a cheap anarch trick and insisted Montano was innocent. While their master slept, they chose sides and fell to bloody squabbling. Only Montano refused to participate.

At the apex of the suspicion and chaos, the anarchs attacked. The weakened Lasombra clan reeled under the impact of the full fury of Europe's anarchs, aided by the Assamites and Lasombra anarchs like Gratiano. The clan fell like a house of cards, and a mighty anarch leader attacked, defeated and drank the blood of the Lasombra founder. Only Montano and a handful of others survived utter destruction.

Gratiano predicted the other clans would fall as easily as his own, and helped mold the reckless energy of the anarchs into the Sabbat. Sobered by the destruction of Lasombra, however, the other elders banded their houses together into the Camarilla and presented a unified front against their rebellious progeny. They defeated the Assamites, and fight the Sabbat to this day.

Gratiano, now an Archbishop of the Sabbat, works to undermine the Camarilla. Through political maneuvering, corruption of Camarilla neonates and outright violence, he and the other Sabbat leaders fight their ancient enemies from city to city. Though he has not attained more outright victories like the one over his sire, he is content to rule over an unruly force of anarchs.

His Nature

The arrogant Italian nobleman presides over his Sabbat court with disdain bordering on contempt. The wild, rebellious anarchs remind him of the lumpen peasants with whom he avoided associating during his human life. He yearns for elevated, civilized company, but knows his fate decrees less ennobling associates. Still, as one of his idols observed, better to rule in hell than serve in heaven.

Lambach

Tzimisce Elder of the Sabbat

*Dreams you didn't dare are dead.
Were they ever there? Who said?
You won't remember, you won't remember at all...*

*The roads you never take
Go through rocky ground, Don't they? The choices that you make
Aren't all that grim.*

*The worlds you never see
Still will be around, won't they?
The man I'll never be,
Who remembers him?*

Stephen Sondheim, "The Road You Didn't Take"

Vampires have bled the lands of Eastern Europe to the bone for thousands of years. From the Tremere to the Brujah to the Tzimisce go the greatest Tzimisce of all, Vlad Dracula, the territories north of Bulgaria have seen no peace from the bloodletting. But in this nightmare land, even some of the vampires sleep and uneasy sleep as they wait for Gehenna.

His Life

The Tzimisce clan loomed over the noble families of medieval Hungary and Romania, casting a long shadow over all their houses. The vampire clan selected many of its neonates from a pool of powerful young aristocrats who were raised specifically to become undead. This ensured them a line of noble-born fledglings, bred to wield power. Unfortunately, it also created a host of spoiled childer with weak genes and weaker wills – childer like Lambach Ruthven.

His Death

Though born to privilege and power, Lambach Ruthven never wielded his command with much confidence or courage. A weak, indecisive man, he became a weak, indecisive vampire lord, promoted over far worthier rivals by dint of the accident of his birth. He flourished only by squandering the great reserve of power his ancestors had stored for him.

He lived his life in fear of the inevitable Embrace and tried his best to avoid it. Because he spent so much time dreading the bite, he suffered greatly when his Tzimisce sire drained his blood. The vampiric ritual lasted only three hours, but to Lambach it felt like an eternity of sheer and utter hell. Lambach suffered the torments of the damned and did not come through the ordeal intact. After the excruciating agony subsided, he withdrew into himself and became an anxiety-ridden, desperate, terrified bully.

His Unlife

Lambach lacked the courage and cleverness to rule effectively, but inherited a large power base to administrate and many loyal followers. His Tzimisce leaders demanded that he help fight the Tremere, fend off the rampaging anarchs, and control the ebb and flow of mortal power. He usually did a poor job and seldom measured up to complicated tasks, which often involved toppling princes from their thrones and installing weaker monarchs.

But trouble stirred in the Transylvanian highlands. The anarchs, heady from their success in destroying and committing diablerie upon the Lasombra Antediluvian, attacked the Tzimisce clan in force. They captured many weaker Tzimisces, demanding that they join the anarchs or die. Lambach's sire called all his children to defend him and escaped, leaving his children to be slain. Lambach put up a weak fight before the renegades overwhelmed and captured him. Lambach agreed to convert rather than die.

The anarch leader Lugoj broke Lambach's Blood Bond to the Tzimisces, but could not instill courage in him. Still, Lugoj needed Lambach's knowledge to lead his fratricidal band to the hiding place of the Tzimisce founder. Lambach took Lugoj and a mob of anarchs to the ancient cathedral where the Tzimisce Antediluvian slumbered. The Tzimisce guardians put up a great fight, but after a wicked battle, the anarchs won. They dispelled the magical protections and unearthed the ancient vampire from his torpor. Lugoj himself greedily consumed the Antediluvian's blood.

But fear welled up in Lambach when he saw how weak the Antediluvian seemed – as if he were no more powerful than a neonate. He studied the Antediluvian's body before it crumbled to dust, and sweated blood when he saw telltale signs of fleshcrafting. Lambach knew well the power of the Tzimisces to mold the mortal clay, enabling them to disguise and disfigure themselves and others. The destroyed vampire was not the Antediluvian, but had been fleshcrafted to look like him.

As the anarchs rejoiced in their triumph, Lambach fearfully studied the carnage in the cathedral. A wave of terror overcame him, for his advanced powers of perception showed him something the other anarchs could not see.

The real anarch leader Lugoj hung behind them, impaled on a massive wooden hook and hidden with a powerful spell of invisibility. So who was the Lugoj who stood rejoicing before them?

In a gut-rending flash, Lambach realized what had happened. The Tzimisce Antediluvian was not dead, but had subdued the anarch leader Lugoj during the fight and taken over his form. The anarchs had killed and drunk the blood of a fleshcrafted look-alike, not the real Antediluvian. The real Antediluvian was standing in their midst, pretending to be the anarch leader.

"Lugoj" just smiled at Lambach, as Lambach stared in horror. "Be a good lad," the Antediluvian warned, as his blazing eyes pierced Lambach to the core. He then announced to the other anarchs:

"Alas, I must now go into torpor like the very one whom I have just destroyed. You will now complete the conquest of the hated Tzimisces. I shall wait for you, On the night of Gehenna, I shall arise and we shall rule the world together! While the other Antediluvians eat their clans, I will join with you, my trusted brethren, and destroy the other Antediluvians! We shall be complete, and we shall prevail! Wait for Gehenna. Plan for Gehenna. On the night of Gehenna, I shall come for you."

Lambach tried to flee the castle ahead of the other anarchs, but they caught him and made sure he stayed in line. He feared telling them that the Antediluvian lived on. He wondered if the Antediluvian would rise up against him or reward him on Gehenna.

The frightened Lambach went back to his work controlling mortal affairs of state. Though he now worked for the anarchs and the newly formed Sabbat, he felt the orders from the top were similar to his old orders.

For example, he had to continue promoting the members of the Danesti family in their bid for the Wallachian throne. But upstart rulers gave him a hard time, and by the time Prince Vlad Dracula ascended the throne, Lambach struggled for any influence at all. He supported Dracula's cousins Vladislav II and Dan III in their bids to wrest Dracula's throne from the rightful heir.

Thanks to Lambach's incompetence, Vlad clung to power and even caught one of Lambach's vampiric spies. The Impaler prince kept the neonate spy imprisoned in Castle Dracula and drank his powerful blood to gain inhuman strength.

Lambach's Sabbat leader Lord Tabak punished Lambach for allowing this flagrant violation of vampiric power, and led a group of vampires to depose the impudent prince. But before they reached Castle Dracula, they walked into a trap. A group of Camarilla Justicars ambushed them, capturing Lambach, forcing Tabak into torpor, and destroying the rest.

Before the Justicars could destroy Lambach, however, the mortal prince Dracula attacked, slaying the weakened Justicars. Dracula forced Lambach to turn him into a vampire and then drained the blood of Lambach's defenseless regent Tabak.

Dracula turned Lambach loose, but not before warning his "sire" never to challenge him. Lambach fled and returned to the Tzimisces. He feared they would destroy him if they knew he unleashed a vampire prince upon the world who had the power of his sire Tabak, but was loyal only to himself. So he did not reveal what happened to him, and reported only the Justicar attack. Dracula soon visited the Tzimisces, refusing to describe his parentage.

His Nature

Lambach's every day is filled with fear and regret. He knows the anarchs did not kill their founder as the Lasombra anarchs did. Unfortunately, all the Tzimisce anarchs believe they did. The Tzimisce Antediluvian lives on, waiting patiently for a rapidly approaching Gehenna. But what then? Will the unsuspecting clan fall prey to the wily Antediluvian? Will the ancient vampire reward Lambach's silence? Or will he have a special torture waiting for his treacherous descendant?

Lambach regrets not revealing the corpse of the impaled Lugoj, or at least trying to make the other anarchs see it. He regrets joining the anarchs. He regrets trying to depose Vlad Dracula, a fiasco that ended in Dracula's existence as an independent Tzimisce. He regrets much. He has tried confiding his fears in other anarchs, but they scoff at the thought of the Antediluvian's continued existence. So he waits for Gehenna with growing unease and fear.

Montano

Lasombra Antitribu of the Camarilla

There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.
Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus"

No other tragedy devastates a loyal vampire childe with the same apocalyptic fury as does the death of the progenitor. Even beyond the sorrow caused by the loss of sire or prince, the loss of the clan founder evokes a sense of abandonment beyond the ability of mortals to understand. For Montano, internal conflicts over the destruction of the Lasombra Antediluvian go far beyond those known to any other Kindred.

His Life

Montano's story began thousands of years ago on the Masai steppes of East Africa. He came into the world on Mount Kilimanjaro in the midst of a vicious storm - a storm which killed his mother. The shaman of the nomadic Falcon tribe saw the survival of the infant as a powerful augury. He named the child Ontai, which meant Enduring, and took him as an apprentice shaman.

The remarkable child showed exceptional insight into the world of animals and spirits. His great compassion and unquenchable thirst for knowledge pleased the shaman.

During Ontai's sixth year, the skies cracked open and a great plague racked the tribe. An evil vampiric spirit followed, in the form of a pale, gray man who demanded the tribe's young as tribute. The devastated tribe fought back, and the shaman unleashed the power of the spirit world, but the stranger easily stood against them. He mocked the shaman as he flayed the flesh from his bones. The young Ontai solemnly sword on the skull of the murdered shaman that he would rid his tribe of the malign entity regardless of the cost.

The vampire, an ancient grandchilde of the Caine named Lasombra, had walked the corners of the earth to find a perfect childe. After creating and destroying legions of disappointing offspring, he decided he could only make a worthy, loyal childe by raising it himself.

Even though the blood Bond enforced loyalty, Lasombra hated the thought that the young vampire might secretly plot against him in his innermost heart. He craved the faithfulness even beyond his final annihilation, so he crafted a thousand cruel games to test the loyalty of his offspring. He obliterated each one as soon as it failed to measure up to his impossible standards, and soon had killed them all.

The powerful Cainite devised a plan to gain a truly loyal son. He would find powerful people with strong bodies, great courage, and an abiding sense of honor, and terrorize them into making one. The Falcon tribe of the Masai people seemed perfect: healthy, victorious in battle, and determined to die rather than give up their honor.

Lasombra set up a cruel behavioral experiment. He ravaged the Falcon tribe with plagues and spiritual despair, and told the people they would perish if they did not produce a child who would be eternally loyal to him. Once the child had offered a child to the vampire, he selected Ontai, a shaman in training, to serve as the primary playmate to his "son." To build the child's gratitude and loyalty, Lasombra made sure the child had everything he wanted. To make the boy a natural leader, the tribe had to obey the

boy at all times. Lasombra felt this would turn his "son" into a natural leader: accustomed to giving orders to men and being instantly obeyed.

But the experiment collapsed in shambles. The ancient vampire had envisioned a powerful, determined son committed to his father's glory. What he got was an arrogant, spoiled man-child, concerned only with his own pleasure. Raised in luxury, his son had no concept of achievement over adversity, and could not shrewdly jockey for position with others. Worst of all, his highest priority was not service his lord and "father," but indulging in petty whims.

In anger, Lasombra destroyed his "son" and hurled the boy's remains into the tribal meeting place. He told the people he would destroy half of them as punishment and start the experiment again. Once he had a formula for producing the perfect offspring, the village would make him sons forever. The people of the Falcon tribe rose up and launched a great war against the pale spirit. During the bloody night, Lasombra slaughtered many of the warriors, but did not manage to wipe out half the village. He fled as the first rays of dawn touched the blood-drenched field, but vowed to return the following night and finish his butchery.

His Death

Lasombra rose from his earthen sanctum the next night and found a shock. Ontai (now a young man) sat over him, watching. The apprentice shaman had somehow traced the vampire to his hidden lair, and for some reason didn't attack the sleeping monster.

Ontai immediately sword loyalty to the vampire, offering his life in eternal service, even beyond Lasombra's destruction. He did not bargain for his village's existence or state conditions, but gave himself freely.

This immediately raised Lasombra's suspicions, but his curiosity overwhelmed him. He stole the life from the unresisting young man and replaced Ontai's blood with his own undead ichor. But he did not force a Blood Bond upon Ontai. He did not trust Ontai to be truly honorable and loyal, and wished to put him to the test.

He took Ontai back to the village and commanded the young man to kill everyone within, starting with his dearest friends. Ontai began to do this without hesitation.

In that moment, Lasombra realized that Ontai would keep his oath at all costs -- even to the utter destruction of his people. And he would do it simply because he had given his word that he would. Yet because Ontai agreed without any coercion, Lasombra could not duplicate the experiment. The success relied entirely on Ontai's free will -- the only factor Lasombra could not control.

The vampire stopped Ontai from killing the tribe, Blood Bound him, and left the Falcon tribe, never to return. All Ontai took with him was the skull of the fallen shaman, as a symbol of the undying promise he had made.

The vampire was amazed and deeply disturbed by the turn of events. He had created a perfect child of honor and loyalty, but had come no closer toward finding a formula to make such offspring. He could never force anyone to possess Ontai's honor or duplicate his sacrifice.

Deep in his undead hearth Lasombra silently wondered: did the child outfox him? Did a mere boy trick the ancient Kindred into leaving the Falcon people in peace? But how could he? Lasombra might have let him destroyed the tribe. And yet the fact remained -- because he was willing to destroy his people, Ontai saved them all.

His Unlife

Lasombra gave Ontai the Western name Montano and took him around the Old World, instilling terror and creating a legion of progeny. Montano assisted his master in creating and testing the childer. Few measured up to Montano, and none could match his unswerving honor. The Antediluvian realized that his eldest son's honor came from within him; it was a force beyond his control and ability to reproduce in other sons. Because of that, Lasombra never felt entirely comfortable around Montano, and favored his other, less worthy offspring. If Montano suffered under the weight of this injustice, the world never knew.

The Lasombra clan expanded quickly and moved its home from the Iberian Peninsula to Imperial Rome. To the mortal world, Montano appeared as a mysterious, dashing, romantic figure in the Roman court. His dark, chiseled features and noble bearing made him the envy of many courtiers and earned him the affection of many women. He parlayed every ounce of authority he earned into expanding the clan's power, in contrast with other sons who sought command to feed their own vainglorious egos.

Montano assembled an elite legion of powerful warriors, which Lasombra called his Victory Corps, and led bloody skirmishes and daring political maneuvers against the other vampire clans. Their battles spilled over into human affairs and shaped European history through wars fought by mortal pawns. Montano's strength as a warrior and courage as a leader made his "night-dark troops" a fearsome sight on the battlefield. He spread a far-reaching spy network across the Roman Empire and beyond. To centralize Lasombra power, he saw to it that the far-flung pagan empire yielded to the more consolidated Christian Empire.

As the centuries wore on, Lasombra's blood thinned until he could not remain active for long. He spent more and more time in torpor and left his sons to run his affairs. The clan made its home in Sicily, far removed from Italy's wars with the invading armies of the Ventrue-dominated Holy Roman Empire. The Lasombra built a great castle to protect their sleeping monarch, and worked to settle the wars with the Germans.

When news of the anarch revolt reached the Italian court, Montano sympathized with the cause. Still, the anarchists posed a threat to his master, and the loyal son worked to crush them. His "brother" Gratiano betrayed him by joining the anarchists, taking vital secrets with him.

The anarchists attacked the castle and defeated the guards; one of their leaders even drank the blood of Lasombra. The remaining clan members had to choose between joining the anarchists or dying. They all chose surrender and joined the enemy. All but Montano.

Though he despised the ancient vampire and was grateful for his death, Montano had made an eternal pledge of loyalty and refused to break it.

So he chose a third option -- escape. He fled the castle and joined the fledgling Camarilla as one of their few Lasombra *antitribus*.

His Nature

Montano's strongest quality is his willingness to endure his fate. Because of his honor, he continues his service. Because of his deep humanity, he continues to be appalled by his own actions. His is a tortured existence, but his honor is of greater value to him than his relative comfort.

Etrius

Tremere of the Inner Circle

Fiends are legion, we discover; our noblest hopes grow teeth and pursue us like tigers.

John Gardner, *In the Suicide Mountains*

All vampire clans can trace their bloodlines back to a single ancient progenitor – Caine himself. All vampire clans but one. The Tremere are unique among the Kindred, in that their founder became a vampire through his own efforts, not the bite of another.

The clan began as a medieval house of wizards called the Tremere, which felt its grasp loosening on a world increasingly parched of magical energies. The Tremere watched helplessly as magic eroded like streams in a drought, leaving the Earth a barren, dusty landscape of sterile science.

They sought refuge in the dark world of the supernatural, necromantic forces. Through diabolic rituals they traded their souls for the immortality and bloodlust of vampirism. Thus they remained on Earth as the rest of their kind migrated to different planes, went underground in human society, or expired. In the face of growing rationalism, deism and demonism, vampirism became their only refuge. And they still wonder if the prize was worth the price.

His Life

The siren call of magic beckons to very few, but those few who hear the call dare not refuse it. A small Swedish boy named Etrius heard the summons in his little medieval village. He could not control his power, and his magical insights nearly drove him mad. Finally, the quiet, shy, introspective child left his home and embarked on a long, lonely dangerous pilgrimage to find wizards. He arrived exhausted at the Tremere Covenant in Sweden. The Tremere mages immediately recognized his potential and took him in as an apprentice.

Etrius quickly distinguished himself, mastering complex spells with energy and skill. A relentless fire blazed in the quiet boy, driving him to burrow deeper and deeper into the occult landscape. When he mastered everything the Swedish Covenant could teach him, he transferred to the Transylvanian Covenant, which vigorously sought out new spells. Though he could again feed his obsession with new spells, his happiness collapsed when he stumbled on a horrible secret.

Magic was slowly dying, ebbing away from the world of man. Even the millennia-old enchanted creatures were fading from Earth's reality. The few mages who knew about the Great Loss faced an uncertain future of powerlessness and mortality.

The great, charismatic wizard Tremere refused to accept the Great Loss, and hoped against hope that one day the magic would return. He declared that his Order of Hermes would survive the loss of magic by any means necessary. He tested many spells to create eternal life, but found them all fatally flawed, since they all drew their power from the world's fading magic source. In the end he concluded that the only form of immortality not severely degraded by the loss of magic was vampirism.

Tremere's ideas touched off a firestorm within the wizards' Order. Many saw the plan as a mad gamble that risked sacrificing their souls and very humanity for eternal life. They might not survive the ordeal as men, but as soulless monsters.

Undaunted, Tremere gathered his most devoted followers for the task. Etrius disliked the plan and argued against it. "What if immortality cannot be separated from the curse of vampirism?" he asked. "What then?"

But Tremere was used to obedience and ultimately carried the day. Etrius dutifully fell in line and carried out crucial research in the plan. But all along, he feared surrendering his essential humanity.

His Death

The mages assembled in the Transylvanian Covenant, and used the bodies of captured Tzimisce vampires to invoke and transfer the vampires' immortality to themselves. But the spells went awry. Pain lanced through the wizards' bodies like razors. Their organs shriveled, their hearts stopped, and the pure blood in their veins turned to poison. The mages collapse, overcome with agony. As Etrius choked on his own tainted blood, he felt something precious and nearly invisible flee his body. Etrius mourned its loss without knowing quite what was gone. Thought they all survived, they survived as vampires.

In the chaotic days that followed, the Tremere vampires who eagerly embraced the loss of their humanity maneuvered to wrest control of the new vampiric Order away from the more reluctant mages. Etrius suffered blistering magical attacks by rivals who felt he was too weak to be one of them.

Tremere feared losing a full balance of opinion within his new Order, and attacked his unruly charges. He forced his vampiric legions to stop fighting among themselves, and Blood Bound them in a rigid hierarchy beneath him – his pyramid of power. To keep them honest, he linked them by telepathic bonds and kept constant tabs on them. Any Tremere vampires who did not act in the interests of the leader disappeared, and a more deserving member took his place in the pyramid.

Tremere rewarded the faithful Etrius by making him one of the seven vampires in his Inner Circle. But Etrius wondered to himself if Tremere really knew all along that the spell would turn them into vampires. His doubts weakened his respect for the great wizard.

His Unlife

Etrius continued his studies in magic, relieved to know that his magical facilities had not been sacrificed along with his humanity. He eagerly studied his new physical and magical abilities, curious about all the changes in his own body and mind and will. For a time, he was happy.

But Tremere was not content to look inward and contemplate magic. He focused outward, on temporal power. He sent the seven vampires who made up his Inner Circle to dominate the rest of the Tremere house. Etrius sadly left his research tower and traveled Europe, turning old friends into subservient vampires and binding them into their new clan.

The greatest resistance the Tremere "clan" faced came from the other thirteen vampire clans, who considered the new group a dangerous intrusion into their neatly or-

dered world. They felt violated by this upstart clan of vampires that did not descend from Caine and had no Antediluvian progenitor.

But Tremere had a solution to that problem. As he navigated the murky, primeval world of vampire lore, he learned that a vampire can absorb the power of any other vampire whose blood he consumes – even a progenitor Antediluvian. He summoned his Inner Circle and put them to work researching Antediluvian power. Etrius came through again, crafting cunning spells to locate a slumbering third generation vampire.

They located several, but settled on Saulot, founder of the Salubri line. Etrius felt uncomfortable attacking the weakly defended Saulot, but could formulate no real reason for his reticence. The magical energies given off by Saulot were alien and pure, and they terrified. Tremere overrode Etrius and decided to attack Saulot.

Tremere and his Inner Circle tapped the power of the entire clan and raised Saulot from torpor. Tremere magically restrained the Antediluvian and drank his blood. In the mad rush of the blood frenzy, only Etrius noticed that killing Saulot was far too easy. Saulot died with a look of serenity that chilled Etrius to the bone.

After consuming the power of a vampire clan found, Tremere could call his house a true vampire clan, and force the other Kindred to take them serious. The other clans trembled in terror as the Tremere destroyed the Salubri vampires, knowing that each immortal Antediluvian was not just as vulnerable as any neonate. Etrius told Tremere his fears, but the wizard lord refused to listen, flying high on the surge of his newfound power. Once Tremere went into torpor, the debate officially ended.

The reluctant vampire mage Etrius lives in fear of the future. Saulot knew something none of the other vampires knew – something old, dark, wet and long buried. It frightened Etrius like nothing ever before.

His Nature

Etrius roams the havens of the Tremere on a slow burn, uneasy and afraid. His joy in learning, his questing curiosity, his passion for magic, and everything else that once motivated him has crumbled to ashes. He still has nightmares of his act. The diablerie he helped Tremere commit haunts him like a specter. In the darkest hours of the night he succumbs to depression, concluding that he has crossed over an invisible line and can never cross back. Etrius suspects his act has unleashed something terrible at the heart of the vampire mystery.

He doesn't know what. He doesn't know how. He just knows the look on Saulot's face, as if Saulot somehow invited the attack. As if the Antediluvian had attained Golconda, and, from that mystical state of purity, willingly accepted Tremere into his soul.

Durga Syn

Ravnos Elder and Independent

*The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye
As the perfumed tincture of the roses.*

William Shakespeare, "Sonnet LIV"

For centuries the Russian peasants feared the Czars, the Cossacks, the curses of the Gypsies and the night-dark creatures the skittered through the silent woods after dusk. But most of all, they feared Baba Yaga. Baba Yaga the hag. The sorceress. The flesh eater.

The undying Nosferatu vampire Baba Yaga spread a long, corrosive influence over the land, and even the mightiest heroes trembled before her. Her shadow lingered over the Rodina long after she entered torpor. She worked her wicked will through human vassals, enslaved enchanted beings, and her Blood Bound Nosferatu childer. Only the mysterious vampire priestess Durga Syn possessed the strength to challenge her and survive.

Her Life

For centuries the ancient Mother Goddess religion enjoyed strong popularity and devoted adherents among the people of pre-Christian Russia. Peasants worked vigorously in the ancient land, worshipping their fertility gods and goddesses with equal fervor.

The young priestess Durga Syn lived an exciting life of initiation into the mysteries of the Goddess. The beautiful and clever initiate delighted in the wild ecstasies of the pagan rituals, and devoted her life to the fearless exploration of the inner and outer realms.

In those magical days, wise women and cunning men consorted with the immortal enchanted creatures as often as they associated with their fellow mortals. Durga Syn enjoyed the company of a host of faeries, Lupines, vampires and spirits no longer known to our world. The purity of her sexuality and the innocence of her spirituality gained her the admiration and friendship of many beings, who saw her as a trusted mediator and peacemaker in their many disputes.

Unfortunately, the young priestess also attracted the attention of Baba Yaga, an ancient fourth generation Nosferatu who had degenerated into cruelty and madness. She behaved mainly as an unstable instigator, gleefully terrorizing the Russian countryside with powerful spells and far-reaching curses. Her manipulations pitted one force against another, and she created mistrust and war where once there was accord and harmony.

But many of her tidal waves of war evaporated into the mist after Durga Syn shone the clear light of reason and compassion on them. After Durga Syn helped settle a precarious disagreement between the Ravnos clan and the Lupines of the Novgorod Forest, Baba Yaga declared the priestess a severe obstacle to her sport, and vowed to stop her.

The hag, who had herself been a follower of the Mother Goddess before the Nosferatu Antediluvian Embraced her, offered Durga Syn power, immortality and great wisdom as her closest daughter. All she demanded was eternal obedience.

Durga thanked the hag for her offer but rejected the gift, explaining that she preferred to experience the full cycle of life and death naturally, and under her own will. Baba Yaga screeched that no one ever rejected her and lived to boast of it, and put a curse on both Durga Syn and her Motherland.

"If you are so very eager to feel your supple bones grow brittle and your firm flesh sag and grow mottled, then so be it!" Baba Yaga shrieked. She cast a powerful spell on deep illusion on the young priestess. Durga no longer looked young and innocent, but old, haggard and vile. Baba Yaga then embarked on her cruelest game of all. She cursed Mother Russia to suffer an incursion of war that would last for centuries and hound Durga Syn's ancient religion unto death.

Her Death

Shortly after Baba Yaga's curse, the Christian missionaries came, bringing war and pestilence. They would not accept Durga Syn's mediation and fought all who would not convert. They crushed the old religion and instituted their own in its place. Durga and her allies fell before the onslaught, which coincided with the time that magic began to fade from the world.

As Durga lay dying, Baba Yaga appeared before her, prepared to take her in vampiric Embrace. Russian Ravnos vampires, irate over the horrors Baba Yaga capriciously inflicted on their land, created a great illusion of Christian soldiers attacking the hag. While Baba Yaga fought the illusions, the Ravnos whisked away the dying priestess and gave her the gift of unlife.

Though saddened by her undead condition, Durga Syn determined to use her newfound power to resist the forces of intolerance blanketing her Rodina. She fought Baba Yaga's cruel plans and resisted the swordpoint conversion of her people.

Though she silently endured both Baba Yaga's curse of age and her newly acquired bloodlust, every fiber of her being rebelled against the twin violations of her human spirit. Due to the unnatural extension of her existence, she was forced to watch as the centuries eroded magic from the world and washed her dearest immortal companions from the shores of Earth.

Her Unlife

But even immortal evil cannot continue indefinitely. The witch Baba Yaga, wounded by the same forces which sapped magic from Earth, lost much of her power and ultimately had to go underground in a state of torpor. The Nosferatu clan saw to her business in her absence, though many of them went their own way.

With Baba Yaga gone, Durga Syn found clever ways to sabotage the Nosferatu's more insidious plans. She threw herself into her studies of magic, and succeeded in partially unbinding the magic spell holding her in an ugly, weak, decrepit form (Even today, however, she has not fully freed herself; her unbinding spell works only briefly, and during those times her power grows stronger and stronger).

She funneled vital information to Kindred and mortals whom she thought could help right the many wrongs inflicted on the world by the likes of Baba Yaga. She helped

mortal rulers resist the manipulation of vampires and other wicked supernatural creatures. Prince Vlad Dracula of Wallachia heeded her advice and become one of the few independent vampires. She later assisted him in his search for Golconda, and magically bolstered his efforts to keep the Inconnu demon under control.

She helped Camarilla vampires go underground and remain hidden from the Inquisitors. She instructed members of the Sabbat in unifying their anarchic group when it threatened to fly apart in a thousand different directions. She warned the Inconnu about the dire consequences of their trafficking with demonic powers, and has maintained contact with Lupines and the few mages still remaining in the world.

She has aided both Camarilla and Sabbat forces during their endless wars, infuriating both groups. She helped the Brujah stir the Russian people to revolution against the corrupt Czars and invader Church during the early twentieth century, but withdrew her support after the revolutionaries embarked on a horrible path of destruction and genocide. She struggled mightily against the forces of living death that settled over the Russian Motherland like a shroud, but was powerless to stop them.

Suddenly, near the end of the Twentieth century, Baba Yaga surfaced from torpor and returned to claim her nation. The hag destroyed the Communist government and now has begun to rebuild the Church. The forces of science weaken her magic, but when the forces of religion are strong, people return to sorcery, and strengthen her. Durga Syn fears that Baba Yaga's return presages Gehenna, and that the hag paves the way for the return of the Nosferatu Antediluvian. She knows she must soon confront Baba Yaga, and has built a formidable coalition of vampires, Lupines and other creatures of power to assist in this task. The showdown is coming.

Her Nature

The mysterious Durga Syn grieves for the dream days when magic filled the land, and would sacrifice herself to return the magic. Torn between her role as pagan priestess and her supernatural corruption, Durga is a woman of two worlds. She has wreaked havoc in the land and has also bound the wounds of a tortured Russia. Those who have crossed her path either love her or hate her with a passion, but most fear her. She hungrily quests after renewal and healing, just like her people and her land.

Genevra

Giovanni Ally of the Sabbat

*It seems to be much more than Art
when the Art you sell is you.
Be careful how you play the game,
Or else the game plays you.*
J.J. Walker, "To the Artist"

Not all vampires survived the Inquisition through alliances with the Camarilla or the Sabbat. Some clans endured those brutal years by working even closer with mortals, burrowing deeper into human society. The necromancers of the Giovanni clan retained tremendous power in Italy throughout the Inquisition by working - some say too closely - with the very Church that decimate the great vampires of Europe.

Her Life

Some Camarilla Harpies warn their wayward fledglings that neonates must be as unquestioningly devoted to their elders as are the young of the Giovanni, or the devil necromancers will crush them all and enslave them as undead zombies. The Harpies whisper that the dreaded Giovanni clan only Embraces the most trusted members of its own living family, rendering the clan impervious to betrayal from within.

These rumors prey on a neonate's fear of facing unified opposition from a diabolic necromancer clan undivided by inner rifts, and keep some anarchs in line. For behind the massive doors of carved oak which hide their blasphemous rituals from prying eyes, deep gouges split the Giovanni family tree.

Like mortal royal families which associate and marry only within a limited gene pool, the Giovanni breed weak leaders for jobs requiring decisive taskmasters. Like royal families with restrictive membership rolls, the Giovanni constantly fight each other in covert feuds and bitter, hidden struggles. Outsiders brought in for mating purposes are always held in suspicion by the family. Only hate and fear of the other clans unite the old and new members of the incestuous Giovanni.

Genevra lived a divided, schizophrenic existence. By day she was a pampered noblewoman in the mansions of the living, but when the sun went down she became an abused menial in the vaults and catacombs of the undead. In the sunlit world of medieval Italy, she lived a carefree life of high status and great luxury. In the nightmare crypts of the Giovanni necromancers, she performed degrading chores and endured miserable violations as a wholly irrelevant slave.

When she ventured into the mortal world to carry out the orders of the Giovanni vampires, the locals obeyed her instantly. This gave her a taste for privilege and power, and a heightened sense of her own importance. But the elders treated her entire family line as a powerless, expendable auxiliary branch that would never be important to the Giovanni as a whole.

Genevra had no hope of selection for the honor of the Embrace. Her family line existed merely to serve the undying vampires, and to age and pass away while the main body of the Giovanni stayed young and immortal. This undercut Genevra's lofty self-importance with a very real taste of her own insignificance. She despised it, writing in

her diary, "I refuse to watch my youth sour and my beauty sag when the keys to eternity are within my sight but just out of my reach."

Her Death

She embarked on a campaign to woo the attention of the eligible Giovanni as they matured, and received permission to set up their households. But she had no status to offer her quarry, and her naked power lust offended them.

Stinging from the rejections, Genevra then contacted del Georgio, an important but feeble-minded Giovanni elder vampire, and petitioned directly for the Embrace. She flattered and pampered his ego, and gained his attention. He liked her forthrightness and the way she stirred his aged blood. But his wife Carmina took an instant dislike to the ambitious young woman, and forbade del Georgio to take Genevra as his next childe.

Del Georgio, a weak and confused old vampire, acquiesced to Carmina and rejected the young woman. Carmina whipped Genevra for her temerity and told the other necromancers they could use the girl in future experiments calling for live human tissue. Suffering from the cruel treatment and fearing a gruesome fate, Genevra vowed to take rapid revenge.

She played a risky game by contacting the dreaded Inquisition, which had declared open war on all vampires. She told the Inquisitors she would deliver the wholly evil Queen of the Giovanni vampires to them for destruction.

On a daring noontime raid, she smuggled Inquisitor assassins past del Georgio's ghouls and led them right into Carmina's inner sanctum, where they decapitated the sleeping vampire. Genevra did not tell the vampire hunters that del Georgio, the real power of the two, lay helpless just one room away. She smuggled the Inquisitors back out, returned to the bloody chamber and slashed her own body with the Inquisitors' stakes.

When del Georgio awoke, the sight of his wife's ashen remains nearly drove him mad. Genevra claimed she had fought to save Carmina, but the Inquisitors had nearly killed her. The kindly old vampire rewarded her efforts by granting her the Embrace. She accepted it eagerly, relishing the exquisite agony as the culmination of her life's work.

Her Unlife

The cunning Genevra knew of del Georgio's confusion and indecisiveness, and moved unbidden into the position formerly held by his wife. She dominated the weak-willed old vampire in the same way Carmina did, and used his power as her own. Many of his superiors frowned on the presence of a rank neonate in their crypts of power, but were too busy fending off the Inquisition to focus their attention and get rid of her.

So Genevra gained more power in the clan and maintained her secret connections to the Inquisition. She convinced the vampire hunters that the death of the "Queen" gutted the Giovanni's power, and betrayed a few more sacrificial Giovanni (mostly her enemies) to appease them. Working with other like-minded Giovanni, she stopped fighting the vampire hunters; indeed, she created a strong Giovanni presence within the Church.

Her risky plan paid off handsomely when she gained a measure of influence over the Inquisition itself. She successfully diverted the Inquisition away from the Giovanni, steering them toward foreigners, heretics, wise women and the poor people of Europe - and toward other vampire clans.

She continued to use del Georgio's power to guide the Giovanni and shape Church policy. She forced the clan to initiate her into their necromantic mysteries, and she absorbed tremendous magical powers. Many other elder necromancers still resent the way Genevra gained and wields power, but dare not challenge del Georgio. But they view Genevra as a temporary Giovanni, and a nuisance to be disposed of soon.

To fend this off, Genevra has formed an alliance with the Sabbat. She funnels money and resources to the reckless, irresponsible anarchists, and they dedicate a portion of the deaths they cause to the Giovanni. This gives the necromancers power without risk, and keeps Genevra on top.

The Sabbat members don't know why the mysterious, aristocratic, domineering Genevra willingly divulges essential Giovanni secrets to them, but they don't complain. They owe her some great favors, and expect that soon they'll have to pay back. They are looking forward to the chance.

The Seraph Jalan-Aajav dedicates much of the carnage he causes to Genevra, who in turn feeds on the death energy. But Jalan suspects feeding Genevra's power could backfire in the long run, and could turn on her at any time.

Her Nature

Genevra understands that the Giovanni Harpies conspire against her, her Sabbat contacts waver in their commitment, and even her Inquisition contacts could become public at any time. She knows no peace of mind, but constantly oscillates between rage, paranoia and deep depression.

Because she still has not been initiated into the very deepest Giovanni circle, she fears the entire clan plots against her there. To fend off any attack on her power, she conspires with the Sabbat and human vampire hunters. She walks the razor's edge in the Giovanni, and knows she could be destroyed at any moment.

Jalan-Aajav

Black Hand Seraph Of The Sabbat

*Rattle Big Black Bones in the Danger Zone
there's a rumblin' groan down below
there's a big dark town it's a place I've found
there's a world going on UNDER GROUND!
They're alive, they're awake
while the rest of the world is asleep
below the mine shaft roads it will all unfold
there's a world going on UNDER GROUND!
Tom Waits, "Underground"*

Terror has a name. Among the fearsome vampires that scuttle the Sabbat underground, one name freezes the ill-gotten blood of the undead. When the Sabbat needs to obliterate an opponent or terrorize a reluctant ally into complying, its members invoke one name: Jalan-Aajav.

Jalan-Aajav. The most frightening, violent and monstrous assassin in the Sabbat arsenal. As a Seraph, he does not answer to even the highest Sabbat councils. He confers solely with the three other Seraphs who lead the Black Hand squadron - and often he ignores even them.

Mortals who have glimpsed him and lived remember him in nightmares. To the Camarilla, he embodies all that is vile, irresponsible and dangerously out of control with the Sabbat - all the reasons why the Sabbat must be destroyed. Even his fellow Sabbat members see him as a loose cannon, recklessly endangering Kindred and kine alike. But when they have their backs to the wall in a fight to oblivion, they're damn glad to have him on their side.

His Life

Mongol warriors chased fortune and glory across the steppes of Central Asia and Europe for hundreds of years, and revolutionized warfare in the process. The nomad raiders earned a reputation for swift and merciless strikes against even the most formidable targets, and toppled civilizations far more advanced than their own. They crushed great cities to rubble and obliterated everything in their path.

Jalan-Aajav's family rode with the Mongol leader Genghis Khan on some of his greatest conquests, and the boy joined the looting expeditions as soon as he could ride. The frenzy and rigor of this wild life coarsened and toughened him, and the tribe soon recognized him as a great warrior. He lived for the wild, frenetic raids and slew thirty men in violent clashes before he was old enough for manhood rites.

On the day of his coming-of-age ritual, he told his fellow tribesmen that he never expected to live more than a single day. He revealed a dream in which he saw himself roaming the world as a dead warrior.

His Death

After great triumphs in China, Genghis Khan turned his attention to the Near East. During an expedition to sack Russian villages, he sent a scouting party led by Jalan into a haunted grotto. Khan believed the Russians had hidden treasures in the grotto, because the locals begged him not to enter it, claiming it was inhabited by monsters. Jalan suspected the villagers told the truth, but arrogantly refused to heed the desperate warnings. He paid the price for it.

As the scouts made their way through the dark grotto, a band of great beasts attacked them, extinguishing their torches and killing their horses. The monsters then hunted down the Mongols one by one, killing each painfully and slowly.

Jalan kept his wits about him, and despite the meager light noticed that although metal weapons did little damage to the man-beasts, they recoiled in horror from arrows. He wrestled with one monster and managed to stab it through the heart with a wooden arrow, immobilizing it. He desperately urged his companions to use arrows. They did not follow his advice and died horribly.

Jalan's tactics brought him within reach of the grotto's mouth, but the creatures overwhelmed him there, enveloping him in a cloud of leprous dust. When he collapsed from exhaustion, he thought only of revenge.

His Unlife

Jalan-Aajav awoke into a terrifying world of midnight terror and rivers of blood. The monsters, vampires from Clan Gangrel, had big plans for him. Jalan's prodigious survival skills earned him a place in their ranks, and they turned him into a vampire. They Blood Bound him and forbade him to contact the Mongols or other mortals. He could only call vampires his people now. But though they had accepted him as one of their own, his torment had only begun. They wanted to play a wicked game they called the Harrowing.

The vampire sire and his brood starved the young Mongol for days and then released him from the grotto late at night. They gave him a three-minute head start and promised to tear him to pieces if they caught up with him before dawn. They loped along at an easy gait, effortlessly following their weakened prey, and chased him across the steppes. They let him feed on small prey, but if Jalan found large game, came close to a nearby nomad band, or strayed near the far borders of their territory, the Gangrel swept down and sent Jalan moving in another direction.

If the Gangrel caught the young vampire before dawn, they would disembowel him and leave him for the rising sun. Fatigued from the chase and weak with chronic blood loss, Jalan would have to crawl to the safety of the dark grotto before the first sun's deadly rays spilled across the steppes. The vampires played this game once a week and kept Jalan bound in the cave the rest of the time, perpetually delirious and supremely weak from lack of blood.

But on one particularly bloody Harrowing, Jalan successfully ran down a deer and managed to gorge himself on the blood before one of the Gangrel caught up to him and forced him to move on. The fresh blood coursed through his veins like a mighty river, renewing his prodigious strength and revitalizing his vampiric energies.

With his system full of fresh blood, he suddenly found himself faster and stronger than his tormentors. With a new burst of strength, he broke past the boundaries of the

Gangrel territory and headed deep into the far woods. He had heard the younger Gangrel speak of the woods with fear, and hoped to lose them in the thick underbrush.

Instead, he stumbled into a band of renegade anarchs. The anarchists captured him and told him that only his death would pay for his crime of trespassing. Jalan-Aajav, struggling against the Blood Bond, offered his master in his place. The anarchists gladly severed the Blood Bond by feeding Jalan a mixture of their own blood.

The newly freed warrior set a trap for the hated Gangrel leader. When the Gangrel cubs appeared on the edge of the forest looking for their wayward childe, Jalan faked wounds. He lured them deep into the forest, where the anarchists ambushed them and tore them apart. Jalan and the anarchists returned to the grotto, where the anarchist leader gleefully committed diablerie upon Jalan's former master.

When Jalan tried to swear fealty to the anarchists, their leader laughed and explained that his group's Blood Bonds worked differently. The anarchists put Jalan through a rough hazing process, but the fully fed Mongol, accustomed to rough treatment, thrived on the chance to prove his toughness.

When the Sabbat formed, Jalan's pack was among the first to join. He clawed his way up through the ranks and worked vigorously to hunt down and destroy the Sabbat's enemies. In the days when the Inquisition was strongest, Jalan distinguished himself in pitched battles against powerful vampire hunters, Lupines, demons and vampires of the Camarilla.

Impressed by the uncompromising ferocity of the Mongol, the Sabbat put Jalan in charge of rooting out spies and purifying the ranks. The experience of the Harrowing gave him a keen sense of the fear of the quarry, and made him the best hunter in the Sabbat. His influence and power in the Sabbat rose in proportion to his body count.

When Sabbat leaders formed the Sabbat subcult known as the Black Hand, they immediately offered him membership in its ranks, and he became its first and greatest assassin. Soon he became a Seraph - one of four Black Hand leaders. He grew so powerful and uncontrollable that other Sabbat leaders began to fear him; they have subtly worked for centuries to keep him from becoming too strong.

Jalan could gain more power than he has, but his uninspired leadership and poor strategic sense hold him back despite his skill as an assassin. Command roles do not suit his hair-trigger temperament, much to the relief of other Sabbat leaders. They find it convenient to have him around, but shudder to think of him commanding the anarchist legions.

The Seraph despises the Camarilla with all his heart, and has a special hatred for the Gangrel. He calls them frightened rabbits, and enjoys flushing them out of their hiding holes. He believes humans are mere cattle who ought to be paying homage to their Sabbat conquerors.

He despises the secretive ways of the Sabbat, and pushes for the day when it can rise up, reveal its existence without fear of reprisal, and crush human and vampire civilization. To hasten this day, he often leaves gruesome remains behind after his battles.

He has been chastised for his sloppy exterminations, but still remains a loose cannon; many believe his bloodiness intimidates his foes. Though some neonates tremble at the sight of his violence, his enemies in the Camarilla use his careless executions to close in on him and locate his safe havens.

His Nature

A taciturn vampire, Jalan-Aajav speaks only when absolutely necessary. He angers easily and explodes in murderous rages with little provocation. Even his friends are wary around him and make sure he gets to vent his fury often.

The Seraph revels in striking without warning in an explosive attack, devastating his target, and disappearing before his foes can react. Though many vampires think of him as a mindless monster, he plans his attacks with acute cunning - plotting and spying on his foes long before he makes his attack.

He collects teams of effective anarch fighters and molds them into perfect fighting forces. He loves terrorizing mortals and Kindred alike. Flesh rending and blood drinking are not just necessities of his existence, but additional benefits to the perfect job.

Dominique

Ventruue Antitribu Of The Sabbat

*I cannot improve all you have created
I cannot impress you with the things that I see
I never have asked you for too many favors
I have never asked you to be more like me.
Would I be selfish to alter the order?
Would I be foolish to not follow you?
But I have the strength to walk past all that you have,
I will not walk in my father's shows.*

Chris Eberhardt, "My Father's Shoes"

The members of the Sabbat crave and prize freedom above all else. Freedom from restraint. Freedom from authority. Freedom from the oppressive expectations of the elders and the fangs of the Antediluvians. In the name of absolute freedom, they intimidate and destroy mortals and vampires alike. Their version of freedom terrifies other vampires.

The Camarilla does not know that within the shadowy underground halls of Sabbat power, a quiet storm rages over freedom. Sabbat members at every level have argued, fought and even killed over one important point: are all Sabbat free to act on any whim, or does absolute freedom demand absolute responsibility?

The Ventruue Antitribu Dominique is the leading proponent of the doctrine of vampiric accountability. She has made powerful enemies within the Sabbat over her stand, but has also won the backing of many influential anarchists who see her as the conscience of the sect, and who credit her with keeping the Sabbat from turning the Earth into a living hell.

Her Life

Scholars who taught in medieval universities lived much richer, safer and happier lives than did the great mass of peasants. Even though they lacked the riches of nobility, they liberated themselves from crushing poverty and ignorance.

As knowledge and wisdom enjoyed a quiet rebirth in France, silversmith guild member Henri Touraine turned his hand to the professor's trade. He tutored the sons of nobles, and on a whim, taught his daughter Dominique as well. She proved his most adept pupil, and quickly surpassed him in Latin, geometry, history and philosophy. Nobles and merchants sought her company, and her quick wit dazzled all who met her. Sons of noblemen vied for her hand, trampling past many prettier, richer and more servile women to woo her. She took little interest in their attention, which only inflamed their ardor.

At twenty-five, the bright, fiercely independent, and happily unmarried young woman attracted more than ardent suitors; she incurred the wrath of the pre-Inquisition clergy. They railed against Dominique's father for daring to educate her. "Women are graced by God with hysterical faculties," they opined, "and labouring to teach them corrupts the holy throne of Reason."

Her father apologized and attempted to force Dominique to give up her books, but she refused. As a devoted student of ancient Greek philosophers, she believed that her

highest course of action was to "know herself," be true to herself, and accept the consequences of her actions. Though her father agreed with her in principle, he lacked her courage.

As the winds of hate blew across the disease-ravaged lands of Europe, the smoldering embers of misogyny were whipped into a roaring inferno. Midwives and educated women were raped and burned, and wealthy widows had their property confiscated.

Rather than hiding, Dominique challenged the might of the clergy. She spoke out against the Church's position on education and appealed to reason and honor. Her father gave up scholarship and returned to the silver trade, but many powerful men joined her in opposing the excesses of the Church. Unfortunately, the Inquisition lashed back with more public executions, and Dominique's support disappeared.

Her Death

When her rich suitors abandoned her, the Inquisitors closed in and tried her for heresy. At her trial, she told her persecutors she did not fear the consequences of her actions, and would gladly pay the price. Her reasoned arguments swayed many onlookers, and her willingness to martyr herself even earned her the grudging admiration of some Inquisitors. Still, the intolerant faction carried the day, and she was sentenced to death by hanging.

Her public execution was interrupted by a dark mist that frightened the crowd. Several hooded riders attacked, striking down Inquisitors and civilians alike. Though Dominique resisted her saviors, they successfully kidnapped her and took her to the manor of the Ventrue Titus. Against her will, Titus drank her blood and turned her into his Blood Bound daughter.

Titus' human servants, smitten with love for her, had begged that she be rescued. Titus had agreed, eager to add her wisdom to the Ventrue court. They were not prepared for her reaction.

Dominique angrily said, "By interrupting my execution, you have made a mockery of my stand. If I am to die that Reason live, then so be it." She pronounced the Blood Bond compelling her to follow the dictates of another "far crueller than the devices of the Inquisition. My faculties are overthrown. You claim to share my love of learning, and yet you show no respect for my decisions."

Titus did not understand that she did not want to be saved, and was determined to force her to enjoy being a Ventrue. "After all," he entreated, "are we Kindred not the wisest of all creatures? You can further your education here for all eternity! Think what wonders you will discover!"

Her Unlife

But Titus was wrong about eternity. The Inquisition located his holdings, killed his servants and tore through his family. In desperation, he commanded his progeny to defend him while he escaped. After the horrendous battle, the anarchs arrived, recruiting the survivors among the forsaken children of the vampire clans.

Dominique joined eagerly. She found it easier to adjust to life among free Kindred than among Blood Bound toadies. Free from the restrictive hierarchy of Ventrue politics, her natural leadership qualities asserted themselves. She planned many successful raids on the Inquisition and protected its mortal targets. Many of the ghoulish families that serve the Sabbat to this day were recruited by Dominique during the Inquisition.

As the Inquisition became less of a threat, the Camarilla became a much more dangerous one. Dominique's keen mind made her one of the Sabbat's greatest strategists, but she refused to help plan the complete destruction of the Camarilla. She insisted that her only quarrel was with the use of the Blood Bond, not with the Camarilla's right to exist.

This infuriated the Black Hand Seraphs, including Jalan-Aajav, who secretly plotted to Blood Bond her and force her to plan their tactics. This violation of the most basic Sabbat creed infuriated high-ranking Sabbat members, who unconditionally forbade it.

But it did underscore Dominique's most powerful point: Freedom is meaningless without inner guidance. At a massive Sabbat rally in Paris, Dominique asked her fellow anarchists, "What do we really offer when we offer Kindred freedom?"

"Breaking the Blood Bond is viciously hard work. Sundering the emotional, social and supernatural ties between neonate and mentor requires extraordinary temptation.

"So we dangle before young Kindred the purest bait yet discovered: absolute freedom. We peddle the opportunity to act free from restraint, and that lure draws young vampires to the Sabbat like flies to honey. We tell them freedom means complete recklessness and utter irresponsibility. This has great appeal after the oppressive weight of years of domination by siblings, mentors, elders and Antediluvians in the Camarilla. So the young see the Sabbat as a chance to lead explosively violent lives with no one else to check their basest impulses.

"But the crucial phrase is no one else.' We all have to answer to our own inner voices about which desires to act upon. To me, freedom does not mean utter irresponsibility, but complete responsibility. It's a chance to explore self-control and self-identity far from the stifling restrictions of the Camarilla courts. Eternity is a long time to spend not knowing who one is and what one stands for.

"Most Sabbat members who have tasted the freedom that comes with inner guidelines and living by a personal code of ethics have found it infinitely more satisfying than slavish devotion to the whim of the moment. Our whims are not our will, and caprices are greater tyrants than the lords of the Camarilla. Only by living a vision greater than ourselves are we truly free."

Her words struck a chord in many anarchists, who embarked on personal quests for their own visions and senses of purpose. It also enraged the more savage members, who considered it a sneak attack on their freedom, and a tricky way to regulate their behavior in a manner they could not understand.

These anarchists give the members of the Sabbat a reputation as monsters that live to kill. But many Sabbat members reject unrestrained violence for human, conscientious behavior: integrity over intimidation. These two groups wage a running battle for the ideological heart and soul of the Sabbat, and though the second group is a distinct minority, they carry great power in the eyes of the Sabbat rank and file. Though these vampires often turn to Dominique for guidance, she is likely merely to answer, "What do you think?"

Her Nature

Dominique lives for freedom. She joined the Sabbat because she believes in the right of everyone to act without outside restrictions. She espouses freedom of choice to the unruly band, and stresses the need for greater, not less responsibility.

Her message, that irresponsibility is as great a limitation as a Blood Bond, is not always well received, but even her Sabbat enemies respect her. They listen to her because she does not condemn their brutal, divisive ways, as do many of the Sabbat

leaders who try to organize the diverse elements of the group. She has made it clear that she would not trade life in the flawed Sabbat for subservience in the repressive Camarilla.

Like so many other Ventrue, Dominique seems to make money without even trying. Her instincts about human nature and business pay off despite plunging economic climates and Camarilla manipulations. Her effortless business cunning and practical advice on Kindred behavior give her great influence among the Sabbat.

Dominique enjoys the free exchange of ideas, and though she sometimes bridles at the violent excesses of her compatriots, her only word of reproach is that they accept the consequences of their expressions of freedom. She especially challenges them to weigh the price of their victories. "With our power and experience, we could become the masters of the world. So we must be sure of our motives and our objectives before we lash out."

Lexicon

Anarch: A rebel vampire who rejects the authority of the elders.

Antediluvian: One of the thirteen "third generation" Kindred; a grandchild of Caine. Each founded one of the clans.

Archon: A powerful Camarilla warrior charged with enforcing the Masquerade and the Six Traditions.

Assamite: A vampire clan of Diabolists turned assassins. Its members kill for anyone who pays their price in blood.

The Beast: The hateful drive that pushes a vampire to become a monster. The urge to frenzy.

Blood Bond (Blood Oath): A mystical rite binding the will of one vampire to another.

Brujah: Once the philosophers of the undead, the members of this clan have since devolved into violent rebels.

Camarilla: A worldwide sect composed of seven clans and free Kindred which was created primarily to enforce the Masquerade.

Caine: The first child of Adam and Eve; thought to be the first vampire.

Cainite: A vampire, usually one of great age.

Caitiff: Clanless Kindred, generally held in scorn.

Clan: A group of vampires descended from a particular Antediluvian.

Diablerie: The act of slaying and drinking the blood of another vampire, and thereby absorbing its power; one who practices diablerie is known as a Diabolist. Many Kindred view diablerie as the ultimate crime.

Elder: A vampire who is over 300 years of age; generally also a member of the conservative faction. Note that some anarchs from the original anarch revolt are now elders.

Embrace: The bite; the process of transforming a human into a vampire.

Frenzy: A state of berserk bloodlust; the Beast unleashed.

Followers of Set: Masters of moral degradation, the members of this clan take great delight in the decay and corruption they cause.

Gangrel: A clan of wild Kindred whose ability to turn into animals causes them to become more animal-like with each passing year.

Gehenna: The Kindred version of Armageddon; the night when the Antediluvians shall awaken to consume their young.

Generation: The distance of a vampire in Caine, the first vampire, in terms of sires.

Ghoul: A mortal who regularly feeds on the blood of Kindred and thereby gains superhuman abilities and a greatly extended lifespan.

Giovanni: Ensconced behind a facade of respectability, this vampire clan of rich business tycoons spends many of its nights among the dead, performing ghastly rites of necromancy.

Golconda: Kindred salvation. A vampire who attains this state is freed from bloodlust and the urges of the Beast.

Harpy: A member of a clique of powerful, meddling Kindred who believe it is their role to determine everyone else's status.

Haven: A vampire's home, where he sleeps during the day.

Inconnu: A mysterious sect of ancient vampires.

Inquisition: The war waged by humans against vampires and other supernatural creatures during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries.

Justicar: A Camarilla judge, investigator and enforcer.

Jyhad: The neverending struggle of the Antediluvians, using lesser vampires as pawns. The Jyhad finds expression in the anarch wars, the oppression of neonates by the elders, and the Sabbat-Camarilla war.

Kindred: Vampires.

Kine: Mortals.

Lasombra: One of the vampire clans which founded the Sabbat; the clan is renowned for its members' affinity with darkness and the night.

Lupine: A werewolf. Lupines are the ancient enemies of the vampires.

Malkavian: A clan of vampires whose members are known for their exceptional insight - and raving lunacy.

Masquerade: The effort to shroud the existence of the Kindred from the world of mortals.

Neonate: (Childe, Fledgling): A young vampire, only recently Embraced.

Nosferatu: A clan of hideously ugly vampires whose members spend more time in the sewers than on the streets.

Prince: The vampiric ruler of a city; used for both men and women.

Ravnos: A clan of tricksters and connivers, these vampires crisscross the globe, rarely settling in one place.

Sabbat: A global organization of two clans and free Kindred that grew out of the first anarch rebellion. The Sabbat is the Camarilla's primary enemy.

Sire: The parent and creator of a vampire; used for both men and women.

Toreador: The vampire clan of artists and dilettantes.

Torpor: A state of suspended animation entered by vampires who are gravely wounded or on the verge of starvation.

Tremere: A vampire clan; however, its members were originally human wizards, and turned to vampirism during the Middle Ages.

Tzimisce: Perhaps the most inhuman of the clans; the vampires of this line are infamous for their ability to mold and shape the very flesh of their bodies - or that of other.

Vaulderie: The ritual blood pooling and blood drinking practiced by the Sabbat. This ritual can break even a centuries-old Blood Bond.

Ventrue: The aristocratic and influential clan ruling the Camarilla.

Vitae: Blood.