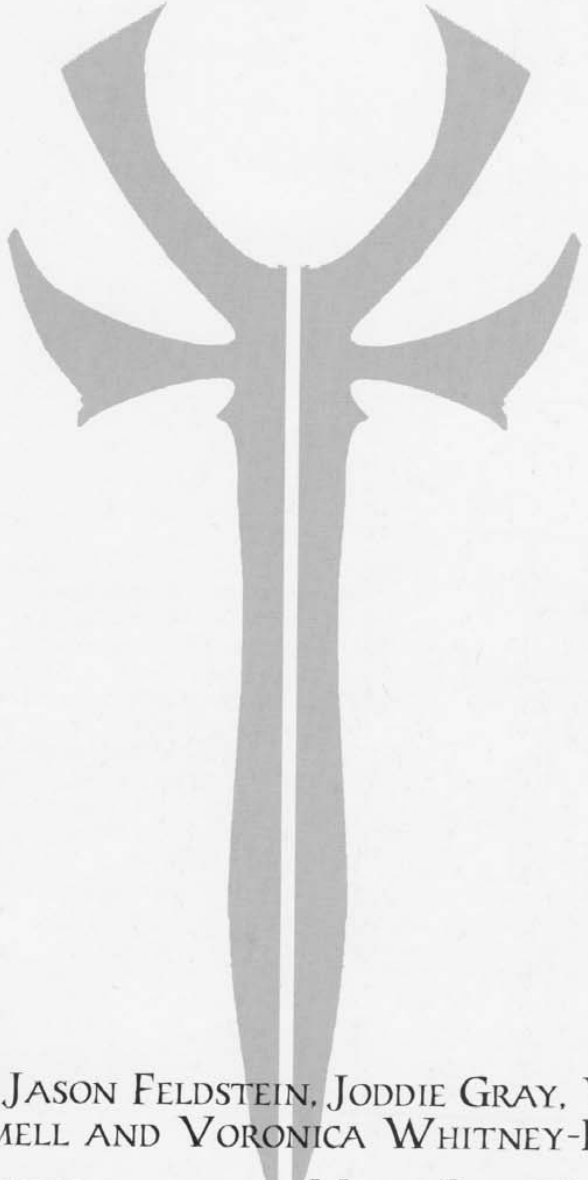
KINDRED OF THE EBONY KINGDOM™



A SOURCEBOOK ON AFRICA FOR VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE®

KINDRED OF THE EBONY KINGDOM™



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Chapter One: The Ebony Kingdom

The Devil turns against its friend.
—Luyia Proverb

I have no memories of Africa in the daytime. In this way I am well suited to the task of telling you the ways of the Laibon, for I've never actually known these creatures as mortal men and women. There's a kind of clarity in this: I've only seen the Ebony Kingdom for its monsters.

A wise man considers carefully everything I've seen and wonders why I care to share it. A fool believes me or ignores me. The fact is that you decide how to make use of my story but only I know why it's told.

The truth in any tale is like a diamond: precious and tiny. It must be associated with filthy coal to be appreciated and can only be had through excruciating patience or shrewd bargaining. Once you have it, you will be tempted to show it to people, which is when thieves will think to steal it from you.

How To Use This Book

This book is arranged a bit differently from other titles in the **Vampire** line, owing largely to the uniqueness of its subject matter.

This chapter, **Chapter One**, details the Ebony Kingdom in overview, introducing the broadest elements of the setting.

Chapter Two presents the legacies of the Laibon, the "clans" of African vampires.

Character creation is the focus of **Chapter Three**, with an emphasis on thinking about the characters of this new setting with a renewed freshness.

Disciplines, powers and strange sorceries comprise **Chapter Four**, including local treatments of the core Disciplines that Western Kindred might take for granted.

A survey of the region's political geography makes up **Chapter Five**, which also includes maps for your convenience.

Chapter Six focuses on storytelling with the singular purpose of placing the African experience at the heart of a chronicle.

Chapter Seven outlines several antagonists the Laibon might run afoul of in the Ebony Kingdom, as well as a bestiary of more mundane threats.

Finally, a few non-native clans and rare legacies make up the **Appendix**.

What This Book Is and Isn't

Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom doesn't pretend to be a travelogue or history of Africa. Rather, it is an expansion of the **Vampire** setting into a portion of the world that has remained unexamined thus far. Such being the case, you're going to want to do some research of your own when planning or playing a **Vampire** chronicle set in Africa. We have only so many pages to use in this book, and we're not ashamed to say that we're not going to devote too many of them to reprinting material you would be able to find elsewhere. Take a trip to the library, hit a search engine on the Web or talk to an expert to round out your African experience, or even as a preface, to see what ideas inspire you or resonate with you the most. This book will be here both before and after, so you'll be able to see how your newfound knowledge fits in with the continent's vampiric population.

Theme and Mood

The primary theme of **Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom** is that times change, and with that passage of time, so must vampires adapt lest they marginalize themselves and ultimately prove to be their own doom. This has occurred to the Laibon at a slower rate than it has to the rest of the world, largely owing to much of Africa's Third-World status and the relative paucity of Information Age luxuries that most of us take for granted. Still, the elders have realized it at this point, and one of the higher-concept conflicts is them figuring out just what to do with themselves in a kingdom that's inevitably going to have to deal with creeping modernization. The neonates won't sit by and accept the kingdom's old ways if they don't think they have to, and the elders certainly aren't going to give up any more privilege or influence than they absolutely must, so where is the compromise struck?

The secondary theme is one that's very near and dear to **Vampire**, but it can always prove to be a solid foundation for stories: the war of ages, the Jyhad. It fits neatly with the primary theme but can exist independently. Modernization need not always be the issue at hand. The eternal struggle between elders who have had centuries to garner resources and the neonates who want them but often find slim pickings manifests here just as it does everywhere.

Finally, family is a theme in the Ebony Kingdom, owing to the fact that that's exactly what clans as "legacies" are. While this idea doesn't relegate the legacies to the status of fraternities or teams, they do connote a sense of community if not camaraderie. Such will also be the case with the "tribes" or extended coteries that make up geographical communities of Laibon. Certainly, struggle exists inside these familial units, but that adds a degree of depth to the relationship — it's not just you against a rival, it's you against a rival who's your brother.

On to mood. Despite being a land of sun and heat, Africa in **Vampire**'s World of Darkness feels forever under a shroud of night. The mood is one of isolationism, of being "in the dark" as much by choice as by destiny. Let light and darkness be symbols throughout your chronicles. Portray the dawning light of social progress, but also show the darkness that accompanies it in the form of dictators or military coups. You can even be ambiguous, illustrating the "light" of modernization as well as the less savory elements it introduces to a culture that is not necessarily prepared for it.



I know all about diamonds. I was born a mortal somewhere in western Africa near what would now be Sierra Leone. For some reason I was taken with my parents across the Atlantic to the American colonies. By my estimate, this would be sometime near the year 1750, possibly earlier. My first memories of daylight are from Virginia. Early in the American Revolution, the British offered freedom to those slaves who would serve Her Majesty's interests during the war. Those of us who agreed would then be sent to Canada to live as free men. In my case, the freedom never really came. The British "officer" who made this offer to myself and a handful of other men came to us after dark with a promise for real power over the American slavers. Three of us were vampires by morning, scattered to wreak English havoc on the colonials. I don't know what happened to those other bastards, but I found that British officer one night in 1777, and drank him dry before I'd learned anything of bloodsucking custom. Then I spent a few quiet years in Canada that I don't much remember now.

An effort to repatriate the freed slaves was made by the British in 1792 as further reward for service during the Revolution. The city of Freetown was founded in Sierra Leone as a new home for human cattle collected from all over the African continent. A generous and stupid idea. However, one ship of Her Majesty's fleet fell behind schedule and spent a whole night loaded up in harbor, so I boarded her with the feeling that accidentally burning to death in daylight at sea would be preferable to elk's blood for eternity. As it happens, it was a relatively simple task to stay out of the sunlight aboard ship. Feeding was only slightly more difficult, due to a lack of privacy but I think every Kindred and Laibon can appreciate the benefits of restraint in his early nights.

I came to the Dark Continent at night. From the sea, Freetown was a simple spread of black earth, brilliant speckled sky and windy, snapping firelight. By foot, it was much the same. In some way, I had honestly expected Africa to be somehow familiar. Since then I've learned something better. Africa, some part of it, is strange to everyone. Even after decades and centuries of posturing and maneuvering, the undead monsters can't always understand each other. Anything that claims to know Africa that well is lying.

Laibon Society

The ageless existence and long memory of a vampire causes it to seek out others of its kind. Communities of Laibon become families over time, drawn closer together in resistance to the expanse of modern change. Laibon are social monsters, after all, with one eye on the prey and the other on the home.

A Laibon community often has a distinct collective identity descended from mortal and undead heritages. The societal structures of Laibon domains are made up of

customs, traditions and ideals culled from supernatural and historical sources. Laibon existence most often centers on the activities of local importance. A collection of Laibon centered on a traditional homeland town might simply choose to be unaffected by strife in a nearby region.

The extreme granularity of Laibon society makes it difficult to generalize. While a stratum of vampiric culture links the Laibon territories across the continent, millennia of local history and cultural disparity divide the individual domains. There is no overriding authority to homogenize the behavior of Laibon in Mauritania and Ethiopia. The sometimes-distant, sometimes-absent Guruhi are the closest resemblance to a continental constant we have to consider.

Ancestry, culture and folklore, more than anything else, is what Laibon have in common. Thousands of years of Laibon cultural influences have gathered and spread across the continent, beneath the mortal fibers in every vampire. This is a natural phenomenon from unnatural beings. All vampires have the same thirst, the same undying demands, influencing us in our blood.

The Legacies

The legacy is the cultural kernel of the Laibon. African vampires place a great deal of importance on the responsibilities and entitlements associated with one's legacy. It's like a family, in that the legacy is the fundamental connection between Laibon but is, in practice, often not a real factor of social interactions. Relatives who dwell around you are likely to be a major part of your existence. Were you to meet a distant family member, you might be able to use that familial connection, or you might be disregarded as just some like-named stranger.

At the same time, the familial bond can be strong enough to overcome doubts, suspicion or xenophobia. When I came to Sierra Leone, I was granted remarkable cultural leeway because my mortal and Laibon blood flowed from here. That seemed to soften the suspicions some other Laibon held against me as an outsider.

Like any family, each legacy is connected by blood. Bloodlines stretch back to the ancestor whose power was so great that some residue of it continues to influence the blood of contemporary Laibon even 13 or 14 generations removed. I can't say exactly how this blood interacts with its counterparts, but I can tell you this: I have no knowledge of my blood's European origins, but the Akunanse Laibon in Freetown recognized me as one of their own. How, I don't know. Something intrinsic, some spiritual charge passed into my blood that resonates with theirs.

Younger Laibon do not experience this sensation, and the degree to which I have felt it suggests to me that it may be an imagined psychic phenomena, and yet I have an undeniable vampiric relationship to the Akunanse I met in Freetown. It's something like having a grandfather's eyes or manner of speech, except the traits are like magic. I have a love for stories, as do my Akunanse cousins here, and in the last few decades, I have been finding markings on my back that somewhat a resemble a rare breed of spider.

I'm told this is desirable among "my people." The spider spins webs as an Akunanse spins stories or histories. Indeed, Akunanse and spiders spin webs for exactly the same reasons.

Africa at a Glance

Strictly speaking, the portions of the continent south of the Sahara comprise the recognized Ebony Kingdom with a few troubled and/ or rogue domains in the desert itself (don't worry — Chapter Four includes a map). Because not everyone will be as familiar with Africa as they are with, say, Europe, the following list includes the countries of the continent as well as a bit of quick data on them to give readers some idea of what the country is like.

The area of the nation is its size in square miles. The population, obviously, is the number of people who dwell there. Density is the population divided by the area — how many people might occupy the average square mile, which gives some idea of how crowded a nation is. The gross domestic product is the value, in sum, of goods and services in a nation. The GDP per capita is the gross domestic product divided by the population, or each person's share in the national assets. Life expectancy estimates the length of the nation's average citizen, while the fertility statistic suggests the number of children a typical woman will have over her lifetime. The annual growth rate defines the change in population as a percentile.

Note that this table includes information on nations that are not necessarily part of the Ebony Kingdom. That's simply for the sake of completeness, and nations not within the Ebony Kingdom's boundaries have their names in italics.

The Domains

The domain is the component element of the continental kingdom. Across Africa, there are untold hundreds of domains operating on the single social foundation that links them together as a kingdom. Each domain is a community allied to some degree against outside influences. The domains ally together to some extent to uphold the traditions of the kingdom. The kingdom bands together, more or less, against vampiric influence from abroad.

I have been to countless domains across the continent, and I have few examples I can give you that describe a majority of them. Different situations result in different domains. The only structure all of the domains share is that which stems from the figurehead at the core of each territory. Each domain really amounts to little more than

Nation	Area	Population	Density	Gross Domestic Product	GDP per capita	Life Exp.	Fertility	Growth Rate
Algeria	919,591	30,480,793	33	120,400	3,950	69	3.48	2.18
Angola	481,352	10,864,512	23	8,200	755	47	6.27	3.06
Benin	43,483	6,100,799	140	11,300	1,852	53	6.56	3.31
Botswana	231,803	1,488,454	6	5,000	3,359	45	4.14	1.48
Burkina Faso	105,869	11,266,393	106	10,300	914	42	6.72	2.45
Burundi	10,745	5,537,387	515	4,000	722	49	6.48	2.11
Cameroon	183,568	15,029,433	82	30,900	2,056	53	5.93	2.86
Central African Rep.	240,533	3,375,711	14	2,500	741	45	5.35	2.01
Chad	495,753	7,359,512	15	4,300	584	48	5.79	2.67
Comoros	838	545,528	651	400	733	60	5.54	3.09
Congo-Brazzaville	132,046	2,658,123	20	5,250	1,975	46	5.06	2.15
Congo-Kinshasa (formerly Zaire)	905,564	49,000,511	54	18,000	367	47	6.58	2.34
Djibouti	8,494	440,727	52	520	1,180	51	6.01	1.51
Egypt	386,660	66,050,004	171	267,100	4,044	62	3.5	1.89
Equatorial Guinea	10,830	454,001	42	660	1,454	53	5.11	2.57
Eritrea	46,842	3,842,436	82	2,200	573	51	6.47	6.35
Ethiopia	435,184	58,390,351	134	29,000	497	47	6.94	2.67
Gabon	103,348	1,207,844	12	6,000	4,968	56	3.85	1.47
Gambia	4,363	1,291,858	296	1,230	952	53	5.98	3.48
Ghana	92,100	18,497,206	201	36,200	1,957	56	4.43	2.21
Guinea	94,927	7,477,110	79	8,300	1,110	46	5.66	1.1
Guinea-Bissau	13,946	1,206,311	86	1,150	953	49	5.26	2.33
Ivory Coast	154,502	15,446,231	100	25,800	1,670	45	6.06	2.35
Kenya	224,962	28,337,071	126	45,300	1,599	54	4.26	2.13
Lesotho	11,718	2,089,829	178	5,100	2,440	52	4.22	1.83
Liberia	43,000	2,771,901	64	2,600	938	59	6.16	6.92
Libya	679,359	5,690,727	8	38,000	6,678	65	6.19	3.64
Madagascar	226,656	14,462,509	64	10,300	712	53	5.83	2.82
Malawi	45,745	9,840,474	215	8,600	874	35	5.77	1.57
Mali	478,765	10,108,569	21	6,000	594	47	7.09	3.18
Mauritania	397,954	2,511,473	6	4,100	1,633	49	6.76	3.17
Morocco	172,413	29,114,497	169	107,000	3,675	70	3.47	2.02
Mozambique	309,494	18,641,469	60	14,600	783	45	6.11	2.6
Namibia	318,259	1,622,328	5	6,200	3,822	65	5.05	2.94
Niger	489,189	9,671,848	20	6,300	651	41	7.37	2.98
Nigeria	356,668	110,532,242	310	132,700	1,201	55	6.17	3.05
Rwanda	10,170	7,956,172	782	3,000	377	39	5.93	8.24
Sao Tomé and Principe	371	150,123	405	154	1,026	64	4.22	5.54
Senegal	75,749	9,723,149	128	15,600	1,604	57	6.24	3.35
Sierra Leone	27,699	5,080,004	183	2,650	522	48	6.29	3.54
Somalia	246,201	6,841,695	28	8,000	1,169	46	6.76	3.03
South Africa	471,444	42,834,520	91	270,000	6,303	56	3.22	1.51
Sudan	967,495	33,550,552	35	26,600	793	56	5.79	3.06
Swaziland	6,730	966,462	144	3,900	4,035	58	6.01	3.24
Tanzania	364,900	30,608,769	84	21,100	689	42	5.58	1.6
Togo	21,927	4,905,827	224	6,200	1,264	58	6.68	3.54
Tunisia	63,170	9,380,404	148	56,500	6,023	73	2.52	1.48
Uganda	91,135	22,167,195	243	34,600	1,561	40	6.52	2.14
Zambia	290,853	9,460,736	33	8,800	930	36	6.48	2.02
Zimbabwe	150,803	11,044,147	73	24,900	2,255	41	3.94	1.26
Combined	11,645,170	758,075,927	65	1,467,514	1,936	51	5.556	2.8

the area inhabited by a group of like-minded or like-blooded Laibon who abide by the judicial decisions of a single territorial authority above them, whose position was created by the Guruhi. That's the most scholarly description I can give you, and it doesn't tell you very much, really.

In some domains, these figureheads are little more than that, in honorary positions of esteem. In others, they are like tyrants or warlords, allowing other Laibon to share their domains only out of the desire to see them dance at their whim. A domain might consist of a single, private or remote Laibon who is responsible for his otherwise-unclaimed territory by default or a domain might include a large Westernized city and the swelling Laibon population around it. A domain might have a very quiet, accepted social order that's been running smoothly for a hundred years, or a domain might be a tangled net of political tripwires in a constant state of redefining itself. It's all subject to the customs of the region and the whim of the domain's overseer.

This method of organization descends from the tradition of power being bestowed upon the eldest Laibon, which the elders tell us is integral to the Laibon existence. The power accumulated by elders over the centuries is the natural law of the Laibon. The eldest are the wisest, strongest and most enduring, therefore they survive for centuries, therefore they are the best suited to leadership. A Laibon who wanders off will have great difficulty proving his age to those who haven't known him for decades, so he risks losing his position of power. So Laibon cluster together (socially more than geographically, sometimes) into domains where success and experience can be easily tracked and rewarded.

Put another way, social mobility and physical mobility are opposing forces in Laibon society. Those Laibon who do take up a traveler's existence, like myself, either have no interest in pursuing complex relationships with their undead kin or plan to do it somewhere else, some time later.

In the Congo, I know of several domains that span startlingly large stretches of land with populations of four or five Laibon. Kinshasa, especially, has several bordering domains that seem to have recognized domain within their own boundaries. These are all matters of customary territory and are overseen by Laibon who have inhabited those lands for three or four hundred years. The tightly knit broods of Laibon within those domains are like demonstrations of pre-colonial life; their social dynamics have resisted outside change since Europe's Renaissance.

A domain I occasionally visit in Mozambique is popular for an unpopular reason: The magaji there in known for very liberal interpretations of Laibon customs, which attracts thin-blooded younger vampires and foreigners. Since her community enjoys the existence and the neighbors have not (or cannot yet) present a meaningful deterrent, there is no higher power to dissuade such behavior.

This touches on one traditional belief about Laibon territories. Culture and heritage are considered more proper foundations for a community than political or (especially modern) popular trends. The idea, I think, is that deathless beings who are weak enough to be swayed by mortal fads are not suited for power. Anyway, it is not considered proper for a Laibon to wander off in search of a domain that suits his petty fancy.

Since Laibon are selected, not born, the idea of a social order that procreates culturally rather than biologically is actually possible to achieve. Those Laibon who participate in societal discussion would tell you that it is the blessing that counters our curse. In my experience, though, the eldest Laibon outgrow that concept and the youngest think of it as propaganda. I think the entire system is designed to reduce power struggles and solidify authority wherever possible so that an eternal civilization can be built to accommodate our undying selves.

Remember, though, I hold no titles in any domain.

Beneath the measured ambitions and the rigid hierarchy lies a fundamentally mortal feeling that continues to reinforce the gathering of Laibon into groups. The Laibon in every domain regard each other as family, sometimes going so far as to adopt familial relationships and superimposing them over their vampiric blood ties. In Freetown, I'm regarded as an uncle by some of the young Laibon, for example, due to my age and tangential relationship to the domain. A pair of Ishtarri Laibon in the Sudan, Ubende and Ganhuru, call each other "cousin" because their sires have the same sire. Since I last saw them, they have taken over a domain there, but I can't tell from our correspondence which of them has formally taken on the role of magaji.

This familial bond makes the domain the strongest Laibon social organization I know of. A slight against one Laibon in the domain is far more likely to warrant a fatal response from colleagues than the elimination of a Western "Kindred" would, and I speak from experience. Family struggles are frequent and messy, but they are also usually suspended to overcome external conflicts. No creature but me has the right to treat my brother the way I do.

Magaji

Each Laibon territory on the continent falls under the supervision of a magaji. The magaji's responsibility is to the domain he or she oversees, whether as a patron or a despot. The connection between the magaji and the territory is indisputable by anyone less than the Guruhi. Even that is a delicate thing, as other legacies hold more power in certain locales than even all the local Guruhi combined.

A magaji (from the Boko language, meaning "king") is not, strictly speaking, the master of her territory, though she does enjoy some degree of subservience from those who exist beneath her in status. In theory, the magaji enjoys authority at the cost of responsibility, both of which are bestowed upon her (or a predecessor) by the Guruhi who claims the land. It's a narrow role, really. The magaji has the most inwardly focused duty in Laibon society. Whereas less-important Laibon may still interact with the outside world, the magaji is sometimes swamped with matters of Laibon society.

This is one reason why magaji are very frequently the oldest monsters in their territories. Elder Laibon have less interest in the outside world, and the more entrenched one becomes in vampire society, the more difficult it is to extract oneself later. In truth, I will tell you that most magaji I have met — and there are many — are the eldest because they are the strongest. Therefore, the strongest Laibon typically oversees the domain.

Oversight of a domain consists largely of interpreting the Tenets. These are the laws of Laibon society that empower the magaji as governor and judge. The magaji welcomes new Laibon into the territory or sends them away. The magaji sentences transgressors or pardons them. The magaji upholds traditional custom or quietly ignores it.

Historically, the position of magaji is granted by a Guruhi, but tonight that's not always the case. A territory might change hands through open or clandestine warfare, or it might pass down willingly from a retiree to a protégé. Both events are uncommon, but they do happen. In Burundi there is a domain that is actually overseen by a magaji named to the position by an elder council. Neighboring magaji don't regard him as a genuine authority, but the domain is small enough and quiet enough to get by. Young, idealistic thin-bloods regard the place as a shining example, yet no more than five or six Laibon dwell there.

The innate bond between magaji and domain reinforces the rigid order. First, and most obviously, an undying overseer may never need a successor. Secondly, the boundaries of any domain depend on the magaji at its heart. A strong magaji will have farther-reaching influence than a weakling. This has resulted in some massive territories swelling and pressuring the neighboring domains. With the disinterested, diminishing participation of the Guruhi in nightly politics, more and more domains shift one way or another without formal approval.

Take the territory that used to be sovereign in Angola, for example. The handful of Laibon who dwelled there eventually broke apart in a handful of territories with one Laibon apiece. Each, informally, became magaji by default, without the consent of the Guruhi. When word spread of this disintegration, neighboring magaji quickly took up those territories in a more official capacity, though the former magaji within haven't moved and haven't been subjugated in any meaningful way.

What's important to realize is that the relationship between a Laibon and his territory is flexible but unbreakable. The form of any domain is contextual, subject to the understood relationships between participating Laibon in the region. Those courtly orators who debate social philosophy might exaggerate territorial shifts into warfare, while the lone zebra-hunter might have his homeland pass from one magaji to another and not find out for a decade.

Yet the magaji is not supremely powerful. In the most basic way, a weak or lax overseer can be unseated by a greater number of more powerful vampires. You'd think such events are necessarily rare, given the respect elder, powerful Laibon say they have for the system, but the magaji is often surrounded by a larger number of powerful undead anyway. A magaji who falls terribly out of favor does have consequences to suffer.

The camaraderie of Laibon within a territory shouldn't be ignored, either. A great many magaji maintain their seats out of tradition. ("Undele's always been magaji. That's his job.") This is, once again, an example of the innate connection between the Laibon and the role. The fact is that not every Laibon has a taste for that kind of power, and fewer still have the knack for it.

A better story, which I can confirm to be true from my time in Kenya, is that of Tsunda, magaji of a sizable inland territory. His domain was granted to him directly by the Guruhi, and circumstance had eventually left him with a land of younger Laibon unable to influence him. The kholo were children in comparison to him. Tsunda was a bloodletting bastard, accustomed to violence and fond of dangerous demonstrations of power before mortal eyes. He was, then, unpopular with the local Guruhi, who wasn't especially local by all accounts. Tsunda was dismembered before Laibon witnesses by a thick-maned lion on his own property. Such things, as they say in that domain now, do not happen by accident. The domain is now held by one of the youngest magaji I know of, Kisha, who has since been in frequent contact with the Guruhi.

For all I've said about internal power struggles, I must remind you of the difference between a magaji's relationship with those in his domain and a magaji's relationship with outsiders. Even those Laibon who resent or distrust their own magaji will support him against outside forces. "There may be problems with my domain," a Nigerian Osebo once told me, "but they're mine, and I won't give them up."

Kholo

Each domain is also overseen formally or otherwise by the kholo — a council of elders consisting of one representative from each of the legacies in the domain. In every case, these representatives are the Laibon proven to be the eldest of their heritage in the land. I know of no exceptions to this policy.

A note here about the language. The word kholo refers to the collected body of elders who advise (or are ignored by) the magaji as well as any individual member of the body, such as the Shango kholo or a kholo of Ugadja's domain. A magaji may or may not recognize a kholo of his own legacy in addition to himself.

The Guruhi are often credited with the creation of the kholo as an advisory force, even though councils of elders had been formed in mortal circles before the Guruhi bestowed the domains. This is not to diminish that noble bloodline's reputation for wisdom, merely to suggest its inspiration. Regardless, the kholo might just as well be an invention of the common Laibon rather than the magaji. They function as a clear and experienced voice in the ear of every domain's figurehead, supplying the necessary wisdom that no single soul could encompass alone even with a century of nights behind him.

Magaji don't select, authorize or otherwise govern the conventions of the kholo. The council and its practices are a distinct, separate tradition accepted into the social order but not specially subject to it. The magaji has no direct say who claims the kholo title any more than the magaji may assign an age to someone. At best, the magaji may endorse the kholo body (though this often has no practical benefit); at worst, the magaji may choose to disregard the kholo outright (which is unlikely to be seen favorably by kholo or kin). The kholo, in turn, is not exempt from the law of the land. The magaji does have the authority to apply the Tenets to members of the kholo as he or she sees fit, however.

To my surprise, there is actually very little ceremony involved in the kholo which is consistent from one domain to the next. Here, the kholo may be revered with rituals and offerings from the magaji herself. There, the kholo might just casually convene in an all-night gas station like rustic locals. The only practice common to all kholos is the method of appointment. Only the eldest may sit on the council. In practice, of course, different domains have different standards of acceptable proof of age.

This is one reason why so many established Laibon are hesitant to move from one domain to another. Reputation alone vouches for a great deal of the most powerful Laibon, so there is no benefit to traveling outside the boundaries of one's reputation. Patience and prudence might be all a Laibon needs to win authority one night.

In many ways, there is no more desirable post than that of kholo. It suggests wisdom, bestows some degree of honor, grants authority, inspires respect and requires very little on behalf of the title-holder. Although I'm not foolish enough to name any for you, I could tell you about a good many kholos who are obsolete dullards at best and practicing idiots at worst. In the domain of a single Ishtarri, the most foolish is king.

Counterpoint to this is the case of any domain with a prolific sire. When just a few weeks separate the kholo from his competition, conflicts consistently arise over titles. More relevant to the issue in the modern nights is the place thin-bloods hold. One small domain in Senegal was quietly inhabited by 10 or 12 young licks (I think they were Xi Dundu) before a handful asked to Belong. A year or so later, the others sacrificed themselves to destroy the Xi Dundu kholo there. For nine glorious months, a vampire 13 generations removed from Cagn held the title of kholo in that land before a 10th-generation Xi Dundu was paid handsomely, I hear, to move in. The Eldest Are Kholo and the Eldest Command Undeath, so that young strategist was unseated and then expectedly drained dry.

Filling the Vacant Seat

In 1985, I participated in the replacement of a kholo in the Nigerian domain of a magaji called Nkule. Very few Xi Dundu dwelled in this small dominion, so when the eldest of the region was extinguished, a group of us sought out a seventh-generation Xi Dundu thought to be hunting near the Cameroon border. We couldn't find any sign of the Laibon in question, but we understood that Nkule's primary concern was keeping the resident 13th-generation Xi Dundu out of an influential position in the domain.

Nkule's Osebo sword-bearer and I went across the border and spent 16 nights seeking out a Xi Dundu willing to come back with us and accept some new authority. This was more difficult than might be expected. This sort of offer aroused all sorts of suspicion in Douala. Imagine how much Nkule must have despised the idea of a young kholo to accept any random outsider in his place?

I didn't return with Nkule's whip, though we did find a 10th-generation Xi Dundu in good standing with the Guruhi to return with him. In 1999, that Laibon claimed the domain for himself against the wishes of the kholo but with Guruhi consent. If what I hear about that Xi Dundu is true, Nkule finally saw the sun rise.

Keep that story to remember how kholo politics operate. It is often in the best interests of the kholo to maintain a generation gap between themselves and their would-be successors, so that up-and-comers will find no one in the domain willing to assist them in winning the position. Sometimes, like in Nkule's domain, this strategy weakens the domain overall. Nkule had to choose between the risk of elder blood from outside the domain or the inauguration of pitiable youth. It's hard to say which of these evils a magaji could say she preferred.

A Brief Lexicon

Africa is huge, and the parlance of the Laibon carries more specialized words than we can hope to print here. What follows, then, are a few of the more universal terms used by African vampires. In all but the most isolated domain, one Laibon speaking to another (provided she knows the local language...) is unlikely to be misunderstood if she uses one of these commonly understood terms.

Note also that such a situation provides a wealth of opportunities for Storytellers and players to research or create their own terms — and even to sow confusion by having the same word mean different things in different localities.

Akunanse: A legacy of vampires taking its name from the "wise spider" myths of Africa.

Aye: A vampire's terrestrial aspect or physical self.

Bamba: One's childe, or affectionately, any vampire younger than oneself.

Cagn: The progenitor of all vampires. Cagn is a creator-god among Bushman tribes in south-central Africa, and in some incarnations governs sorcery and shape-changing. Sometimes spelled Kagn.

"Fire on the Mountain": A colloquial term for diablerie, most often used in central and eastern Africa, but generally familiar to all African vampires.

Followers of Set: A legacy of vampires that reveres the Egyptian god Set.

Guruhi: A legacy of vampires named after an evil Gambian god.

Ishtarri: A legacy of vampires originating outside the Ebony Kingdom and named after the Mesopotamian/Babylonian goddess of love and war.

Kerrie: A walking stick, used for protection as well as to aid travel.

Kholo: The eldest vampire of a given legacy in a given location. Also, a collected body of these vampires. From the Chichewa for "parent" or "ancestor."

Kingdom: Territory claimed by a Guruhi, though this Guruhi is not necessarily the magaji of the domains within the kingdom. All kingdoms in Africa combined make up the Ebony Kingdom.

Kinyonyi: A legacy of vampires named after the Luganda word for "bird."

Kuta: Literally, "turtle"; a term used to signify a young vampire, often patronizing or derogatory, much as Western Kindred would use the term "whelp."

Laibon: An African vampire or multiple African vampires. Also, *laibon* means "shaman" or "medicine man" in the Masai tongue.

Legacy: In the Ebony Kingdom, clans are referred to as legacies, to the point of wholly replacing the word "clan" itself (which is considered to be a Western affectation). In practice, legacies are more familial than clans, sharing heritage and (sometimes grudging) respect.

Magaji: The preeminent vampire of a given domain; an African vampire "prince." From the Boko word for "king."

Naglopers: A debased and cruel legacy of vampires.

Night-walker: A vampire. More loosely, any supernatural creature.

Obayifo: A witch.

Orun: A vampire's supernatural aspect or "higher self."

Osebo: A legacy of vampires named after the leopard of many African legends.

Shango: A legacy of vampires named after the Yoruba god of magic, war and storms.

Xi Dundu: A legacy of vampires who cast no shadow, from the Bavili word for "shadow."

Zombu: The walking dead; a "zombie."

Legacies' Roles and Relationships in the Ebony Kingdom

The Laibon of Africa's legacies do not exist in a vacuum. They are more intricately linked than the clans of Western "Kindred," probably due to the dominance of the Guruhi. Therefore, the Laibon of the Ebony Kingdom are either for the Guruhi or against them, at least in terms of respect for tradition. Since the clash between tradition and modernization lies at the heart of Ebony Kingdom politics and unlife, and because the conservative nature of the Kingdom's elder population nightly comes into conflict with the often more progressive young Laibon, it is important to understand how the individual families of African vampires interrelate.

Akunanse

These sages and wanderers of the Akunanse legacy take their name from the "wise spider" legends of the Ashanti and other West African tribes, and the name is apt. Deeply in tune with the earth and its primal origins, the Akunanse develop bestial features of the spider, the lion, the hyena and the snake, among others, as they wander down the road of centuries. Restless, like many predators, they roam the star-shrouded nights of Africa, seeking knowledge and wisdom, as well as the prey they need to survive.

Wanderlust fills the Akunanse, and many do not feel compelled to needlessly restrict themselves to a single domain. They travel across the whole of the continent, from the plains to the mountains, from the coasts to the jungles, both learning from and teaching to mortals and Laibon alike. The wisdom gained from their sojourns makes the Akunanse highly valued as advisors, mediators and mentors to many magaji and other influential Laibon.

Legends tell of one Akunanse traveler calling himself Hasani who traveled the Ebony Kingdom far and wide in the 16th century. It's said his taloned feet touched every type of terrain, including the Sahara itself, and the legends recall he was quite fond of various cultures' beliefs about their origins.

In the late 16th century, Hasani found himself in Morocco on the northern coast of the continent as that nation was fighting a losing war against the Portuguese and their colonial interests there. The Portuguese hoped to conquer Morocco and transform it into a satellite of the Iberian country. As the Europeans controlled the sea, the Moroccans often held less coastal territory in their own country than the foreigners did. While usually above mortal concerns, Hasani had no interest in seeing any more of his homeland fall under the dominion of outsiders. Therefore, he presented himself to the Sultan of Morocco, a frail, ill man, as advisor and consul.

Aided by the Laibon's advice, the Moroccans soundly defeated the Portuguese in 1578 at the Battle of Three Kings. The battle earned this name from the fact that the Portuguese king himself took part in the battle, as did the "tame" sultan candidate the European monarch had to replace the current sultan. Both of these mortals died in battle, and Hasani, knowing that a weak leader meant ruin for Morocco, witnessed the death of the sultan himself.

The new Moroccan ruler, Almansur, made Hasani a fixture of his court until wanderlust again moved Hasani to go elsewhere. Almansur took advantage of the Laibon's patronage and desire to be on the move, and Hasani traveled with an army south across the Sahara to attack and conquer the Songhai Empire in 1590. Within a year or two, even the legends lose track of Hasani, as he again wandered to some new challenge, some new lesson.

The Akunanse are well regarded within the Ebony Kingdom for their knowledge. The Guruhi value them highly as advisors, counselors and inter-domain diplomats. The Shango often consult the learned Akunanse when dispensing Laibon justice, and the Xi Dundu treat them warily, suspecting them of being more Guruhi spies and informants than sagely wanderers of the earth. In some cases, certain broods and sub-tribes of the Akunanse legacy have conflicted with individual factions of the Setites. Perhaps this is to be expected with the former's inclination toward learning new things and the latter's desire to hold knowledge close.

The Akunanse themselves respect the dominion of the Guruhi and its supporter legacies, rarely feeling the need to change the current system, which works well enough most of the time. These Laibon often worry over the ambitions of the Xi Dundu, however, and wonder when (not if) they will strike at the Guruhi regime. Many Akunanse, at least those less concerned with politics than learning more of the earth and its wonders, remain aloof regarding a possible struggle of domain supremacy. As long as they are left alone to pursue their owns ends, many Akunanse care little enough for which Laibon legacy claims to have power over them.

Followers of Set

The Setites of the Ebony Kingdom are more diverse than their North African brethren. While as a group, many still seek the location of the Grand Temple to their god (which they believe lies somewhere in the Sudan, near the Uganda border), these Laibon also know the value of a secret kept, of lore hidden and of using knowledge to indebt those who lack it.

Known unflatteringly as Vipers to some, these Laibon use their abilities and their closely guarded secrets to bring others, both mortal and undead, under their sway, while largely remaining aloof from Laibon society and politics. In that way, these self-styled outsiders will be ready for the inevitable eventuality of the Grand Temple being found, which they believe augurs the ascension of darkness: the return of their founder, Set. Some Setites believe that, not only is the Grand Temple somewhere within in the Ebony Kingdom, but so is their god. Perhaps, some speculate, the two lie in the same place: the Grand Temple being the home to which Set retired in AD 33.

One noteworthy Setite calls herself Zhenga; she's the mistress of Mombassa's illegal underworld. Slaves, drugs, blood or secrets, all these and more can be had from Zhenga for the right price. She directs her mortal retainers, ghouls and retinue of fellow Laibon (mostly, but not exclusively Setites) to prowl the night as she sees fit. Zhenga holds two main ambitions. The first is to claim Mombassa outright as her own domain, though from the safety of the darkness. With such a tool at her disposal, she feels the Setites would be that much closer to being ready for their god's return, as Zhenga prepares Mombassa to be his capital with each passing year.

Zhenga's second, secret objective deals with the army she's creating for her lost god. She uses the slave trade to sustain a captive breeding program unlike any other. In the wilderness beyond the city, small camps exist where Zhenga breeds her vitae-enhanced ghouls with mortals. When the children of these unholy unions are born, the mortal parent is killed and its blood is mixed with milk and fed to the infant as its first meal. Zhenga calls these children *bima* (the Nilote word for ghoul), and she hopes their unique diet, training, and in some cases, supernatural abilities beyond those of any typical ghoul, will serve them well as Set's shock troops of darkness rising when the dark god returns. *Bima* are dark and hairy (some to the point of being furry), and many have tusks and long claws.

Most other Laibon regard the Setites with caution, as noted by the common nickname Vipers. The Guruhi and their allies distrust them, for they cannot help but wonder what secrets the Setites hide, what secret knowledge they quest for and what schemes they have to find or resurrect their so-called god. Most Guruhi do not believe that Set still exists, but they are wise enough to know that the fact of it matters little. If the Vipers believe their god has returned, the Setites across the Ebony Kingdom will rise in open revolt.

The Setites care little for Guruhi politics, Osebo and Shango posturing and threats, and the constant burrowing for knowledge of the Akunanse disturbs them some. They see the other legacies as useful tools, to be used when needed and put down when they are no longer productive. The Xi Dundu bear particular attention, as they are one of the few legacies that the Setites grudgingly respect and keep their eyes on.

Guruhi

The Laibon of this legacy are the masters of the Ebony Kingdom. The oral histories of the Laibon state that they were the first legacy to immigrate to Africa, and they soon established the basis for what is now their domain. They suffered the other legacies to immigrate or develop, but they always maintain a close watch so that none gain too much power or too much arrogance and desire to seek the Kingdom for themselves.

The Guruhi's forceful personalities and impressive physical capabilities, even among Laibon, ensure that they are likely to hold on to their positions of power and leadership. Of course, powerful individual Laibon belonging to other legacies exist, but they do so as long as the Guruhi feel that they are content in their roles as the Kingdom's servants. As long as they maintain their domains to the benefit of the kingdom and the Laibon, the Guruhi allow these potent individuals to serve them.

Eze, the Demon Prince, is one of the most notorious Guruhi. He existed in Abyssinia (what is now western Ethiopia) around 1540 as an open warlord, who made no attempt to hide his supernatural origin. Not only did he viciously battle his way to dominance of the region, he also wiped out numerous bands of Portuguese invaders who sought to expand their colonies in Africa. Eze terrified both Laibon and mortal alike, the former for his flouting of the Tenet of The Secret Must Be Kept, and the latter for his unholy strength and overwhelming force of will. Local mortals were not molested, but any outsiders (especially Europeans) were held as nothing more than chattel for the Demon Prince and his retinue of Laibon. He created many ghouls who served as his bodyguards and assassins for his mortal adversaries. Enemy Laibon — and there were many — he sought out himself, drinking their souls to increase his own power.

After nearly a decade of this, Eze pushed someone or something too far. He disappeared suddenly, all record of his existence had been stricken from mortal records and memory. The identity of the force powerful enough to destroy the Demon Prince remains a mystery among the Laibon to this night, though it is whispered that the Akunanse have uncovered hints regarding it.

The Shango, Osebo and some members of the Akunanse legacies have the strongest ties to the Guruhi, for they serve to support the domains of these Laibon. The Ishtarri and the Kinyonyi regard their Guruhi "patrons" more coolly, so as long as they're left alone, these two legacies don't care much for formal titles or political posturing, respectively. The Naglopers and Xi Dundu

distrust the Guruhi at best, and neither of them would be averse to seeing the legacy fall from its position of power.

As the undead leaders of the Ebony Kingdom, the Guruhi maintain strong relationships with many of the other legacies. They see the Shango as their judges and their enforcers to be used when other Laibon step out of line. They view the Osebo as their scouts and soldiers, and they consider the Ishtarri to be wise, valuable diplomats and occasional advisors. The Guruhi pay little attention to the Kinyonyi and, for the most part, the Akunanse as these two legacies possess little in the way of political ambition. They consider the Naglopers to be monsters that bear close watching, lest they get out of hand, and they feel the Xi Dundu are rebels just waiting for the first sign of weakness on the part of the Guruhi. Weakness is not something the lords of the Ebony Kingdom intend to display, especially to would-be usurpers.

Ishtarri

The Ishtarri place themselves as outsiders within the Ebony Kingdom, but nonetheless a vital part of it. According to their own creation story, they are the descendents of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. As latecomers to the Ebony Kingdom, they petitioned the Guruhi for a place in their domain, and to the surprise of the indigenous Laibon, the Guruhi agreed. To this night, no one knows exactly *why* the Guruhi agreed, but the weight of tradition ensures that the Ishtarri have their place.

As the goddess who created them was the patron of love, fertility and war, so, too do her Laibon children follow in her footsteps. Along the millennia since their introduction to the Ebony Kingdom, however, their understanding of their mother's ways has grown base and carnal. Ishtarri often revel in physical pleasure, either unable to draw the line at temperance or unwilling to rein in their own desires for the benefit of anyone else. In many cases, this proves their undoing, as their lust for unlife drags them down the paths of corruption, blackmail and addiction. On the other hand, they are the legacy with the greatest connection to the mortals of Africa, arguably the most "alive" of the Ebony Kingdom's Laibon families, and their finger rests on the pulse of the living throngs who populate the continent. Ishtarri can be wise observers of the living, advising their magaji with a candor almost unprecedented among the undead. On the other hand, they can be decadent sybarites who care only for the source of their next burst of undeath-defying sensuality.

Too often, other Laibon forget Ishtar's warrior aspect, and they regard the Ishtarri as complacent hedonists. This is true in many cases, but in those cases where it proves false, it proves *terribly* false. Ishtarri frequently become warlords, leaders of fellow Laibon and mortal soldiers through their power of personality or through demonstrations of their tremendous physical prowess. Although an Ishtarri might be fattened by his gluttony, he still has the potential to move as quickly as lightning across the sky; while an Ishtarri might be winnowed by venereal disease, she still can be as tough as Cagn's own walking stick.

An Ishtarri named Igoli once served the Guruhi kings of Africa by traveling between their domains and acting as a messenger, interpreter, liaison and diplomat between the greatest masters of the domains. The height of her notoriety occurred in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, when the highest tier of Guruhi kings included as many as 20 Laibon. Igoli not only remembered what each king's opinions were, which policies they favored, a general understanding of the political climes within their domains and the magaji leaders in those domains, she also knew how to treat with each one so that she might make the most ambassadorial progress with them.

When the Guruhi kings finally understood the depth of Igoli's acumen, however, they grew mistrustful, as Laibon often do when presented with a fellow who might have the potential to be a threat. They called a great meeting of the Kingdom's mightiest lords and invited Igoli to attend. Igoli wisely smelled a trap, but she could not deny her responsibilities to the Kingdom. She was wary, but dutifully arrived at the palace where the meeting was being held.

At this point, the story diverges, depending upon the teller. In some cases, each of the assembled Guruhi kings tries to kill her, but Igoli's smooth demeanor and silver tongue allow her to talk each one out of delivering her to Final Death. (Indeed, many talespinners are fond of this version of the story. No doubt they have concocted individual stories about each of these encounters.) Another version of the story suggests that Igoli came prepared, with 20 mighty warrior-Laibon for each of the kings — either to grant them to him as a symbol of loyalty or to cut of his head if his motives were treacherous. Other variations also exist, but invariably they result in Igoli defeating the treacherous Guruhi's plans to destroy her.

Naturally, none of tonight's masters of the Ebony Kingdom even remember such a Laibon, let alone some epic tale of her achievements.

Though the Ishtarri get along fairly well with the other legacies, it is often because those other legacies don't understand how truly capable the Ishtarri are, and dismiss them as flighty, irrelevant or lost in their own desires. This suits the Ishtarri fine, of course, as leading others to underestimate them makes it all the easier for them to trick them, parlay profitably with them or otherwise achieve what they want. They treat respectfully with the Akunanse, whose stories they appreciate, the Shango and Osebo, with whom they share common

ties to the Guruhi kings, and, secretly, the Followers of Set, whose similar status as "outsider natives" makes them strangers in their home lands. Many Ishtarri see the Xi Dundu as their next possible patrons (who can handle the dirty work of administration, leaving the Ishtarri themselves to their own wiles), but they see no need to aid them. They regard the Naglopers as lamentable failures of the Laibon condition — though others see this disdain as a bit of the pot calling the kettle black, so enamored are the Ishtarri of their own vices. Kinyonyi can come or go as they please, with little relation to Ishtar's children.

Kinyonyi

Suspected of being one of the latecomer legacies to the Guruhi's Ebony Kingdom, the Kinyonyi have seized that aspect of their reputation and run with it. No, the Kinyonyi aren't truly native — no, the Kinyonyi aren't part of the original group of legacies that settled here. Yes, the Kinyonyi have a voice in Ebony Kingdom affairs, but only so much as they choose to contribute. This arrangement seems to suit most of the powers that be in the African domains just fine. The Kinyonyi can simply abstain from matters if they choose to, and that means the rest of the legacies don't heave to deal with them.

As much so as the Akunanse, the Kinyonyi are wanderers, but for a different purpose. Many Laibon suspect that the Kinyonyi hail from itinerant mortal tribes, perhaps being related to migratory cultures of Celts displaced off the coasts of Spain or perhaps even originating with the "Gypsy" culture originating in India, what some Kinyonyi refer to as the "Middle Kingdom." Whatever the case, the Kinyonyi are definitely outsiders, though they have parlayed that status into a sort of neutrality, which they then extrapolate into a sort of mercenary status. The Kinyonyi wander from domain to domain, doing everything from "odd jobs" for the local magaji to dirty work for ambitious other Laibon. If a Laibon wants something handled, she can do it herself or wait for the inevitable Kinyonyi drifter to make his way to town. Often, a magaji will simply throw up his hands when confronted with a Kinyonyi troublemaker, knowing that sooner or later, the Laibon will go about his way, bringing his ill omens to another domain.

Given their often-unrecognized status, the Kinyonyi often occupy the lower rungs of the social order. Even established elder Kinyonyi typically earn little esteem except among others of their legacy. While their reputations precede them, such reputations are often like those of storms, which local Laibon simply prepare to weather when news of their arrival comes on the wind. As such, few Kinyonyi are widely trusted, and are instead turned to purposes at which anyone who had a vested, long-term interest in the domain would balk. For the Kinyonyi, it is the doing of the act that is important — the repercussions or benefits rarely figure into the deed.

The greatest Kinyonyi many members of the legacy know by name is the legendary Wamukota ("left-handed"). With dusky skin and long, straight hair, Wamukota obviously came from outside the Ebony Kingdom, but he made a name for himself in bringing the Laibon what they wanted. When the magaji Uchenna wanted his progeny brought back from the foul Setite who had captured her heart, Wamukota wooed her away from the foul Viper. When Sanjo's sister threw her favorite cowry shell into the sea, Wamukota leapt into the depths and questioned all the fishes until he found where it rested. When the kholo of Senegal were at each other's throats, Wamukota stole their fetishes, uniting them in hatred against him and forcing them (at least temporarily) to make their peace with each other in light of his common threat.

Wamukota's greatest victory, however, is one about which rumors do not widely circulate outside the campfires of passing Kinyonyi themselves. It is said that one of the great Guruhi kings of Africa wanted the sun as his own, and asked Wamukota to obtain it for him. Wamukota was no fool — he knew that Cagn had been forbidden to look upon the sun or bathe in its rays — but he knew that it would fetch a valuable price from this greedy king. At first, he set out to make it seem impossible, the better to raise his price.

"But, king of kings," Wamukota insisted, "our kind is unable to look upon the sun, for such is the Curse of Cagn."

"I do not care; I want it for my own," the Guruhi replied.

"But, master of magaji," Wamukota countered, "others would know immediately if the sun had been stolen."

"I do not care; I want it for my own," the Guruhi replied.

"But, ruler of all nights," Wamukota insisted, "without the sun, the rest of the world would go blind and wither in the darkness."

"I do not care; I want it for my own," the Guruhi replied.

This went on for one hundred and one nights, until the Guruhi finally asked Wamukota, "Can you not do this, Wamukota?"

To this, the Left-Handed one replied, "Of course I can. You shall have the sun when tomorrow night you rise."

The next day, while the Guruhi slumbered, Wamukota borrowed the moon's mantle so that he might move about by day. He went to the sun and asked, "Sun, I know of a conspiracy against you, and for a single coin, I shall tell you of it all."

The sun granted Wamukota's request, and the Kinyonyi replied that the next person he saw to bear his coin would be the treacherous one. Then he returned to the Guruhi's palace.

When the Guruhi awoke, Wamukota told him, "I have captured the sun for you and here it is," and gave him the sun's coin. "But you must never show it," Wamukota continued, "for I have placed a false jewel in

its place, and if you reveal yourself to be the true owner of the sun, everyone will know they have been tricked and become very angry."

The Guruhi agreed, but he had no intention of keeping the secret. As the owner of the sun, he was master of all and could easily destroy anyone who felt upset at being tricked.

One month later, he planned to present his prize at his court. Standing before the assembled Laibon, he drew the sun's coin from a pocket in his robe. "See the sun I hold in my hand!" he shouted. "The sun in the sky by day is only a jewel which I have placed there to do the sun's duties!" The crowd gasped...

...and the sun, seeing his traitor's coin even across the night sky, sent a single ray of his own brilliance to strike down the vain Guruhi, leaving only ash in his place.

Wamukota shook his head and walked on — but he had already been paid, so the consequences were not his to bear.

The Kinyonyi are given a wide berth by other Laibon, not fully trusted but understood to be useful tools who expect little in return other than their agreed-upon sums. At the same time, they know that few magaji will look too deeply into reports of Kinyonyi deaths or even preemptive attacks against them in anticipation of malfeasance. The Kinyonyi accept this, knowing that it is the price they pay to have the laws of the land so loosely applied to them. They get along well with the Akunanse, with whom they trade stories, the Guruhi, who employ them more often than any others, the Ishtarri, who are fellow foreigners, and even the Xi Dundu, whose ends do not matter to the Kinyonyi, so long as they do not achieve the power to revoke their outsider status. Kinyonyi often suffer strained relations with Osebo and Shango, who sometimes find themselves investigating the interlopers' activities, the Setites, who have their own mercenary purposes, and the Naglopers, who want little more than to feast on the flesh of others.

Naglopers

The Ashanti have a legend regarding a hideous creature that hangs from trees and devours passersby with its metal teeth, the *asanbonsam*. No doubt these legends were caused by or confused with the dreadful Naglopers, debased Laibon who are as close to the realm of beasts as they are to the society of men. They are not the wise animals of legend like the Akunanse, however, they are monsters out of nightmare. Gifted (or perhaps cursed) with the ability to pull flesh from its moorings and twist it into blighted new shapes, the Naglopers prowl the night for their own purposes alone. They have little solidarity and even less courtesy. Other vampires suffer them only because of the Tenets, and even then, plenty of magaji hate the Naglopers enough to drive them far from their domains and into the wilds.

Obviously the Naglopers have fallen, and what they are tonight is little more than the debased remains of... something else. At least, that is what other Laibon hope, for few tales of Laibon history position them as much more than claw-gnashing brutes and ravenous fiends to be overcome. The Naglopers don't mind this, apparently, because they do their best to keep exactly that image fresh in the minds of the other African undead.

What purpose, then, do the Naglopers serve in the Ebony Kingdom? Surprisingly, many Guruhi grant them leave to survive because they are perfect objects lessons. "Don't let your wild side thrive," wise Laibon warn, "or you'll be doomed to unlife like a Nagloper." To their credit, the Naglopers can summon immense cunning and estimable animal craft. Indeed, some suggest — more than a few Naglopers among them — that they are the perfect vampires, as they can so easily discard the mantle of men and instead take on utterly the aspect of the Beast. Few Naglopers are eloquent enough to speak this thought, however, and more often than not, a Nagloper continues to devolve throughout her unlife. I have heard whispers of elders of their legacy becoming little more than forces of nature, paragons of what it means to be a monster, rousing themselves at night only to sate their thirst for blood and speaking only a score of words over as many centuries.

Throughout Laibon legends, the Naglopers do make a place for themselves, though it is not a distinguished one. In these tales, Naglopers are implacable foes, hunting their enemies down with single-minded ferocity. They can also be tricksters, but not of the merry sort — they fool unwary travelers into their lairs or cajole a warrior to give up his flesh so that his beloved might live. They might be hardy warriors or competent witches. While Naglopers have the ability to be urbane, almost anything they touch becomes fouled at their presence, and menace follows them almost universally.

The Naglopers can take many forms in these tales, as well. A Nagloper might hide below the water, beneath a bridge or on a rocky coastline. A sorcerer's cellar might hide one, or she might make her lair in the trees as the *asanbonsam* legends attest. They might sneak into a village by night to sustain themselves or maraud unchecked across the savannas of a powerless magaji's domain. One might be a skilled but malicious kholo, a rugged emissary or a simple brute. In the end, only two things are certain: The Nagloper has only his own interests in mind, however he may act, and his presence alone signifies a tangible evil.

In short, they are just like every other Laibon, only stripped of pretensions.

To say that the Naglopers have amicable relationships with anyone would be misleading. More accurately, an individual Nagloper can cultivate relations, but the legacy as a whole shouldn't be held accountable for his actions, nor should it be seen as an encouragement to traffic with such monstrous creatures. Naglopers typically regard other Laibon collectively as either below their consideration for attention, or they genuinely believe that other Laibon are better than them — for which they grow exceptionally jealous and hostile.

Osebo

Following closely on the heels of the Guruhi when they claimed the Ebony Kingdom as a gift from their god, the Osebo have been a part of Africa for as long as any can remember. In fact, some suspect that the Osebo dwelled in the Ebony Kingdom before the Guruhi came and simply realized that the Guruhi were better equipped to handle the domains than they were. Suggesting this to an Osebo typically elicits one of two responses. Those proud in their might would scoff and probably make a physical display of how no one is better prepared than them to do *anything*. The more common response would simply be a shrug. The majority of Osebo don't want to bother with such things as dealing with domains and interpreting Tenets.

To this end, the Osebo find themselves the welcomed guests of the Guruhi domains. Few of the Laibon kings have entourages that don't include at least a single Osebo enforcer or heavy. In some cases, these are distinguished champions of a particular magaji. In other cases, they are lackwit thugs, Embraced from the mortal ranks of violent psychopaths who have found an excuse in undeath to continue as they had begun in life. Ambition is not a common Osebo trait, and most are more than satisfied to attach themselves to an established regime so that they may draw comforts from its successes. This would be somewhat saddening if it wasn't how the Osebo have always been. Surely, the Osebo could physically stand against the Guruhi and possibly even the Xi Dundu threat combined — they just don't want to. It's easier to let someone else do the bookkeeping, especially since they choose to and seem better at it.

This isn't to say that the Osebo are idle. Far from it. They just don't want to be at the head of their domains. Many Osebo build secret societies or criminal organizations. They hide themselves within religious cults and lend support to dictators or their revolutionaries — or both. Indeed, the Osebo seem to have a hard time controlling themselves, and they often thrive in domains where a strong authority exists, as it serves to keep them in line. Left to themselves, they often indulge in ever more vulgar acts, not because they realize their morals are degrading, but because they are, and the degradation



itself urges them toward sinfulness. Child-snatching, kidnapping, bloody rituals, black magic and even less wholesome practices occupy the Osebo who are left to run rampant. Laibon society, ironically, seems to encourage the Osebo to work toward better ends, if only because those ends frustrate the scourge of other Laibon as often as not.

One Osebo of note, Homa, followed the warrior tribes led by the great Shaka himself in the early 19th century. Building around her a veritable army of itinerant soldier-Laibon and ghouls sworn to her cause in exchange for blood, Homa was the scourge of the southern domains. When Shaka's own life ended at the hands of his murderous half-brothers, Homa took the chance to free herself from the mortal warriors and establish her own domain in Luanda, Angola. The current magaji didn't stand a chance of repelling her, and he and his kholo fled to Zambia, leaving the other Laibon of the domain to defend it to their inevitable Final Deaths.

Homa's coup lasted for an uncharacteristically long period, as far as Osebo domains are concerned. For over a century, Luanda experienced great growth as a center of Laibon unlife. While it was not truly a cultural center, it was a place where laibon could either lay low for a while while news of their exploits cooled off, or they could simply claim to Belong there, making a haven in a domain claimed by one of the most lax interpreters of the Tenets ever to hold the title of magaji. Of course, Homa's kholo had an abnormally high attrition rate, but such was to be expected in such a lawless environment.

Homa eventually tired of the duties of magaji and turned her domain over to the kholo as a council at the beginning of the 20th century. As might be expected, the council tore itself apart and suffered even more accelerated attrition at that point. Eventually, a new magaji walked in a claimed the domain. This one was unaffiliated with Homa or the previous order and likely installed by the Guruhi kings who had had just about enough of the rogue Osebo and her riotous ways.

Every now and then, a truly ancient Osebo emerges from the shadows somewhere, typically in the northern domains, and claims to have been a part of a Utopian city that stood thousands of years ago. These Osebo often bear little resemblance to their Ebony Kingdom kin, possessing different gifts of Cagn and wielding extraordinary forces of personality. Indeed, few would associate them with the Osebo at all if they did not claim to be members of that legacy themselves. These ancients often grow disillusioned and move on quickly, however, seemingly because the Ebony Kingdom domains do not seem to want their notions of Utopia. They might settle in certain domains or proclaim themselves magaji, forcing the Guruhi to recognize them, but most pass into the night not long after.

The Osebo have strong relations with the Guruhi, but they rarely see eye to eye with the Shango sorcerers, whose magic they do not trust. They see most other legacies as rabble rousers, by and large — but that's alright with them, as many relish the chance to demonstrate the power of the titles the magaji bestow upon them. While few trust the Xi Dundu, rumors have circulated of a malcontent among the legacy who has taken an entire brood over to the Masai legacy's camp, and to this night trains his progeny in the arts of shadow war. These rumors have yet to be reported with enough evidence to lend them much gravity, but a wise magaji grows nervous at the very implications of the matter. As always, time will tell, and preparations for war might come on the rumors' heels.

Shango

Over the millennia of Laibon history, the Shango have emerged as the voices of reason amid the often cacophonous culture of African undead. They serve as advisors to magaji, guardians of Laibon legends and history and the warders of the Tenets. Equally capable with sorcery and more physical devotions, the Shango often find themselves in the roles of judges and warriors. They frequently support the Guruhi, but they do so not out of acceptance, as do the Osebo, but out of a genuine agreement with them. On the whole, the Shango are conservative, and it is whispered that their obedience to the Guruhi power hierarchy originates with an oath of respect that the Shango swore when the Guruhi allowed the other legacies to settle in their kingdom.

The Shango are proud and loyal, true, but anyone who mistakes them for the toadies of the regime will likely find himself painfully reevaluating that belief. In their capacities as advisors, the Shango often have to play devil's advocate, and occasionally find themselves committed to some course of action not because they want to do it, but because it serves as some sort of check to the power of another. For example, a Guruhi magaji who hates the Ishtarri might declare them anathema in his domain, killing those who are foolish enough to venture there. The Shango might hide individual Ishtarri until the magaji can be reasoned with — not out of love for the Ishtarri, but because the magaji's policy is unfair or detrimental to the domain. While there are as many philosophies among the Shango as there are individual Shango themselves, by and large, the Shango are strongly committed to those ideals.

Given their austere orientation and sometimes unsavory duties, it is unsurprising that the Shango also carry fearful reputations. Their sorcery terrifies other Laibon; their sense of purpose scares those who lack their drive. It is said that the Shango are not invincible, they merely know their own strengths and limitations, and they contrive never to have to face an enemy from a point of weakness.

The oral history of the Laibon attributes many tales to one particular Shango over centuries of existence. It is unknown whether this Shango, Jafari, was ever real, or simply the vehicle for fables told by the Shango themselves.

Jafari had his own favorite tale to tell, which he attributed to the life of his mortal father.

One day, Jafari's father was walking through the forest when he saw a baby monkey. He looked about diligently, but didn't see the monkey's mother anywhere. Thinking to himself, "What harm could possibly come of a baby monkey," he took the monkey home, where he fed it and treated it with love.

In time, the monkey grew large — large enough to threaten Jafari's father. It was rough and surly, and Jafari's father had to build a cage for it.

But the money kept growing, and Jafari's father had to build larger and larger cages to house the monkey. One day, he finally realized that his pet was no longer a monkey — it had grown into a full-sized gorilla.

"This has become too much to manage," Jafari's father thought to himself. "In the morning, I will let the monkey go."

During the night, however, the gorilla became agitated and shook his cage. The simple lock Jafari's father used to close the cage broke, and the gorilla escaped. As he left his cage, the gorilla devoured Jafari's father, every bit and every piece.

In Jafari's estimation, the monkey represented sin. What started out as an "innocent" indulgence or transgression rapidly grew to become an overwhelming liability. At any time, Jafari's father could have freed the monkey or put his sin behind him, but he didn't, and it eventually became his undoing.

Many other Laibon perceive the Shango to be particularly rigid and unyielding, as this tale might suggest. This is true somewhat, as the Shango do stand behind their own codes of ethics. They rarely look down on other Laibon arbitrarily, however, instead choosing to hate their flaws and not the people themselves. Indeed, if the Shango *did* look down on others, they would be guilty of pride themselves, and therefore flawed in their own estimation. They often enjoy the company of the Akunanse, though their disposition toward traveling makes the Shango somewhat uneasy. They serve the Guruhi faithfully when they can, but they hold their leaders to standards that even the most stringent of Guruhi would be hard-pressed to uphold, and many find themselves compromising their own outlooks to remain true to their patrons. When a leader is corrupt, however, he can know no more intractable foe than a Shango who wants to right his wrongs. The Shango have a professional respect for the Osebo, even if they do think the leopard is a passionate creature, and the Ishtarri they treat as necessary evils. Kinyonyi prove useful occasionally, but must be allowed to take their own way when they are ready. The Naglopers are cursed by fate and cannot help what they are. The Xi Dundu they trust warily, but as often as not, their desire to treat the shadow-men with trust betrays them in the end.

Xi Dundu

A Wadchagga proverb states that when the lion grows old, even flies attack him. Such is the belief of many Xi Dundu, who see the Guruhi as the lion, anachronistic and staid, and beset by enemies their centuries of tightly held power have earned them. While the Xi Dundu would likely be loath to characterize themselves as the flies in the proverb, many of them would do attacking of their own, hoping to install themselves on the thrones of the Ebony Kingdom. Some Xi Dundu insist that they resided in the Ebony Kingdom first, before whatever crazed god the Guruhi claim descent from "gifted" them with the continent, and that they, therefore, are the rightful masters of the domain. Others don't bother with such theatrics or indignity, instead simply scheming to make their claim, and do it soon.

The legacy is one of the most tightly knit, committed as it is to seizing power in the Kingdom and removing the Guruhi from their overlong stay, but it is not a pleasant family. Xi Dundu plot and scheme, acting openly when it suits them and skulking in the darkness at other times, and not even fellows of their legacy are immune to their plans. After all, the weakest limbs must be pruned.

Many Xi Dundu hail from the Masai tribes of eastern Africa, though at what point in history the two became intertwined is unknown. Masai culture also pervades Xi Dundu culture, and seeing their trademark red robes or dazzling arrays of beads is an easy indicator of these Laibon's legacy. Some members of the legacy even maintain that their progenitor was one of the Masai, though this does not seem likely. Despite their strong ties to the Masai, however, the Xi Dundu have spread far and wide throughout the Ebony Kingdom. Their domains are numerous, but small, and often a single Xi Dundu will nurse a brood of fledglings, fighting viciously against other Laibon who would share the same domain.

In nights long past, a brother and sister named Otieno and Onaedo together prowled the plains of what is tonight Kenya. They had both been Embraced by a Xi Dundu, and mere nights after he brought them among the undead, they slaked their thirst on his own heart's blood. The siblings were a terrible pair. They often lit the fire upon the mountain, their ways were violent and they quarreled constantly with each and every Laibon they would come across.

Otieno and Onaedo soon became infamous, and few magaji would suffer them to stay in their domains. They were hunted as often as they were the hunters, and their names were known far and wide as evil folk. Many Laibon took it upon themselves to bring down the pair in hopes of earning fame and glory, but the two were either too elusive or too powerful.

One night, the siblings came upon the domain of Magaji Olugbenga of Nigeria. They slipped in, unseen, at the close of night and slept beneath a tree for the day. When they rose the next night, the magaji's man Uzoma stood over them. "We know you are here, Otieno and Onaedo, and great Olugbenga would speak with you."

What could they do? They knew they were caught, and Uzoma would easily overpower them if they chose to run. They nodded silently, and the magaji's man took them to see him.

"Your dreadful reputation precedes you, Xi Dundu," Olugbenga told the terrible Laibon, "but do not let it be said that Olugbenga is a tyrant. So long as you stay in my domain, so that I may watch you, and so long as you put behind you your troublesome ways, you may call this domain your home."

Otieno and Onaedo agreed — they would calm their turbulent hearts and stay to enjoy the compassion of the magaji.

That is, at least until the next night. When Olugbenga rose to sate his thirst, he found he could not move. The brother and sister had used a cursed kerrie to trap him in his bed.

"But why would you do this, Xi Dundu? I have offered you the comforts of my garden and a home in my very own domain? I have excused your sins of the past and given you a place to build your future."

"You answer your own question, Olugbenga," Onaedo whispered to him. "You knew we were Xi Dundu when you pardoned us."

Ambitions aside, the Xi Dundu understand the value of allies, and they try to cultivate them widely if they can. While they consider themselves above most of the other Laibon, they aren't averse to having another hand hold the spear, as it were. They respect the Akunanse for their wisdom and wide experience, though they hold the Shango in low regard because the Shango seem reluctant to trust them. The Guruhi, obviously, they regard as past their prime, but they admire the tenacity with which the old Laibon hold on to their kingdom. They often see the Osebo and Kinyonyi as useful tools, the latter because they don't ask questions and the former because they are so easily swayed by strong personalities. Most Xi Dundu have little esteem for the Ishtarri because they seem frivolous and base.

The Power of Proverbs

In a land where legends walk, magic is a part of everyone's life and age brings wisdom, the language itself has power. Words hold meaning by themselves, but they combine for more profound messages. It is no surprise, then, that proverbs abound — tiny morsels of sagacity that contain great truths. What follow are several examples of African proverbs, with cultural or regional sources. We've chosen those with a decidedly vampiric flavor, of course. Feel free to have a tenured kholo toss out one of these gems, or have a travel-weary Akunanse whisper one to a character before she departs. If you have a particular flair, create your own — and don't be surprised when the players' characters start using them, too.

Death is like a robe everyone has to wear.
—Mandingo

One in the woodpile does not laugh at the one in the fire.
—Nairobi

Traveling is learning.
—Shona

To be hated by a human being is not to be hated by God.
—Gikuyu

God's rain falls even on the witch.
—Fipa

Suppression of hunger leads to death.
—Luyia

The young can't teach traditions to the old.
—Yoruba

Children will hate all those who give all things to them.
—Wolof

The fire burns the fire maker.
—Luyia

A hyena cannot smell its own stench.
—Kalenjin

Though the lion and the antelope happen to live in the same forest, the antelope still has time to grow up.
—Ghana

A crime eats its own child.
—Sechuana

The rainmaker who doesn't know what he's doing will be found out by the lack of clouds.
—Luganda

When the webs of the spider join, they can trap a lion.
—Ethiopia

The leopard's skin is beautiful, but his heart evil.
—Baluba

The death of an elderly man is like a burning library.
—Ivory Coast

If the tiger sits, do not think it is out of respect.
—Niloti

The owner of the dog does not obey his dog.
—Pygmy

The Tenets

The Tenets are the single uniting thread that runs throughout Laibon culture. This simple code spreads the solidifying concepts of our ancestral leaders across the Kingdom from the heart of vampiric society to its most distant extremities. The Tenets deliver the wisdom of the great nights past to the Laibon of tonight. They are the cultural link that spans national borders, ethnicities and bloodlines to make a widespread secret civilization of undead lords possible.

Since the ancient nights when the Guruhi granted lands in their possession to custodial overseers below them, the Tenets have been constant. Some Laibon regard them as scripture, believing the Tenets contain more than a socially ideological meaning. A good portion of the powerful Laibon I've spoken with agree that the code is the model for a functional undead order, designed and written to guide Laibon behavior into a system that promises to prolong the existence of Laibon culture into the final nights of the world. The ancestors somehow knew more about the entire course of forthcoming vampiric history then than we modern Laibon know about our actual history now.

Regardless of the spiritual esteem one has for the Tenets, they must be taken seriously. They might as well be the laws of the land. It is the job of the magaji to enforce, promote and interpret the Tenets within his territory. It is the job of every Laibon to obey the Tenets, for they are strong and immortal in a way a vampire might never know.

None of these rules are Tenets themselves, mind you. The idea is that the job of the magaji and the citizenship of every Laibon aren't simply mandatory, they're inherent. No vampire can ignore the code or rebel against it. These laws are in the blood of every legacy. This is the way of things.

Of course, most Laibon know better. The Tenets are spoken of in such dramatic ways because there is no other means to convey their importance to new Laibon. Without the code, Laibon society would collapse into an opportunistic cannibal chaos. It seems every Laibon agrees that the Tenets are crucial, but that most do not believe there is any supernatural power within them.

The history of the Tenets supports the mundane belief. I've come to agree with a few Setite scholars in Addis Ababa who tell me that the Tenets are a psychological and political construct that should be recognized for its skillful structure. Crediting the foresight and leadership of our ancestors to supernatural vagaries discredits the careful work they must have done to build the Tenets.

According to legend, the Tenets were written by the eldest of each legacy on the night the first domains were bestowed. This story typically places the elders, the kholos of the continent if you will, around a bonfire deep in the wilderness. Aside from the archaic familiarity of the scene, this is supposed to reveal the ability of our ancestors to dwell near danger without fear. That night, each ancestral Laibon was allowed one addition to what would become the code of conduct for all Laibon in the granted lands. In turn, over a few hours, each Laibon gave a law to the land that would defend his place in it. The

The Tenets of the Ebony Kingdom

The Guruhi Are the Land
Those Who Endure Judge
Belonging Grants Protection
The Secret Must Be Kept
No Secrets from the Magaji
Sires Command, Childer Inherit
The Eldest Command Undeath
Travelers Obey the Tenets
The Eldest Are Kholo

collected Tenets were, therefore, those intuitively necessary for the operation of a vast Laibon kingdom.

To be clear, the Tenets are not laws, exactly. Their subjective adjudication at the whims of individual magaji isn't consistent with law. As a code, the Tenets are usually handled case by case. The Tenets are true and binding, but how exactly they apply to a given situation is a matter for debate among the kholo and judgment by the magaji.

While manifestations of the Tenets in nightly existence is variable from one domain to the next, the language is not. The simple language of the Tenets is not mutable. For centuries, Laibon historians and power mongers have debated what the ancestors meant with their words. The words, though, cannot be changed. That would only separate a Tenet further from its purpose.

To invoke or argue a Tenet, it is typically recited. Casually, Laibon do this to empower their speech. Formally, this can be done as a polite challenge or petition to the magaji. It is, therefore, very important to understand the Tenets and their acceptance across the kingdom. Thus magaji are typically well versed in the Tenets or surrounded by advisors who are, such as the kholo.

The Guruhi Are the Land

As the original inheritors of the Ebony Kingdom and the truest wielders of power in it, the Guruhi have wisely crafted themselves an image as the foundation of all Laibon society and culture. Without the benefits of accumulated wisdom and reserved foresight the Guruhi are known for, it is likely that the Laibon would have drifted into warring factions centuries ago. Territoriality, greed and limited self-control would make infighting the standard practice among any vampiric body, I suspect. But the Guruhi wisely positioned themselves outside of that model, to some extent. They are regarded as being removed from the real politicking; what they say is considered objective. They are thought of as serene beasts; they are calculating and potentially lethal. They are recognized as the foundation of the whole system; without them, there would be nothing to fight over.

Ironically, this is the most subjective of the Tenets. Whatever priority the nine rules are given in any domain, this one is always first. The accepted history of the rule is that it was given to us by the eldest Guruhi back in the nights when other Laibon arrived in the land (from other realms or from those brought back by Cagn's fetish, if you prefer). I have heard other theories suggested, such as the idea that some Osebo wrote this rule in reverence, but I doubt that the truth would be so complicated.

In practice, this law is also the simplest to interpret. In my experience, there are very few deviations from the accepted implications. This rule says that the Guruhi are not exactly "equal" to the other legacies. (But what does that mean, anyway?) The Guruhi may take back what they give, as the Earth does. Whatever is built, in a societal sense, is done so with the support of the Guruhi. The Guruhi are constant, reliable, undefeatable and not going anywhere. They are like the land, and through their graces, they shared it with all other Laibon.

Do you see the clever rendering of power here? Whereas all the other Tenets are legislative and stated as such, this first Tenet reads like a metaphorical truth. It actually mandates nothing. What it does is pass a concept, a way of thinking, into law. Thus, the truth of the Guruhi is law. Since it would be a violation of this Tenet to disrespect the Guruhi, who could challenge their word? This circular conceit empowers the Guruhi and solidifies their sovereignty.

Those Who Endure Judge

Since the recognized hierarchy of authority in every vampire kingdom in Africa is based on age, this Tenet is usually strictly upheld by magaji and princes of all sorts. The sanctity of social order depends on this rule above all others. This is the law that tells us which vampire may govern the rest of us.

Who can say for sure which legacy suggested this law in the old nights? If we were to base the decision on which legacy has the most severe reputation for greed or tyranny, we would have a handful of equal suspects. Suffice to say, no organized effort can challenge this Tenet without sacrificing the prize and purpose of a revolt. As more and more Laibon are created, as our Blood runs further downhill away from Cagn, this law becomes more entrenched; the ladder to the top becomes longer. And of course those at the top become further removed from those at the bottom.

Outlasting the eldest Laibon is impossible; they are the eldest because they are masters of perseverance. This is the essence of undead leadership. I know of no way to climb the political ladder without violating this Tenet, other than waiting for misfortune to grace every undead figurehead between you and the throne. I've never heard any believable story wherein a magaji has voluntarily given up power. I have been wrong before, however.

Some elders interpret this Tenet extremely strictly, demanding recognition as judges and lawgivers within their domain. In severe instances, these elders judge individual Laibon by behaviors not at all covered by the Tenets. Most often, though, this Tenet is accepted as a means of highlighting experience and wisdom rather than declaring outright supremacy. No method of mandating new Tenets has ever been recognized. The only proper authority in the land comes from the interpretation of the existing Tenets. Of course, a great many magaji use this Tenet in conjunction with intimidation and violence to claim what might as well be called absolute tyranny.

It is interesting to note, though I cannot tell you how this tradition originated, that this Tenet is sometimes cited in place of others in cases of diablerie. The best reason I've come across is this: A single extinguished Laibon is meaningless and sometimes excusable, unless that Laibon has power over other Laibon. That is, stealing authority is regarded as a more heinous act than murder.

Belonging Grants Protection

The divisions of power are meaningless without a populace to oversee. This Tenet binds a Laibon to his or another's domain, albeit loosely. Without this Tenet, Laibon might flock to overcrowded domains without strong leadership.

What this means is that Belonging prevents popular policy-making, which would itself violate the Tenet of elder judgment. Were a Laibon to announce a particular Tenet void in his domain, he would attract like-minded undead and undermine the system. In the old nights, a Laibon held his place in the physical world in higher esteem than we do tonight. Real pride was taken in adherence to tradition. Movement from domain to domain didn't seem like such a tremendous thing to restrict, I suppose.

So this rule rewards those Laibon who either stay in place or report their movements to the magaji. By invoking this Tenet, you are agreeing to abide by the magaji's interpretations of the Tenets. In exchange, you cannot be ignored in any claim based on the Tenets. Essentially, this is an agreement between all parties to play fair. A magaji is not required to recognize any Laibon in his domain who does not Belong. Were a foreign Laibon to be extinguished in his domain, the magaji would be free to ignore it. It's not his problem.

As you'll learn, since The Eldest Command Undeath, every magaji has the right to wave off the destruction of some worthless bloodsucker. The special benefit from Belonging is that the magaji you Belong to has the proper right to declare your demise just or unjust, regardless of where you're extinguished. If the destroyer Belongs to another magaji, though, he may be untouchable until he leaves the domain where he Belongs. It can all get very complicated.

What does a magaji get out of this arrangement? First and foremost, a shred of allegiance. Even the smallest trace of loyalty fostered by this Tenet can be cultivated into something useful. Perhaps more important theoretically is that Laibon who Belong in a magaji's domain agree to accept her judgments in matters of conflicting Tenets. In practice, a magaji is rarely seriously questioned anyway, so this isn't really a factor. Finally, a magaji enjoys a certain logistical simplicity in knowing where his most loyal subjects are on any given night.

Usually, this Tenet requires a Laibon to inform the local magaji that she is leaving the domain, whether for a single night or forever. Strictly speaking, a magaji can forbid a Laibon who Belongs from leaving forever or require her to return, but the point is moot once the vampire has left of course.

I know of at least three cases in which a magaji has sent out enforcers to retrieve an absent Laibon who was ordered to return to the domain. The most extreme of these examples is from a small area in East Africa where a Xi Dundu magaji sent four Shango heavyweights all the way to Budapest with chains and a straightjacket. The popular version of this story ends with the Shango never coming back, but who can say what's true in such a case?

This is the Tenet I believe to be written by the Osebo, whose nature it seems to be to pick a home and defend it against all comers. I've met a good deal of Osebo magaji who consider this law just as important as the right of elder judgment. These are the sorts of creatures who make a ceremony out of introductions and requests for departure. There is a warlord (for lack of a better term) in the Congo who would ask you to bleed on his floor and serve him without question for one night if you wanted to Belong in his small domain. His reputation for brutality against enemies makes him a fine protector, but I'm not able to say if he's worth the potential price.

The Secret Must Be Kept

Only now do we get to the Tenet I hear Western vampires are so concerned about. During my nights in the Americas (before cameras, remember), the big secret didn't seem to be kept too well, though.

On this continent, the need to keep mortal folks in the dark about our existence is given its due weight, though our methods are sometimes different. We have more room to maneuver here, more margin for error. Evidence of the hunt isn't the subject of our worry. Instead, I've seen more Laibon of every generation fret about their ties to mortal society.

A great many more Laibon engage in regular, casual contact with mortals than would admit it. I'm sure that Laibon culture isn't enough for most of the undead. This is the greatest threat to our existence: that some mortal we depend on for some base or noble purpose will learn our secret. In practice, this is a Tenet most Laibon hold over themselves. Magaji may or may not intervene for small violations. The idea is that small violations are the result of trace mortal weaknesses and usually bring their own punishment in the form of destroyed relationships and personal anguish. Lesser violations sometimes solve themselves this way, such as a former lover simply leaving or falling silent rather than dealing with reality. At the very least, the repercussions of such violations can usually be contained through the abandonment or elimination

of the mortal who knows. I know several magaji who require the violating vampire to act as executioner in such cases, to exaggerate the punishment. Whoever learns the truth about us must die.

Greater violations demand the direct attention of local authorities, such as magaji and kholo. The first step in any such case is the containment of the problem. Violating Laibon are extinguished before they can make things worse, usually. Should your magaji learn of your serious violation, you should expect to be destroyed. There is no standardized means of solving the issue of large-scale exposure, though every story I've ever heard ends in a strict diminishing of evident supernatural activity. Any more active solution will just attract more attention, after all.

On the subject of organized resistance, I should say that many Laibon are confidently unafraid of mortals, perhaps overly so. For the most part, the occasional vampire-hunter is used to remind the other mortals that people who believe in vampires are crazy. The extreme character traits necessary to willingly seek out confrontations with supernatural predators do most of the work for us. Letting a few witch-hunters stalk the night actually makes it less likely that more hunters will follow in their footsteps. So, avoidance and secrecy, punctuated with short conflicts to keep them motivated, have been the best defenses against hunters. I imagine this will continue to be the case until technology tips the scales in one way or another.

Unlike European Kindred, the flock that feeds us has a more widespread belief in minor magics, which means the mortal population is more likely to make our excuses for us. We don't need to fear the most minor degrees of recognition in the populace. There are plenty of other real and imaginary dangers lurking in the dark for mortals to be afraid of. It's simply enough that we stay away from the top of the list.

No Secrets From the Magaji

The logical follow-up to the rule that allies all Laibon in secrecy is the one that forbids any conspiracy excluding the preeminent body. First, young Laibon are taught to lie and disguise themselves. Then they are taught never to turn those skills on their masters.

This is why, in some regions, this Tenet actually supersedes The Secret Must Be Kept. Since the Laibon do operate so successfully, since the secret is so well kept, many new bloodsuckers imagine that they can use these tricks on their betters. Therefore, many magaji believe that a Laibon should be obedient first and self-sufficient second. Should a Laibon be unable to keep his secrets, he could always be kept in the company of elders as muscle, I suppose.

Simply put, this Tenet forbids lying to magaji. Interpretations understandably vary. Lies of omission are always considered a breach of the Tenet, but most magaji accept that it is the responsibility of those in power to ask the right questions. This Tenet cannot require a free creature to volunteer information, but it doesn't afford any protection against self-incrimination, either. Presumably you could try to keep your mouth shut during questioning, but that would constitute a breach through omission. The Tenet doesn't forbid lying, remember. It forbids the withholding of information.

Of course there are exceptions to the idea of voluntary divulgence. One Shango magaji in Ethiopia expects accurate written reports from those Laibon in his domain and has some unknown method for authenticating the information he receives. Similarly, I know personally a brood of Kinyonyi investigators who work for several magaji in and around Nairobi collecting information to be used prior to interrogations. The idea is that the magaji never asks any question he doesn't already know the answer to.

As for the other end of the spectrum — breaking the spirit of this Tenet — I could introduce you to South African Laibon who have a magnificent disinformation campaign running against rich rural magaji. While they tell the whole truth, voluntarily without compulsion, they also report elaborate and detailed fiction as fact. The magaji, I'm told, wastes a good deal of time having these reports checked out. Many elders wouldn't fall for such a trick, of course, but enough undead leaders glean their news from younger, more energetic sources that I suspect some level of this behavior is going on in every corner of the continent.

Sires Command, Childer Inherit

Which legacy forefather had the wisdom and fairness to suggest this Tenet? I'm a believer that it was an Akunanse, of course, but it's hard to say. Some progenitor with a love for his offspring, certainly.

This Tenet defines the rights of each party in the relationship between sire and progeny. Strictly speaking, the progenitor is responsible for his creation until that creation is released as a free creature or accepted as Belonging somewhere. Creators enjoy a parent's authority over their offspring according to customary interpretations of this rule. As a result of complete obedience, any mistakes or transgressions made on the part of the offspring are paid for by the sire who should have been holding the leash. Just as often, sire and offspring are punished together. This is why, despite the thrill of having complete control over another being, sires are eventually happy to give up their childer and regain their own freedoms.

Childer are entitled to some inheritance from their sires, though interpretations vary by magaji. Some sires are required to present a physical gift of measurable worth to their offspring. Many domains consider the "inheritance of wisdom" sufficient to fulfill the demands of the Tenet. In more social collections of Laibon, the childe is forever considered the descendant of her sire and given a degree of respect by association.

In some parts of the continent, especially Westernized areas, a Laibon's estate is even divided over his young. This is notoriously difficult, though, considering the limited connections undead lineages may share in practice (having been raised centuries apart, perhaps). The fact that no Laibon meets Final Death "naturally" usually makes the execution of an estate a tense and suspicious affair. Consider, too, what happens when a 100-year-old Laibon and his 20-year-old blood sibling are expected to equally divide an elder's estate. There are many Tenets that grant the elder brother more authority and overshadow this one.

Different domains and legacies have their own means of determining when a Laibon is ready to depart. Naglopers, I hear, are seldom reared to any degree worth the mention. One railroad-traveling brood of Kinyonyi abandons its young without warning. Strangely, no hostility seems to stem from this practice. A Kinyonyi I know discovered his sire at a train station in Djibouti in the middle of the night, much to their mutual delight. An Osebo group in the Congo waits for the offspring to get up the courage to leave on his own, presumably with whatever "inheritance" the childe can manage.

While this Tenet has, arguably, the most permutations across the kingdom, it isn't weakened by its flexibility. Like The Secret Must Be Kept, this rule usually spans between two individual Laibon, rather than stemming down from the magaji on high. Note, of course, that a magaji must always know of a new Laibon's creation: No Secrets From the Magaji because The Eldest Command Undeath.

Critics claim this Tenet actually encompasses two guidelines. I agree. Not only should these two ideals be fused forever, for the sake of both parties, especially with so many illegitimate pairs of fangs loose tonight, but the language that links them seems smartly crafted for this purpose. Ironically, younger Laibon most often call for this Tenet to be split, with one half replacing The Eldest Command Undeath. Splitting these ideas would surely make them both weaker, and which half of the elder-offspring battle would suffer more from an additional weakness?

The Eldest Command Undeath

Regarded by many thin-blooded Laibon as a redundant social organ or heavy-handed reinforcement of other elder-favoring Tenets, The Eldest Command Undeath is regarded as the most abused Tenet. Elders handle it delicately. Young Laibon openly hate and fear it.

The Followers of Set sometimes get the blame for this Tenet, simply because of their associations with death. As I understand it, the assumption is that the Setites were willing to share command over the destruction of their brethren just so long as their kind was given a means of legal murder. This idea seems to me to be too spiteful to be true. Perhaps the real author of this Tenet no longer wishes the credit.

In the strictest domains of Africa, this Tenet grants the eldest Laibon complete control over the very unlives of their subjects. Only fanatical lunatics subscribe to such a doctrine and Belong in such a domain.

Commonly, this rule is said to give magaji the right to govern the legitimacy and circumstances of a Laibon's creation and Final Death. In practice this means a magaji may deny a Laibon's request to sire progeny, may validate or nullify existing but unauthorized progeny, call for investigations into a Laibon's murder or declare a Laibon's death to be acceptable under "the law." Truly, that is a great deal of authority.

Pedantic elders pick on the accepted language here, despite earlier decisions about translation. The Tenet does not expressly describe a single, all-powerful decision-maker, they say. Therefore, any Laibon may choose to create or destroy any Laibon younger than he so long as it is done within the scope of the other Tenets. Thin-blooded Laibon are none too happy with this interpretation, either.

The reasons this Tenet is given such low priority in so many domains are integral to the understanding of Laibon culture. This Tenet is considered a formality. It states an obvious fact as law, as though gravity were to be ratified. The eldest inherently possess the power to shape the destinies of their young, they have physical, intellectual and supernatural potency outside the scope of any screeching whelp. Any rule attempt to override this fact would be completely artificial and impossible to enforce.

I imagine that as more new Laibon slip between the gaps in the Tenets and are created despite this rule we will see this idea tested.

Travelers Obey The Tenets

To my surprise, the Ishtarri are not only given credit for this Tenet, but they seem to accept it. This is odd because the rule is an extension of the traditional Laibon sentiment that foreign undead aren't welcome in Africa. In a way, this Tenet closed the era of accepted undead emigration to Africa.

On that famous night when the Tenets were offered to and accepted by the Guruhi, the assembly of vampires informally agreed that no more legacies would be given official positions in the social hierarchy. Yes, a fair number of undead groups, clans and families have since drifted in from Europe, the United States and Asia. These groups have little united power. Whatever power a

foreign "Kindred" gains in a Laibon domain is individual and based on specific personal successes that are considered exceptions to his damnable origin.

Therein lies the real purpose of this Tenet, I think. While it serves to support the idea that these Tenets are the true law of the land, rather than a code adopted by subscribing members, it also serves to include the Ishtarri in an indisputable way. The Ishtarri are a part of the Tenets, and so part of the realm. To understand the real circumstance, you have to know that this is the only Tenet I know of to have its language formally changed. The original rule named visitors instead of travelers, and so in effect defined all bloodlines other than the original nine as outsiders. This also defines the Ishtarri as insiders.

The change of language is universally accepted, as near as I can tell. An especially old ghoul archivist in Addis Ababa tells me that visitor and traveler are tantamount in the original language, though he could not tell me what language that was. The point is that the local Laibon were concerned that Kindred emigrating to Africa with the intention of staying would attempt to circumvent the spirit of the Tenet through the language. So, the Tenet was changed. In a way, this makes the Tenet overlap with the rule of Belonging, but in practice, the difference is clear enough.

Magaji use this Tenet to compel Laibon visiting their domains to follow local interpretations of the Tenets. The alternative, which has been attempted, believe me, is that a Laibon is required to follow only the mandates of the magaji whose domain she Belongs in. This goes against the spirit of the Belonging clause, too, of course, by suggesting a means of popular order. Notice that this Tenet also puts more focus on the borders of any given domain. Moving from the territory of one magaji into another's can be a big deal if they do not see the Tenets in the same ways. It's like moving from one worldview into another.

If you learn nothing else from this Tenet, learn that few magaji agree on what exactly the Tenets mean.

The Eldest Are Kholo

Finally, we reach the Kinyonyi Tenet. Every magaji I know of ranks this Tenet last in his domain because the concept it supports is considered fundamental by every Laibon in power. Of course the eldest Laibon are the kholo; that's what the kholo signifies. In the broadest sense, that's true. This Tenet is designed, I think, to create an institutionalized standard that can be exploited later.

The mercenary existence of so many Kinyonyi results in a great many of their kind not Belonging to any domain in particular. The majority of magaji allow this because of the valuable niche such mercenaries fill without shaking up the normal order as they might otherwise. Couple this accepted national mobility with the rule made law by this Tenet, and you can see what sort of power your ancestors gave to the Kinyonyi, whether they knew it at the time or not.

This Tenet grants the Kinyonyi a social mobility that is available to no other Laibon. With the support of this rule, a Kinyonyi elder may arrive in a domain and demand to be recognized and respected as the Kinyonyi kholo of the region. Once her work is done, such a Kinyonyi can then easily remove herself from the domain and move to some other region where her age can be put to some other, possibly contrary, use.

Consider the language. Not only is Belonging not mandatory (because the Tenet doesn't say it is), but this Tenet specifically does not say a Laibon needs to Belong in order to be considered kholo. An argument can also be made that by refusing to apply this Tenet to a visiting Kinyonyi, the magaji is in violation of the Tenets, since Travelers Obey the Tenets can be interpreted to mean that the Tenets apply to travelers. This Tenet is positioned rather ambiguously, I believe, as a formal quantifier of the exceptional Kinyonyi role in the Laibon social order.

Stories about this Tenet's origin do not agree. In Lusaka I was informed, quite formally in front of an offended magaji, that this Tenet exemplifies the Kinyonyi role as grub-favors and whores. Supposedly the Kinyonyi ancestor sold his say in the Tenets, so this one actually comes from some other legacy. The Kinyonyi, of course, do not strategize within the Laibon political structure this way. I prefer the Kinyonyi version of this story, though, which tells us that the Kinyonyi offered to let every other legacy go before them so that he could write a Tenet which would secure his legacy's flexible position in the rigid hierarchy of undead. This not only implies that the Kinyonyi can strategize as well as their warrior image suggests, but it reinforces the idea that Kinyonyi are concerned solely with their own kind.

Practically speaking, this Tenet doesn't seem to be invoked very often. I suspect this is to keep it at the bottom of the list, to maintain its non-threatening position. Otherwise, this would be a difficult Tenet to make use of in the Kinyonyi way. It's a wonderful way. A Kinyonyi collector explained a little bit about the process to me at a truckstop in Windhock. As I understand it, certain circles of Kinyonyi cultivate carefully designed relationships with certain magaji so that the Laibon in these circles can move in and out of different kholo seats in whatever manner suits their agendas. It's thoughtfully but loosely orchestrated, of that I'm sure. Otherwise, the process seems designed to spread power out over more Kinyonyi than there are open kholo positions in the subject domains. Theoretically, more power for more Kinyonyi means more power for the legacy overall.

The reason this practice isn't immediately quashed by magaji is because it doesn't win any benefits that are not actively given up by gullible magaji. First, no magaji is actually required to listen to (or follow) the advice of his kholo. Second, since the Kinyonyi who actively participate in these tricks work together, their agendas are usually similar enough that their advice is consistent. Third, most magaji believe that the purpose of the process is to give the Kinyonyi legacy a say in Laibon society without requiring them to anchor themselves to a single seat in a single domain. Many magaji don't pay enough attention to the advice of their kholo to ruminate over which Kinyonyi is offering it anyway.

Do not mistake this Tenet's flexibility for an opportunity. The real reason it sits at the bottom of some many lists is because it applies mainly to a single legacy. I don't know of any non-Kinyonyi Laibon who has moved into someone's territory and taken over as kholo without also asking to Belong there. Here's why: A kholo who doesn't Belong can be extinguished without any mandatory investigation afterward because The Eldest Command Undeath. Without an angry magaji as consequence, there's little reason not to do away with one's competition.

A Thousand Titles

Outside of the social structure described in the Tenets, the magaji may create whatever titles, positions or offices he sees fit. He may invent some method of categorizing the Laibon within his influence, or he may demand special behavior or forms of address at formal events. The magaji may or may not hold organized meetings of any kind; there is no standard method here.

Most positions created by a magaji are meant as honorable recognition for a Laibon's successes, assistance or skills. Several domains I know have a chronicler or secretary. More than not, in my experience, have formal offices for finances and special relationships with bodyguards. A few domains have veritable militias of Osebo or Shango enforcers. Spies are not as common in rural areas as they are in the cities, but they're not unheard of. To my surprise, many spies have fancy titles associated with them and are well known in the foreign lands where they operate. This formalized espionage is usually knowingly, quietly reciprocated between domains.

Very many titles mean nothing. I have been given more than one special address across the kingdom, and I pay no attention to any of them. Falhu's domain in Ethiopia has a court storyteller. Cesewayo, a magaji in Central Africa, keeps an Ishtarri on his payroll to sketch gorillas for him. In Guinea and Senegal I've met Ministers of Jewelry. A magaji in Cameroon appointed a fledgling to the charity position of Birdkeeper. These are cosmetic positions, sometimes ridiculous ones, designed to flatter, compel or reward.

Aside from all of these, there are sometimes less obvious offices. Minister of Portents, for example, or Investigator. I find those positions that are kept in secret to be the most fascinating. I've traveled with a Kinyonyi whose job it is to throw off mortal investigations that threaten to uncover the Secret That Must Be Kept. She holds this title in domains from Eritrea to Tanzania, which is especially odd.

Few magaji care enough to honor another magaji's charity title, at least of the magaji that I know. Magaji don't like to accept another magaji's judgments or assignations. It's a waste of the magaji's power, a surrender of authority. Worse, it motivates Laibon migration and erodes the power structure altogether.

War of Ages

Endurance is the measure of a Laibon's worth. Survival is the ultimate goal of all creatures, and the undead have been given the fantastic might necessary to survive for eternity. As the essential factor of Laibon existence is deathlessness, age becomes the definition of power.

Experience shows that stability leads to survival. Solid, tested routines and entrenched, proven traditions are the surest ways to protect one's unlife. There is no better method forthcoming. The changing world is a distraction. Change means risk, and the power that can be gained through eternity isn't worth the risk.

Those Laibon who do not change and do not take risks grow stagnant, immobile and impotent. These are the Laibon who grow old. Thus, these are the Laibon who claim the continent as their domain. This is the conflict I've seen everywhere, the struggle of a staggering horde of new, thin-blooded vampires to shake up the ancient system they say is crushing them. This is the same conflict rural magaji tell me isn't going on, the same war the elders seem not to notice.

The youngest Laibon can seldom have their arguments heard by their elders because a thin-blood is hardly considered a Laibon. I've heard compelling, scary arguments from some of these childer, perceptive and informed thoughts on the direction Laibon society is headed. An Ishtarri in Johannesburg described it to me this way: "The future of Laibon society looks something like a fiery locomotive and monorail train wreck." I'm not convinced he's wrong, but for every one of these cautionary reformists, a dozen headless anarchists shake their fists at the ancient ways.

Age

The modern argument that each successive generation of Laibon is a collection of dead minds frozen in a different period of time is not totally flawed. As mortals, every would-be Laibon is influenced by his era or his environment. At best, this means that Laibon as a whole,

if such a thing can be entertained, move forward not just in stages but also very slowly. Childer would have you believe that this is the problem with Guruhi dominance, that another generation is always needed to drive progress. I tend to agree a bit with the Guruhi system, however. Generational progress moves in only one direction — away from Cagn. The strongest Laibon have already been created, and there is little benefit to be gained by giving power to the weaker young. I also believe that power can be usurped, and that success indicates strength. In this way, the younger generations serve to create a herd from which leaders can be singled out. They are the standard, against which exceptions can be plainly seen.

A society must develop, after all, mustn't it? It should grow and expand organically. Here, too, lies an error. A society exists as a living, organic thing. A Laibon does not. The Guruhi understand what it means to be eternal. It means you must secure your fate early on and then enjoy it. If you picture the social hierarchy as a massive pyramid crushing the youngest Laibon beneath it, then you are buying into propaganda. In truth, the young scurry about like bugs on the surface of the social order. They have numbers, feckless strength and a strange beauty, like insects. Around them tower true beasts. The predators and other feeders: the lions, hyenas, constrictors and vultures. Dangerous, powerful and dependent on the ground they prowl. They eat only what the earth gives up to feed the middle creatures, the mortals. The Guruhi are the Earth. They are underneath everything, they are the foundation on which all Laibon order is possible. The most impressive thing is that this relationship is by design.

Secure your fate in the beginning, and you will have eternity to watch it unfold. What do the Guruhi need with progress? What does Western money have to offer them? What do they need of advanced medicines or crude oil or diamonds? What do they care which mortal leads or subjugates the rest in this decade? I cannot say. Some Guruhi may care, but we are unlikely to know why. Many of us would not understand if we were to be told, I think.

A Laibon I know in Djibouti has five or six thin-blooded thralls whom she keeps in her employ for blood refining. She sends them out to drink, then drinks from them when they return. Occasionally she'll drink one to dust. By her logic, the blood she gets from them is empowered by its time in a Laibon body, even a weak one. I don't know if that's the case, but I do know that she never risks her own existence going out to feed.

So why do these collectors cooperate? Because there are no other Laibon around them for miles. They have been taught that this is the way things are.

Youth

In any flimsy mortal society, power must be passed down as even the most perfect leaders age and die. Not so for us. The leaders become more and more powerful as time goes on because the populations under their sway only expand.

Expansion is the problem. The Laibon 14th generations from Cagn are considered cheap to "produce" and easy to throw away. Many are not considered worth the effort of a tribunal, so they are told to obey the Tenets but are treated to none of the benefits of allegiance. They are hardly thought of as members of Laibon society in many cases.

Young Laibon must persevere in a violent world where their unlives are worth nothing to their stagnant masters. They have no place in Laibon society and no indication that they will achieve one in the future unless seats are vacated through 10 generations worth of extinguished elders. Young Laibon receive the message that they must play by the rules to earn their place in Laibon society. Then they're told their place has already been taken.

If these newest Laibon are to gain anything from their unlives, they must carve themselves a space in the world. If they may not claim the eternity that belongs to them through their connection to Cagn, then they have no reason not to risk their unlives in the pursuit of progress. They must explode or be smothered.

In practice, of course, very little outright violence goes on. Most modern childer have never seen the magaji of their domain since most modern childer dwell in territories choking with undead overpopulation. Some childer play by the rules long enough to reach a point where they can be heard. Others engineer confrontations that will attract attention to their skills and value, but the best of those demonstrations make it only into the peripheral vision of Laibon centuries older than them.

So most childer either exist on the rim of Laibon culture, working as errand boys or simple muscle for their sires. Even more have few working ties to their elders at all. This is the great fog of useless young that drifts through discos and cineplexes, spilling blood and tripping into the sunlight. A victory for these creatures is in the blood of drug-addicts.

The nightly practices of thin-bloods are variable, low-scale and totally new to Laibon culture. Not only do I know many Laibon who haven't seen moving pictures, I would say the larger half of those are magaji. So there is a revolution going in Laibon society, starting in the lowest, simplest souls, but I don't think it's the revolution anyone is asking for. What's more, so many Laibon on both sides of the issue don't seem to see or appreciate it.



Modern Laibon are becoming involved in an age of changes that their sires aren't even aware of yet. What could be more dangerous to the elders than a massive, invisible cultural change in the population?

Fractured Domains

The curious nature of power in the Ebony Kingdom makes for more than a little confusion among the Laibon who dwell within it. While the Ebony Kingdom itself consists (tonight, at least) of 11 lesser kingdoms, each belonging to a Guruhi lord, those kingdoms are divided into smaller domains, which are the responsibilities of the magaji.

Little can be said regarding the kingdoms themselves, for their Guruhi masters are secretive and withdrawn. A Laibon who makes his home in one Guruhi's kingdom might never see that Guruhi during his entire unlife — or the kingdom may change hands in one of the power plays that characterize the Guruhi's way of doing things. This Guruhi lord almost certainly wouldn't step in to "right a wrong" committed by a magaji, especially if it affects only one Laibon. After all, the other Laibon are guests in the Guruhi's domain, and their magaji are the caretakers of those domains.

Of course, a magaji might arouse a Guruhi king's ire and find himself banished, declared a traitor to the kingdom or hunted by the Guruhi's agents. But then again, if one magaji finds himself on poor terms with his Guruhi lord, well, another Guruhi might see him as just the sort of Laibon he would want to handle domains in *his* kingdom and entice the magaji to join him instead.

As might be expected, all sorts of permutations of this situation occur constantly. A domain needn't be a city; it might be a stretch of land or a collection of smaller communities the Guruhi king entrusts to one magaji. Such delineations aren't necessarily clear, however, as the Guruhi rarely bother to make proclamations to the Laibon in those kingdoms about who's in charge where. As such, a certain domain might not obviously belong to a certain magaji, and a Laibon who acts in accordance to how he believes he should behave in one domain might be grievously breaching the etiquette in the one where he actually is. The Guruhi might not have told another of his magaji that his domain includes a certain area, leaving the magaji to handle affairs without his knowledge that he's supposed to be handling them. One domain might overlap with another, if the Guruhi lord has forgotten where one domain ends and the next begins, leaving different (and often opposing) magaji to deal with affairs in the same region. Indeed, some Guruhi might do this intentionally to cull weak magaji from their ranks without being seen as the active force encouraging their conflict.

Domains need not splinter only on the level of the kingdom, either. The Ebony Kingdom is divided into hundreds, if not thousands of smaller domains. Some of

these are so sparsely populated by Laibon as to be academic at best (if a domain of one, you're the authority figure, obviously), but others rival the Kindred populations of the greatest Western cities. In these great population centers, or even in the smaller ones, a magaji may well claim the domain without the knowledge or approval of the kingdom's Guruhi patron. The title of magaji cannot truly be usurped, as it is bestowed by a lord, but the thousands of pretenders to the position have demonstrated over the years that such a situation might simply be a semantic matter in certain cases. Add to that the fact that the Guruhi kings are often old, distracted or otherwise concerned. If their kingdoms don't have any turbulent issues in them, well, it doesn't truly matter to them *who* is magaji, whether it's the Laibon they put there or someone else with the sense of duty to get the job done. A domain might have two (or more!) magaji — the rightful one and the would-be claimant, no rightful magaji and two feuding aspirants, or any other outlandish condition that might arise. Rest assured, if you can imagine it, someone else has already and has put it to the test in one of the kingdoms somewhere.

Such chaos on the local level can also make for truly uncommon situations in the domains as well. A domain with no magaji — due to the original being stripped of title, fleeing the responsibility, "attrition" or whatever — may never have another magaji appointed if the Guruhi master is too busy (or forgetful). A domain might truly be lawless. On the other hand, the kholo may take it upon themselves to deal with the domain's affairs in the interim, or they might have actively ousted the magaji to begin with.

Africa doesn't truly have "anarchs," as it assumes that most of the Laibon in the domains want to change something about the Guruhi's kingdom. As such, the kings attribute a general level of discontent to all of the Laibon in their domains — that's why they need the magaji.

All of this makes for a liquid political environment, of course, and also encourages Laibon who would be forever locked out of the official system by a lack of Guruhi favor to gather "shadow power." Enterprising Laibon may support mortal political movements, taking their strength not from the seal of Guruhi approval, but from real-world power gathered from the strength of the mortals upon whom they build their power base. They may do the same with cults or religious movements, terrorist organizations or juntas. They may be warlords themselves or even attain some degree of fame and power among those mortals — after all, when a dictator must defend his life at any cost, those habits are going to necessitate and even breed some eccentricity. When the new coup is led by a man who moves only at night, it's unlikely that the first thought to cross others' minds will be that he's a Laibon. Rather, they may assume that he moves only at night to better hide himself from his enemies. Even so, the Ebony Kingdom, and even mortal Africa is so steeped in acceptance of magic and the supernatural that it might not even cause some people to think twice if rumor ascribes supernatural methods or origins to a visible figure.

Since most Laibon never see their Guruhi kings, how are they to know that such kings even exist? It's possible that all of the infrastructure in place is simply the relic of a dead regime. The Guruhi kings may have all died or gone to torpor. They may have killed each other, with tonight's supposed 11 kingdoms claimed in actuality by a lesser number of kings. Certain Laibon may know this for fact, which explains the self-appointed magaji to some degree, but what proof could any Laibon possibly have when dealing with creatures as reputedly potent and venerable as the kings?

The upshot is that the Ebony Kingdom plays host to thousands of opportunities. Whether they're legitimate in the eyes of others or the actions of Laibon gone rogue doesn't really matter in the end. What matters to most Laibon is the here and now, and if the local magaji is powerless against the Xi Dundu raiders, those raiders are going to have more political sway than the rightful authority. Then again, that's no guarantee that the local Laibon want those Xi Dundu there. They may stage their own coup, ousting the raiders and the ineffectual magaji in one fell swoop and installing their own new leader — who then serves at their whim unless she can establish herself independently. Such is the vicious cycle of power and the shattered domains of the Ebony Kingdom.

Stories

Stories in the Ebony Kingdom are as numerous as the grains of sand in the Sahara. The Laibon, the vampires of Africa, understand that stories, like the desert sands, provide a poor foundation for structures or relationships intended to last. Unreliable and ever-changing, they shift beneath your feet when least expected. Tempered with water and heat — and, perhaps, a little blood — tales can be employed in the creation of something lasting. Of themselves, though, they should be approached with suspicion.

The Laibon enjoy stories, but they offer them with the understanding that their audience will not, and should not, accept them blindly. In fact, the most experienced tale-weavers among the Ebony Kingdom's undead preface their recitations with an opening used by their mortal counterparts among the Ashanti: "We do not really mean, we do not really mean, that what we are going to say is true."

A story's failure to be "true" — that is, precise with the facts, a perfect mirror of events or people — does not limit its ability to convey truth as a principle, however. A tale's theme and the lesson it imparts can be vitally important, even if the trappings prove fictional. This would seem obvious, but by foregrounding the fracture between fiction and reality, the storyteller signals the listener that the tale's lessons require effort.

Calling attention to the rift also shields the teller from an audience's potential wrath by dismissing the content as created, much in the same way the phrase "any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental" on a novel's copyright page protects a modern author from legal dangers. Why this remains important becomes obvious to any Laibon who considers the consequences of offending a hot-tempered fellow or elder.

Among many African peoples, Laibon included, storytelling rates as an almost magical act. In addition to its function as entertainment, tale spinning provides a way to conjure the past, to convey lessons, and, most important of all, to demonstrate respect to those who have gone before. This last might explain why certain stories are rarely if ever told by mortals in the daytime. You are far more likely to encounter an ancestor (or any other supernatural entity) at night, and if the purpose of your story is to show respect to them, you need to tell it when they're going to be around. So the most experienced of mortal tale spinners assume that they speak to two audiences when they practice their art, one within the glow of the campfire or the porch light, the other in the darkness beyond.

Stories across the continent share two major traits. They tend to further a cynical, rather than romantic, vision of the world. Love fails, men lose their dreams, heroes stumble and fall. The stories also play out on a stage largely confined to the Earth. The gods begin their existence among men and move heavenward, rather than originating above and descending to meddle with the lesser creatures below. As you might expect, stories traded by the Laibon are even more cynical than those traded by their mortal neighbors. But this is a difference in degree, not kind. In the Ebony Kingdom, the folktales and myths of the Embraced tend to be much more like those of their mortal counterparts than anywhere else in the world.

Such is certainly the case with the most common version of the Laibon creation myth, which shares common elements with folktales told by the Bushmen, the Ashanti and the Bakongo.



How Cagn Earned the Wrath of the Lion and the Sun

WE DO NOT REALLY MEAN. WE DO NOT REALLY MEAN. THAT WHAT WE ARE GOING TO SAY IS TRUE.

A WOMAN OF THE EARLY RACE GAVE BIRTH TO TWO SONS AFTER A LONG LABOR. THE FIRST SHE NAMED CAGN. THE OTHER NAKATI. BOTH SONS WERE BORN IN POSSESSION OF A VALUABLE FETISH. AND BECAUSE OF THIS, THEY WERE FULL-GROWN FROM THE MOMENT THEY ENTERED THE WORLD. CAGN, BEING THE ELDER, IMMEDIATELY ANNOUNCED HIS DESIRE TO UNDERTAKE A LONG JOURNEY. ALTHOUGH HIS MOTHER AND BROTHER OBJECTED, FEARFUL AS THEY WERE FOR HIS SAFETY, CAGN WOULD BROOK NO ARGUMENT AND QUICKLY DEPARTED.

AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, THE DAUGHTER OF THE SUN HAD REACHED THE AGE TO MARRY. THE GIRL, DASSE BY NAME, WAS PRETTY AND WISE. AND NO SOONER HAD SHE ANNOUNCED HER INTEREST IN FINDING A HUSBAND THAN LEOPARD CAME FORWARD. "I WILL BE HUSBAND TO YOUR DAUGHTER," LEOPARD ANNOUNCED TO THE SUN. AND THE SUN REPLIED, "YOU MUST SPEAK TO HER YOURSELF, FOR SHE WILL MARRY ONLY THE MAN OF HER CHOICE." LEOPARD DID SO. BUT DASSE REFUSED HIM. THEN ELAND AND BLUE JAY AND TORTOISE AND ALL THE OTHER CREATED THINGS THAT HAD BREATH CAME FORWARD AND ASKED DASSE TO MARRY. BUT DASSE TURNED THEM ALL DOWN, TELLING EACH ONE IN TURN THAT SHE CARED FOR HIM, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO BE HIS WIFE.

MEANWHILE, CAGN HAD TRAVELED A LONG WAY DOWN THE ROAD THAT LED FROM HIS MOTHER'S VILLAGE. AS HE WALKED, HE USED HIS FETISH TO CREATE THE THINGS HE NEEDED FOR HIS JOURNEY. HE PICKED A BLADE OF GRASS AND WITH THE FETISH TRANSFORMED IT INTO A SPEAR. HE PICKED A SECOND BLADE OF GRASS AND TRANSFORMED IT INTO A CLOAK. HE PICKED A THIRD BLADE OF GRASS AND TRANSFORMED IT INTO A KNIFE, AND SO ON, UNTIL HE HAD EVERYTHING HE NEEDED TO SURVIVE.

AFTER MANY DAYS OF TRAVEL, CAGN CAME TO THE SUN'S TOWN. HE WAS THERE NOT AN HOUR BEFORE DASSE SAW HIM FROM AFAR, AND AS SOON AS SHE SET EYES UPON HIM, SHE FELL IN LOVE. SHE RAN THEN TO HER FATHER THE SUN AND SAID, "I HAVE SEEN THE MAN I AM MEANT TO MARRY. I SHALL DIE OF SADNESS IF WE ARE NOT TOGETHER."

THEN CAGN, WHO HAD LEARNED OF DASSE'S BEAUTY AND WISDOM FROM ALL THE DEJECTED SUITORS, SOUGHT OUT THE SUN AND SAID TO HIM, "I WILL BE HUSBAND TO YOUR DAUGHTER," AND JUST AS HE HAD WITH LEOPARD AND ELAND AND THE REST, THE SUN TOLD CAGN, "YOU MUST SPEAK TO HER YOURSELF, FOR SHE WILL ONLY MARRY THE MAN OF HER CHOICE."

WHEN DASSE SAW CAGN COMING TO SPEAK WITH HER SHE RAN TOWARD HIM. SEEING DASSE'S BEAUTY AND THE LIGHT OF WISDOM IN HER EYES, CAGN RAN TOWARD HER. THEY KNEW THAT THEY LOVED ONE ANOTHER WITHOUT NEEDING TO SAY A WORD. IMMEDIATELY THEY EMBRACED AND WERE MARRIED SOON AFTER.

AS THE ENTIRE TOWN DANCED AND CELEBRATED, CAGN AND THE DAUGHTER OF THE SUN ENTERED THE LARGEST HUT AND SLEPT THERE. WHEN HE AWOKE, CAGN NOTICED FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT MIRRORS CROWDED THE HUT. TEN OF THEM LINED THE WALLS, EACH ONE COVERED WITH A HEAVY PIECE OF WHITE CLOTH. AND HE ASKED DASSE TO REMOVE THE CLOTH, SO THAT HE MIGHT SEE HIMSELF. SHE UNCOVERED THE FIRST, STEPPING ASIDE WITHOUT A WORD TO LET CAGN GAZE INTO THE GLASS. BUT WHEN CAGN LOOKED INTO IT, HE DID NOT SEE HIS REFLECTION. INSTEAD HE SAW A PERFECT, VIVID IMAGE OF HIS MOTHER'S VILLAGE. THEN THE DAUGHTER OF THE SUN UNCOVERED ALL THE MIRRORS BUT ONE, AND WHEN CAGN LOOKED INTO EACH HE SAW A DIFFERENT VILLAGE OR TOWN. SOME WERE FAMILIAR TO HIM FROM HIS TRAVELS, OTHERS WERE NOT. "EACH OF YOUR SONS WILL RULE OVER ONE OF THESE NINE PLACES," DASSE EXPLAINED.

CAGN STOOD BEFORE THE TENTH MIRROR. STILL COVERED BY ITS WHITE CLOTH. "AND WHAT DOES THIS SHOW?" HE ASKED.

"THE PLACE THAT ALL MEN KNOW, BUT FROM WHICH NONE EVER RETURNS." SAID THE DAUGHTER OF THE SUN, TREMBLING WITH FRIGHT. "I CANNOT LET YOU SEE IT, FOR YOU WILL WANT TO GO THERE."

CAGN URGED HER TO LET HIM VIEW THE IMAGE IN THE FINAL MIRROR, AND AT LAST SHE BOWED HER HEAD AND DREW ASIDE THE CLOTH. CAGN DID NOT TREMBLE AT THE SIGHT OF THE IMAGE. INSTEAD, HE STARED IN WONDER. THEN HE PUFFED OUT HIS CHEST. "I KNOW THIS PLACE," HE SAID. "I WILL PROVE THAT A MAN MAY JOURNEY THERE AND RETURN. I AM BOLD AND QUICK-WITTED. BESIDES, MY FETISH WILL PROTECT ME."

ALTHOUGH HIS WIFE OBJECTED, FEARFUL AS SHE WAS FOR HIS SAFETY, CAGN WOULD BROOK NO ARGUMENT AND QUICKLY DEPARTED.

HE TRAVELED FOR DAYS UPON END, UNTIL HE CAME AT LAST TO THE PLACE THAT HE HAD SEEN IN THE FINAL MIRROR. AT THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY STOOD A MAGNIFICENTLY CLEAR WATERING HOLE, AND NO ONE COULD PASS IT WITHOUT PAUSING TO DRINK. AND AS CAGN DID SO, FOR HIS JOURNEY HAD BEEN LONG AND DIFFICULT, LION SPRANG FROM THE BRUSH AT THE POOL'S EDGE. HE POUNCED UPON CAGN AND LOCKED HIS JAWS AROUND HIM, JUST AS HE DID WITH EVERY TRAVELER WHO STOPPED TO DRINK AT THE WATERING HOLE.

CAGN REACHED FOR HIS FETISH, BUT FAILED TO GRASP IT. HE REACHED FOR HIS SPEAR AND HIS KNIFE, BUT FAILED TO GRASP THEM, TOO. AND EACH TIME THE MAN STRUGGLED, LION CLAMPED HIS JAWS CLOSED MORE TIGHTLY, UNTIL FINALLY HE TORE CAGN APART. THEN LION SETTLED DOWN AT THE WATER'S EDGE TO FEAST UPON HIS PRIZE, UNTIL NOTHING BUT BONES WERE LEFT.

NOW NAKATI WONDERED AT THE LONG ABSENCE OF HIS BROTHER. HE ANNOUNCED TO HIS MOTHER HIS INTENTION TO TAKE A LONG JOURNEY TO FIND CAGN, AND THOUGH SHE WAS SAD, SHE RECOGNIZED THE REASON HE MUST LEAVE. SO IT WAS WITH HIS MOTHER'S BLESSING THAT NAKATI LEFT THE VILLAGE. AS HE MADE HIS WAY DOWN THE ROAD, HE USED HIS FETISH TO CREATE THE THINGS HE NEEDED FOR HIS JOURNEY. NAKATI PICKED A BLADE OF GRASS AND WITH HIS FETISH TRANSFORMED IT INTO A SPEAR. HE PICKED A SECOND BLADE OF GRASS AND TRANSFORMED IT INTO A CLOAK. HE PICKED A THIRD BLADE OF GRASS AND TRANSFORMED IT INTO A KNIFE, AND SO ON, UNTIL HE HAD EVERYTHING HE NEEDED TO SURVIVE.



AFTER MANY DAYS OF TRAVEL, NAKATI CAME TO THE SUN'S TOWN. HE WAS THERE NOT AN HOUR BEFORE DASSE SAW HIM FROM AFAR, AND AS SOON AS SHE SET EYES UPON HIM, SHE RUSHED FORWARD TO EMBRACE HIM. "CAGN," SHE CRIED. "MY DEAR HUSBAND! YOU HAVE RETURNED!"

NAKATI GREETED HIS SISTER-IN-LAW RESPECTFULLY, BUT WOULD NOT EMBRACE HER. "I AM NOT CAGN. I AM HIS BROTHER."

THEN THE SUN HEARD THAT SOMEONE HAD COME TO HIS TOWN. WHEN HE SAW NAKATI HE RUSHED FORWARD TO EMBRACE HIM. "CAGN," HE CRIED. "MY DEAR SON-IN-LAW! YOU HAVE RETURNED!"

NAKATI GREETED THE SUN RESPECTFULLY, BUT NOTED, "I AM NOT CAGN. I AM HIS BROTHER."

THE SUN AND HIS DAUGHTER DID NOT SEEM TO HEAR HIS WORDS, SO GREAT WAS THEIR JOY AT THE RETURN OF ONE THEY THOUGHT LOST TO THEM FOREVER. AS THE ENTIRE TOWN DANCED AND CELEBRATED, NAKATI AND DASSE WERE LED TO THE LARGEST HUT. DASSE AGAIN TRIED TO EMBRACE NAKATI, AND AGAIN HE REFUSED. THE SITUATION TROUBLED NAKATI GREATLY, FOR HE DID NOT WISH TO DISHONOR HIS BROTHER AND YET HE COULD NOT MAKE DASSE SEE THAT HE WAS NOT HER HUSBAND. FINALLY, HE CALLED UPON HIS FETISH. USING THE POWER OF THE VALUABLE CHARM, HE MOVED THE SLEEPING DASSE TO ANOTHER ROOM FOR THE NIGHT SO THAT NO SHAME WOULD FALL UPON THEM WHEN THE TRUTH OF HIS IDENTITY WAS FINALLY KNOWN.

WHEN HE WOKE, NAKATI NOTICED FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT MIRRORS CROWDED THE HUT. TEN OF THEM STILL LINED THE WALLS, EACH ONE AGAIN COVERED WITH A HEAVY PIECE OF WHITE CLOTH. AS SHE HAD WITH CAGN, DASSE REVEALED ALL OF THE MIRRORS, SAVE ONE. WHEN NAKATI LOOKED INTO THE GLASS OF THE FIRST NINE, HE SAW NOTHING Ż NO TOWNS AND NO VILLAGES. BUT WHEN HE FINALLY PERSUADED DASSE TO DRAW ASIDE THE CLOTH ON THE TENTH MIRROR, NAKATI SAW THE PLACE THAT ALL MEN KNOW, BUT FROM WHICH NONE EVER RETURNS.

TREMBLING AT THE SIGHT, NAKATI SAID, "I DO NOT WISH TO GO THERE, BUT I WILL MAKE THE JOURNEY. MY BROTHER MUST BE TRAPPED IN THAT TERRIBLE PLACE. I WILL NOT LEAVE HIM TO HIS FATE."

HE TRAVELED FOR DAYS UPON END, UNTIL HE CAME AT LAST TO THE PLACE THAT HE HAD SEEN IN THE FINAL MIRROR HE SAW, TOO, THE MAGNIFICENTLY CLEAR WATERING HOLE AND, AS ALL TRAVELERS MUST, HE PAUSED TO DRINK. THEN LION POUNCED UPON NAKATI AND LOCKED HIS JAWS AROUND HIM.

BUT NAKATI DID NOT REACH FOR HIS FETISH. HE DID NOT REACH FOR HIS SPEAR OR HIS KNIFE. HE DID NOT STRUGGLE AT ALL AGAINST THE IMPLACABLE JAWS OF LION. AND LION MISTOOK THE STILL FIGURE IN HIS MOUTH FOR SOMETHING ALREADY DEAD AND NOT WORTH EATING AT ALL. SO HE CARRIED NAKATI AROUND THE WATERING HOLE AND LEFT HIM ON THE OTHER SIDE, AMONG THE BONES OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN FOOLISH ENOUGH TO THINK THEY COULD ESCAPE LION BY FORCE ONCE HE HAD HIS TEETH ON THEM.

NAKATI LAY STILL, WAITING FOR LION TO LEAVE. WHEN LION HAD DISAPPEARED BACK INTO THE BRUSH AT THE POOL'S EDGE, HE ROSE UP AND BEGAN TO SEARCH THE BONES. HE SOON FOUND CAGN'S FETISH AMONG THE REMAINS OF A MAN, A THANKFUL SMILE ON HIS FACE. NAKATI TOUCHED HIS OWN FETISH TO CAGN'S, AND THE COMBINED POWER OF THE TWO VALUABLE CHARMS BROUGHT CAGN BACK TO LIFE.

NAKATI GAVE HIS BROTHER HIS CLOAK AND HALF OF ALL HE POSSESSED. THEN HE SAID, "WE MUST HURRY. THE EMPTINESS IN HIS BELLY WILL WARN LION THAT I HAVE RETURNED THE FLESH TO YOUR BONES."

CAGN WOULD BROOK NO ARGUMENT AND HE WOULD NOT BE HURRIED. "I THANK YOU, BROTHER, FOR RESCUING ME, BUT I WILL NOT LEAVE THIS PLACE WITHOUT SOMETHING TO SHOW FOR MY TROUBLES."

NO ARGUMENT WOULD SWAY CAGN FROM HIS COURSE, AND SO HE TOOK UP BOTH FETISHES AND TOUCHED THEM TO THE BONES OF THE NINE MEN WHO HAD LAIN AROUND HIM. ONE BY ONE, THE FLESH RETURNED TO THEIR BONES AND THEY ROSE UP. ONLY THEN, AFTER THE NINE RETAINERS HAD SWORN THEMSELVES TO BE AS SONS TO CAGN, DID THE TWO BROTHERS AND CAGN'S FOLLOWERS LEAVE THE TERRIBLE PLACE, BECAUSE HE FACED THE ROAD APPROACHING THE CITY. LION DID NOT SEE THEM UNTIL THEY HAD ALREADY PASSED AROUND THE WATERING HOLE AND ESCAPED.

AFTER MANY DAYS OF TRAVEL, THE BROTHERS AND THOSE WHO WERE SWORN TO BE AS CAGN'S SONS CAME TO THE SUN'S TOWN. SEEING NAKATI NOW NEXT TO HER HUSBAND, DASSE RECOGNIZED HER MISTAKE AND THANKED HER BROTHER-IN-LAW FOR PROTECTING HER HONOR. THE SUN, TOO, MARVELED AT NAKATI'S BRAVERY AND HIS DEVOTION TO HIS KIN. HE SPOKE MANY WORDS IN NAKATI'S FAVOR, AND THE ENTIRE TOWN DANCED AND CELEBRATED HIS HEROISM.

THE SUN'S PEOPLE BY THEIR CELEBRATION, MEANT TO SHOW THEIR JOY FOR CAGN'S RETURN, TOO. BUT THE ELDER BROTHER FELT SLIGHTED. HE LEFT THE FEAST EARLY AND RETIRED TO THE LARGEST HUT, WHERE HE GRUMBLED TO HIS NINE FOLLOWERS ABOUT THE INSULTS HEAPED UPON HIM BY EVERYONE IN THE TOWN. THE NINE RETAINERS WHO HAD SWORN THEMSELVES TO BE AS SONS TO CAGN SHARED THEIR FATHER'S WRATH. THEY FELT EACH SLIGHT HE DESCRIBED AS IF THEY WERE THORNS PRESSED INTO THEIR OWN HEELS.

THEY WERE RECITING THESE IMAGINED INJURIES FOR THE THIRD TIME WHEN NAKATI BURST INTO THE HUT. HE RUSHED TO HIS BROTHER AND SAID, "LION HAS COME TO THE SUN'S TOWN IN SEARCH OF YOU."

OVER THE COMMOTION NOW SOUNDING OUTSIDE THE HUT, CAGN AND HIS RETAINERS HEARD THE VOICE OF LION CALL OUT, "I WILL NOT DEPART UNTIL MY HUNGER IS SATED! BRING ME THE MEAT THAT WAS STOLEN FROM ME!"

"WE WILL NOT RETURN TO THE TERRIBLE PLACE," THE RETAINERS CRIED, AND CAGN HEARD THEIR WORDS. HE, TOO, FEARED THE PLACE THAT ALL MEN KNOW, BUT FROM WHICH NONE EVER RETURNS. FINALLY CAGN FACED HIS BROTHER AND SAID, "WE WILL FIGHT."

NAKATI SHOOK HIS HEAD. "IF WE DEFY LION, HE WILL VENT HIS WRATH UPON EVERYONE IN THE TOWN. HUNGER HAS GIVEN HIM A TONGUE OF FIRE. HE HAS BECOME LIKE THE ALL-DEVOURER. GO ALONG WITH LION NOW, AND I WILL FIND A WAY TO RESCUE YOU AGAIN."

BUT CAGN WOULD BROOK NO ARGUMENT AND HE REFUSED TO GO OUT OF THE HUT TO FACE LION. WHEN NAKATI INSISTED, CAGN DREW FORTH HIS FETISH AND STRUCK A KILLING BLOW. NAKATI FELL DOWN DEAD, THE BROKEN FETISH IN PIECES AROUND HIM. THEN CAGN TOOK HIS BROTHER'S FETISH FOR HIS OWN AND ORDERED HIS NINE FOLLOWERS TO BUNDLE UP THE BODY IN A CLOAK. THIS THEY DID. AT LAST CAGN SHOVED NAKATI'S CORPSE OUT OF THE HUT. AS HE DID SO HE CALLED, "HERE IS YOUR MEAT, LION, RETURNED TO YOU AGAIN."

BLINDED BY HUNGER, LION POUNCED UPON NAKATI'S CORPSE. HE TOOK UP THE BODY IN HIS JAWS AND, NOT CARING THAT NAKATI WAS ALREADY DEAD AND NOT WORTH EATING, HE GOBBLED HIM UP. LION SWALLOWED THE MEAT AND THE BONES AND EVEN THE PIECES OF THE BROKEN FETISH. AT ONCE THE MADNESS OF STARVATION LIFTED FROM LION, AND IN THAT MOMENT HE REALIZED THAT HE HAD BEEN TRICKED.

"THIS IS NOT THE MAN WHO WAS STOLEN FROM MY BELLY!" LION CRIED. HE VENTED HIS FURY, AND THE WIND FROM THAT MIGHTY ROAR BLEW DOWN THE HUT AROUND CAGN AND THE NINE RETAINERS WHO HAD SWORN THEMSELVES TO BE AS SONS TO CAGN. CAGN CALLED UPON THE FETISH HE HAD TAKEN FROM NAKATI, BUT THE CHARM LAY IN HIS BLOODY HANDS LIKE A LUMP OF STONE. THEN CAGN AND HIS FOLLOWERS FELL TO THEIR KNEES, COWERING FROM LION'S WRATH.

LION LAID A CURSE UPON CAGN. "A TONGUE OF FIRE WILL FOREVER BURN IN YOUR MOUTH AND THE HUNGER OF THE ALL-DEVOURER WILL FOREVER GNAW AT YOUR BELLY. YOUR SONS WILL SUFFER FOR YOUR TRICKERY, TOO, AND ANY BEGOTTEN BY THEM, DOWN THROUGH THE AGES."

WITH ONE MIGHTY PAW, LION GESTURED TO THE MIRROR STANDING BEHIND CAGN. OF ALL THE MIRRORS, ONLY THIS ONE HAD SHATTERED IN THE HUT'S COLLAPSE. IT WAS THE TENTH, THE ONE THAT SHOWED THE PLACE THAT ALL MEN KNOW, BUT FROM WHICH NONE EVER RETURNS. "NEVER AGAIN SHALL YOU LOOK UPON THE TERRIBLE CITY," SAID LION. "IF THIS SEEMS LIKE A BLESSING TO YOU NOW, WAIT. YOU WILL FEEL THE STING OF THIS EDICT ONLY IN TIME."

EVEN AS LION TURNED AWAY, CAGN FELT A QUENCHLESS FIRE FLARE IN HIS MOUTH AND A CEASELESS HUNGER ERUPT IN HIS BELLY. SO, TOO, THE NINE RETAINERS WHO HAD SWORN THEMSELVES TO BE AS SONS TO CAGN. AND THE TEN MEN FELL DOWN IN THE RUINS OF THE HUT AND LAMENTED.

SEEING HER HUSBAND WEEPING LIKE A CHILD AT THE FATE HE HAD BROUGHT UPON HIMSELF, DASSE HID HER FACE IN SHAME AND DISAPPEARED INTO THE WIDE WORLD. THE SUN SHOOK WITH ANGER AND ADDED HIS CURSE TO THAT PRONOUNCED BY LION. "NEVER AGAIN SHALL YOU DWELL IN MY TOWN," SAID THE SUN. "FROM THIS TIME FORTH, YOU ARE BANISHED FROM MY LIGHT. ALL MEN WHO LOOK UPON MY FACE SHALL BE YOUR SWORN ENEMIES."

SO IT WAS THAT CAGN AND THE NINE RETAINERS WHO HAD SWORN THEMSELVES TO BE AS SONS TO CAGN LEFT THE TOWN OF THE SUN AND MADE THEIR WAY INTO THE WIDE WORLD. BUT THEY COULD TRAVEL ONLY UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS, FOR THE SUN'S ANGER BURNED LONG AND EVEN AFTER HE ASCENDED TO THE HEAVENS HE REMEMBERED HIS CURSE UPON THE MAN WHO SHAMED HIS DAUGHTER.

THIS, THE STORY WHICH I HAVE RECITED, IF IT BE SWEET OR IF IT BE NOT SWEET, TAKE SOME ELSEWHERE AND LET SOME COME BACK TO ME.

The Secret Must Be Kept: Animism

Africa is a continent populated by several billion people. There are at least a thousand languages that the various nations and tribes speak and even more sub-dialects. Countless governments and tribal laws officially dictate the Africans' existence. Yet, within all this vast diversity, there is something that binds most together in a way nothing else in their lives does: animism.

Animism, simply put, is the belief of the spirit in all things, living, inanimate and dead. The African believes that everything in her environment draws energy from the same source and that makes her only a part of that oneness. This oneness with nature is not just a spiritual awareness, but an affinity with nature that manifests itself in the very day-to-day life of the African, not least of all reflected in the various rituals that govern her existence. While Christianity, Islam and other religions have invaded the continent with all the other trappings of colonialism and Westernization, most Africans still practice animism, or traditional African religion, to some degree or another, openly or deep in the bush. They do it because, in their souls, it is still the belief that holds sway over them. Animism infuses the sacred into real life and, among other things, allows the African to cope with everyday problems and needs.

This is not lost on the Laibon, some of whom still hold the beliefs themselves, others who simply recognize the use and the absolute power of that belief. Within this faith, they are able to maintain, for the most part, their version of the Masquerade. As Western civilization creeps in with all its influential force, however, the Laibon now find the need to evolve as well. This adaptation varies depending on region and geography.

Ancient Fires

Deep within the watery, red mud and emerald green of the Congo, life teems in all its myriad forms. Snakes slither along the ground or twine themselves in the stalks of bananas drooping in their groves. Birds with colorful markings move about in the tree canopies, and monkeys share the roosts with them. The very air is thick and moist, and insects hum incessantly. Staccato grunts fill the air, some made by lions, others made by creatures even more fearsome.

The Congolese who continue to dwell in the bush are closer to their origin than all other Africans. They still make their way in the nomadic style of their great-grandfathers, living in sync with their land. Individualism does not exist — the tribesmen view themselves as a part of the whole. Her tribe is what provides the Congolese Pygmy with her worldview and identity, and it dictates her social behavior. The Congolese still observe the strict maintenance of family bloodlines, and most tribes of the bush are comprised of family and extended families, further enforcing the sense of tribal unity and community.

The Pygmies are a somewhat nomadic people who move depending on the game and the season of the year. Partly because of that, almost no written tradition exists amongst them. This is true of most of the various tribes and ethnic groups that still dwell in the relative seclusion of the jungles of Africa, the last bastion against Westernization. However, traditions are vitally important, and the oral, tribal myth is sacred among them. It is these myths that provide the tribe with their uniqueness and their origin and determines their social and spiritual behavior.

The Pygmies and other tribes that live in the dense vegetation recognize that they are part of nature. As hunters, they understand life and death. In fact, death is merely the transformation of life into a force greater than they are and is one that must be obeyed absolutely. They believe that their ancestors remain on Earth and have ultimate power over their descendents. They understand, as hunters, that they must sometimes give back what they take. Caring for and appeasing and obeying their ancestors is reverence for the universal force of life and, as such, is the highest priority for the tribal community.

The Congolese spend their days hunting and gathering, and they spend their nights safely huddled around large fires. The fires provide security, where the tribe can share warmth and the days' adventures. It is also within the glow of this circle that the tribe retells its origins and other myths and invokes its spiritual ancestors. All the while, tribe members never venture further than the safety of the circle.

So it is within the shrouded gloom of the forests and jungles that the Laibon who reside here are the masters of the night. They view themselves as those spiritual ancestors and, therefore, deserve and gladly receive the sacrifices that the nomadic tribes readily make to them, whether they are animal or kine. The tribesmen believe them to be extensions of nature. The Laibon have almost no need to conceal themselves other than to maintain secluded quarters. Even that is not completely necessary, as the tribesmen also consider it their duty and honor to protect the Laibon's sacred dwellings from anything that would disturb them, be it animal or antagonistic neighbor. The Laibon of the bush hold absolute power and exude the arrogant confidence of the inviolate. They feel a part of the kine around them because of their shared beliefs. And, because it benefits them so, they accept animism.

The double-edged sword of this existence, however, is that the Laibon who hold sway in the bush have, for the most part, become staid and complacent. They have dwelled as unchanging figures for centuries, as have the kine around them. They live in their huts of dung and mud and observe each sunset as they have the one before.

They change the wraps and cloths that cover their bodies only when the others have rotted away. But many have become stagnant and lost touch with the nature they reside with. The Laibon have caught glimpses of change, as roads now meander through their domains, but they have not experienced it to any great degree. Neither have the kine who serve and revere them.

While their existence has been comfortable and dependable, only time will tell which of these Laibon will be able to survive the change that the inevitable encroachment of civilization will bring, as their kingdoms slowly erode. Not all will survive.

Crossroads

In the growing gloom of sunset, a few of the larger trucks, heavily laden with ancient timbers, rumble to life. The small truck-stop village of Awae was simply a wide spot along the only dirt road that connected the East of Cameroon to the capital. The truckers viewed it merely as a spot to purchase petrol and, perhaps, some temporary female company. It was identical to any village that happened to rest near a road, whether that road connected Nairobi to Bujumbura, or Johannesburg to the Kalahari Desert.

The people who live there find themselves, literally and figuratively, at a crossroads. They view themselves as something more than the savages who still reside in the bush, but they don't possess the suaveness or the luxuries that life in a city would provide them. A lone wire carries the expensive commodity of electricity to the very few who can afford it. Normally, that is the barkeeper. People crowd around the bar at night, mesmerized by the glow of light bulbs and the television. Without speaking, the villagers stare at the box and watch strange images dance across the screen. They see people who look like them and could be them, in another life and their dreams.

With the advent of roads, the people of the village can feel ripples of change wash over them. The older folk continue with the way of life that was handed down from father to son since time immemorial. They plow the fields and hunt what game they can. But even they are somewhat different, and they avoid going deep into the bush any longer, wanting, almost against their own wills, to set themselves apart from those who dwell in the jungles and forests. Moreover, their children also wonder. As they see images on the television and the rare photo magazines that the truckers discard or trade with them for "favors," they daydream about life outside their mud walls.

The landscape of the village differs from that of the bush. Mud houses give way to more formal structures that begin to hint at some level of permanence. The walls are still made of mud, but now there is a layer of stucco over that. And some of the roofs now boast corrugated steel instead of thatching. Wooden doors and shutters bar the entrances to the edifices and posters and advertisements



cover some of the walls. Children attend school and learn languages their parents do not understand. And strange religions and churches start to creep in and tempt the villagers. Men in costumes of their god tell the villagers to throw away their old beliefs and give their allegiance to one power — their power.

The village is a life of transition and confusion. As many welcome the promise of new gods and other commodities during the daylight, they still cling to the old beliefs by night. But now, there is a sense of concealment and duplicity involved. Therefore, it is within the villages that secret societies are born.

With almost a sense of shame, the villagers form these tribal groups in the dead of night. The daylight hours are for work, school and the worship of new idols, while the nights are a struggle and a haven to protect the old ways. Out of fear of losing the powers of the ancestral spirits, the societies begin to create even more ritualized behaviors and initiations than their jungle-dwelling brethren. They feel the need to harness the spirits to maintain the integrity and the safety of the village that they fear is wearing away during the daylight hours of change.

Priests emerge from the societies and act as go-betweens for the villagers and the spirits. Fetishes and, more importantly, masks are used to draw in and harness the power of the ancestors. The priests make appropriate sacrifices, often in blood, to consecrate a mask and draw in a spirit to take up residence within the mask and the society. Foremost within the secret society, however, is fear of discovery. That fear colors all the society's actions.

The village is perhaps the most difficult place for a Laibon to make his home. Because it is a place of such change and instability and duplicity, unlife is a struggle here. No longer can the Laibon rest in relative safety during the day. He doesn't know if the rumble he vaguely hears is that of thunder heralding the rainy season or the large earth-moving machines that foreigners have brought in to plow under the trees and the brush of the jungle or savanna. No tribesmen can warn him or protect his abode. A safe haven is very difficult to find. Just as the village is a crossroad for the kine, it is for the Laibon as well. He must decide to move deeper into the brush, move into the cities or make a place for himself within the secret societies.

If he stays within the village, the Laibon cultivates a society to feed and protect him as best it can. He performs minor favors for the group in exchange for what they can offer him, or he holds them in terror of what he might do if angered. It is an uneasy alliance at best as that fear of discovery taints both parties. In fact, it is the first time the Laibon really tastes fear as he feels his unlifestyle threatened. When new members are initiated, and those initiations are necessarily horrific, both the other members and the Laibon regard the initiate with distrust for some time to come. But the Laibon basically remains able to move about unfettered during the nighttime hours. He does not need to disguise his true nature beyond, perhaps, wearing a masque. The society members still view him as a force of nature. They accept his demands and needs and gladly fulfill them to the best of their abilities, and the villagers understand when he must take more than they offer.

The interesting thing that occurs, however, is the parting of the ways between the beliefs of the Laibon and the villagers. While the society struggles to maintain the integrity of its true beliefs against the cultural changes that creep in, the Laibon at the crossroads recognizes that he is not an invulnerable force. He recognizes the usefulness of animism, but he has pulled himself somewhat away from it and no longer views himself a part of it as his jungle brethren still do.

The roads, however, bring more than just change. They carry strife as well. As the villagers learn more, are tempted by more and begin to want and take more for themselves, it becomes difficult for the Laibon to receive his due diligence as he takes a back seat to the kine's desires. He actually has to work for some of it and take the rest. While the strife distracts and occupies much of the villagers' attentions at times, it brings a bonus for the village Laibon: blood. This is blood, though, that the Laibon feeds on as a scavenger, no longer a god. And this indelibly changes those Laibon on the fringe of civilization.

Lights in the Darkness

Within the city limits of Harare, Zimbabwe, colonialism and Westernization have firmly taken root. Along many of the paved streets lined with flowering trees, brightly lit shops with foreign names sell the most innocuous products, ranging from movie star posters to bags of dog food. Not the type of products a bushman or villager might need, but one the foreign residents demand and the Harare city dweller thinks she has to have.

Numerous foreign banks, with decidedly Anglophone names, nestle in one quarter of the city, as well as embassies for both African and European countries. People line up hopefully in front of the stone buildings with their reams of paperwork, envisioning a life somewhere else. Soldiers and police both patrol the city and eye each other warily as the army is mostly made up of one ethnic tribe, while the other popular tribe makes up the police force. Bloodshed boils only one mocking comment away from erupting at any given time.

Churches for the Catholic faith draw in visitors as well as mosques for those who follow the teachings of Islam. Every need, it seems, can be met within the limits of the city. Yet high walls surround these buildings. Topping the fences is a layer of broken glass embedded in the masonry. The doors, supposedly open to any and all, appear to be open only some of the time.

Along with the taxis and private vehicles that rumble down the street, filling the air with dark, noxious fumes, other little stores and cafés beckon to those who walk the street. An air of affluence, bright and shiny, pervades but always with a layer of grime just below the surface. Beyond the fancy shops and the homes of foreign residents, embassy personnel and such, the streets slowly change.

The occasional slack-breasted mammy, hunched over carrying a stack of firewood on her head as she trudges to her hovel, is clearly a presence. In addition, naked babies splash filthy water on themselves from the puddles formed by the potholes in the paved roads. And, of course, further away from the heart of the city of several million, the paved roads give way to the familiar dirt and mud paths.

With most of the wilderness beaten back, very few traces of it remain within the city. Animism has few followers left. A few secret societies thrive, but many have disbanded for fear of angering the army. Those who live in the city have even more reason to fear. A soldier might come and drag one from her bed for no legitimate claim, or a police officer might demand her weekly wages. City dwellers walk about with their eyes lowered during the day, looking up only occasionally when they pass the fenced-in luxury hotels that they will never be able to afford in their own lifetimes. Nights are only somewhat better, when the kine frequent the garishly lit bars and discothèques. Loud, tinny music blares from the open-air bars as urban people drink their wages away. Death is never far, and these same folk run quickly back to their homes, mindful of the sounds that escape the police stations they pass, where the lights and the screams go on all night.

Within the boundaries of Harare, the Laibon have had to adapt the most drastically, as they have in every city. While their country cousins are still able to dwell beside, yet separate from, the kine in rural areas with little modification, the Laibon in the Westernized cities have had to merge more fully with the kine and take a more active role in the politics and economy of the country they reside in. For the Laibon who have chosen to make their havens here, unlife is the trickiest and requires great deceptions.

Laibon in the city tend to stay in larger groups, mostly for their own protection. As fewer secret societies run rampant, the Laibon either band together or cultivate cells of mortals to guard their sanctuaries. With the availability of electricity, Laibon can conduct most of their business dealings in the evening hours with little difficulties and need not disturb their daytime rest. The presence of the military also works in their favor. The kine of the city ask few, if any, questions when a member of their family or a neighbor goes missing, as fear keeps them in check. Poor records are kept. And in the midst of the struggling modernization, a unique situation evolves.

The Kerrie

A kerrie is a traditional walking stick used in Africa, sometimes called a knobkerrie. Its appearance varies widely — in some places it is like a staff, while in others it is more of a cudgel, yet in still others it is smaller yet and designed to be thrown.

Damage: Strength +2 (bashing)

Conceal: J to N (from a jacket to not at all, depending upon size)

Minimum Strength: 1

A thrown kerrie inflicts the thrower's Strength in damage with a range of Strength x 2.

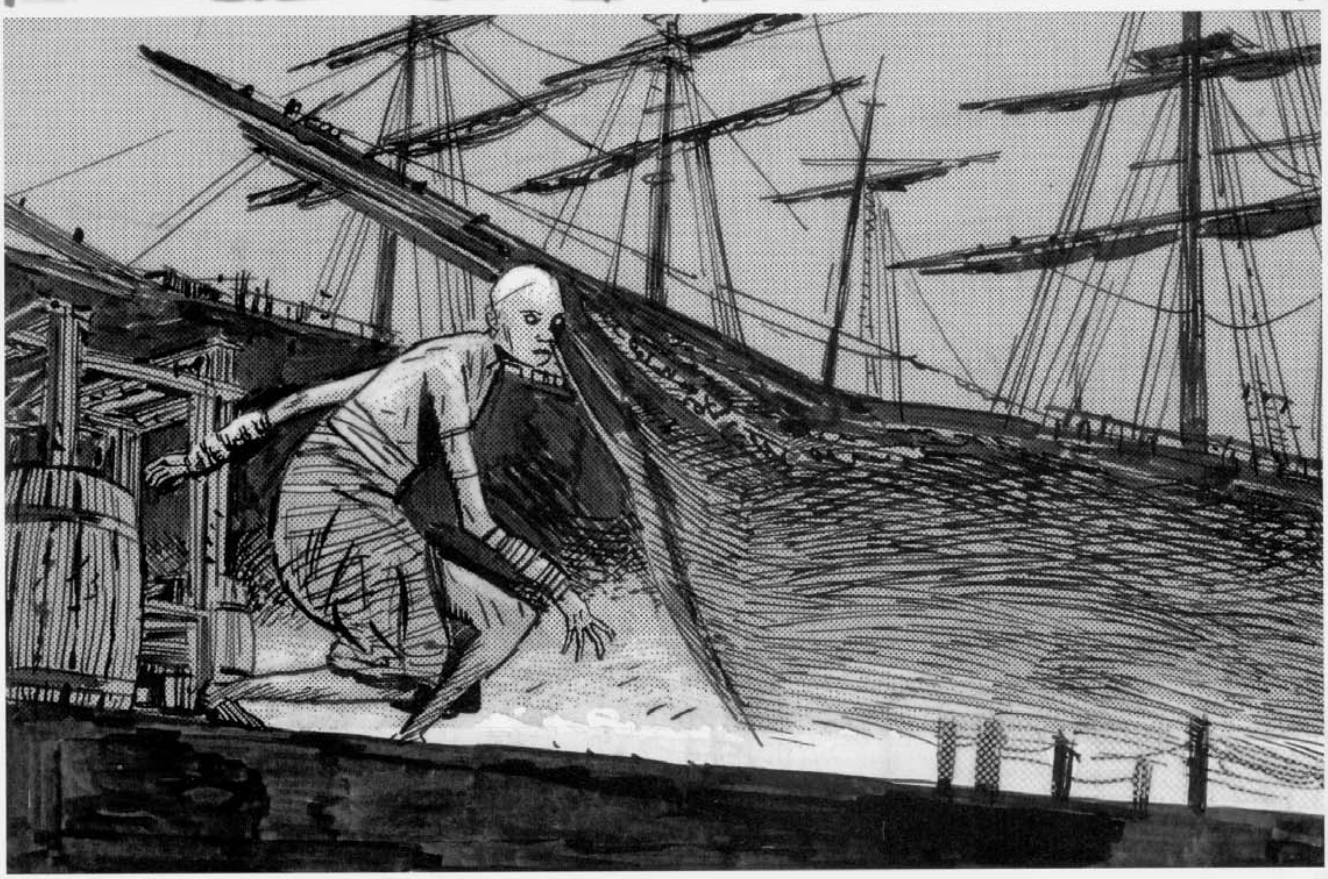
Inherent in all Africans, to one degree or another, is the belief in life forces and energy. While a body might die, the soul (*ka* in Egypt, *kra* in Eshanti, *nyama* in Dogon) continues. In recent history, stone buildings have replaced much of the jungles, but the kine still display a ferociousness to rival the animals. In the various cities across the continent, horrific deeds and foul murders occur in many of these buildings, and the massacres continue. Moreover, not just a few, but thousands have died within the walls of police stations and other municipal edifices. This energy lingers on and imprints itself in the cities, and the power left behind is not lost on the Laibon who reside there.

Out of all of their kind, the Laibon who have accepted unlife in the cities are the most in tune with the power of animism. As they insinuate and corrupt the direction of the finances and political bent of the countries they inhabit, they also recognize the negative forces that reside within the city limits. They see themselves as agents, manipulators and heirs to that power. And they see their place in the natural order.

The Looming Threat

At first, Africa seems to be a chaotic mishmash of independent domains, rogue states heady with their own independence and would-be tyrants bathed in blood. Those who look beyond this façade, however, occasionally catch a glimpse of the forces at work behind the scenes. If the Ebony Kingdom was nothing but a patchwork of coup and rebellion, what order could be said to exist?

The Westerners have a notion they refer to as the Jyhad — the great game that elders play in order to stave off the weight of centuries. This remains true in the Ebony Kingdom, and particularly so with regard to the Guruhi who claim to be its kings. Each failed magaji,



every troubled domain, these are all the work of the kings' plotting against each other and their attempts to outmaneuver one another in hopes of achieving whatever inscrutable end the kings hold dear to their unbeating hearts. It is an ancient game of move and counter-move, with living mortals and lesser Laibon serving as the pieces on the board.

A new threat has risen to challenge the millennia of Guruhi dominance in the Ebony Kingdom, however, and it would seem that the deathless kings have proven a bit slow to react to it. For centuries, the Xi Dundu have schemed to claim power where they may, and they treated what little power they have managed to amass as the greatest of all treasure. By and large, however, the Guruhi kings ignored them. One domain lost or one rogue left unpunished was a small price to pay in their great game. As they turned a blind eye to the ambition of the Xi Dundu, though, that neglect allowed the Xi Dundu to breed that ambition and nurse it into a potent force. The Xi Dundu are younger than the Guruhi, more motivated and more easily able to adapt to change. Indeed, where the Guruhi find order in the chaos of the Ebony Kingdom, the Xi Dundu would eliminate that chaos with their own claims to power, thus taking away the pieces of the Guruhi's game and leaving them woefully unprepared to deal with the new foe facing them from the opposite side of the table.

Without a doubt, the Xi Dundu are schemers themselves, and they seem to be playing a different game than the Guruhi. They break the rules the Ebony Kingdom's ancient masters have placed on the game, and the challenges such "cheating" presents to the Guruhi may have already caused them to lose.

The Xi Dundu understand the idea of small victories, which is key to their bid for power. Obviously, they don't have the numbers to rise up and seize the Kingdom — the Guruhi's supporters outnumber them and even those who don't favor the Guruhi don't necessarily want the Xi Dundu in their place.

While none can say with certainty who will win this ultimate match of wits, they can certainly consider the assets each side brings to the table.

Tearing Down the Walls

While the installation of "unapproved" magaji may not serve the Xi Dundu's end immediately, it does destabilize the power that the Guruhi domain is based upon. After all, if the Guruhi cannot keep his own domain in order, he will be all the more distracted when his plans move beyond its borders.

This fracture of power has had two effects on the Guruhi kings. Some become more desperate the more their own domains collapse, and they try to offset their failures with the acquisition of other kings' domains. This

way, they reason, they can make up for their losses by taking what already exists in a stable condition. Second, some Guruhi kings become very conservative, turning their attentions inward and not looking elsewhere for gains the Xi Dundu or their rival kings might make. The tighter they clutch their holdings, though, the more slip through their talons.

Ever opportunistic, the Xi Dundu are the ones to benefit most greatly here. As one Guruhi turns his attentions toward another's domains, he leaves his own undefended, and even if the Xi Dundu cannot take them outright and another independent magaji does, that at least takes them away from the Guruhi. As another Guruhi closes her borders, her attentions alienate the Laibon in her domain. Those Laibon then become agitated and resentful of the ever-more-severe authorities she puts in place, making the domains prime regions for dissent and open revolution against the secret masters. Again, even if the Xi Dundu cannot hold these domains right now, at least they ensure that they elude the Guruhi as well.

One-Sided Stalemate

The greatest irony of all, of course, is that, as masters of the Ebony Kingdom, the Guruhi should be masters of these sorts of political maneuverings as well. By all rights, the Xi Dundu should not be a threat — the Guruhi should be so skilled at these secret games that they would have defeated the Xi Dundu before they even stepped to the table.

What went wrong, however, was that the Xi Dundu put aside their internal rivalries to focus on the larger prize. As the Guruhi grow ever more jealous and suspicious of each other, they must rely only on themselves individually, which allows the Xi Dundu to take on single kings at a time, rather than face their combined might. Even if the Guruhi were to suddenly see the Xi Dundu's tactic for what it is, they would likely be unable to defeat the foe as easily as they should have to begin with. Their game has grown specialized and incestuous — they know to the most infinitely minute detail how one of their rival kings would react to a move on the kingdom's surface, but they don't know their new opponents half that well.

Further, the Guruhi's refusal to allow anyone to come to their table prevents them from gaining additional allies. "Allow" is the key word, here — the Xi Dundu simply showed up at the game. The Guruhi are loath to share their kingdoms with others of their own kind, let alone members of the other legacies, and the sheer audacity of the Xi Dundu to move against them has caught them completely off guard.

Has twilight fallen upon the Ebony Kingdom? Has the era of the Guruhi kings come to en end? If it has, will the Xi Dundu take their place immediately, or will the other legacies stand up for their rights to make their own destinies? It is not a question that can be answered in simple words here. It is the subject of stories and legends all its own.





Chapter Two: Legacies

...What is good among one people, is an abomination with others.

—Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

The legacies of the Ebony Kingdom are like the clans of the Western world, but they have a bit more gravity for their own sake. Indeed, the legacy has a much more familial connotation than a clan. Whereas it's not uncommon to find a Brujah feuding with a fellow Brujah or a Toreador spreading vile gossip about another of the Degenerates, such activity is considered unbecoming among the Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom.

Of course, that's not to say that rivalries don't happen. It's just that it's poor form to place one's familial difficulties in the open for the rest of the world to see. *Me against my brother; my brother and I against the stranger*, after all.

Akunanse

The Akunanse are the wanders and the storytellers of the Ebony Kingdom and the closest to understanding nature. They are, perhaps out of all the Laibon, the least concerned with the Jyhad, and while other vampires write them off as distracted fools, a small number of Laibon are curious why the Weavers aren't more troubled by it.

In parts of West Africa, the Ashanti believe in a legend that they refer to as "the wise spider." This spider traveled the world over on his strings and webs. In the beginning, there were no stories on earth, but many creatures knew they existed in the realm of the gods and they wanted to know them, as did the spider. He felt that by having all the stories, he would know the beginnings and endings of all things. So this spider went to the sky god and asked him for these stories. The sky god gave the spider four seemingly impossible tasks to complete in exchange for them. Through cunning and clever trickery, the spider did the impossible, so the sky god gave him a wooden box with all the tales. And the spider shared them with the rest of the world, by spinning their webs for all to see.

The Akunanse are the embodiment of that Ashanti legend. Presumably having their roots in Ghana, the Akunanse no longer call any region home, but they look at different countries as merely pieces of a whole tapestry. They occasionally travel with other Weavers out of convenience and experiences they have in common, not because of desire or necessity. Traveling has made many Akunanse wise beyond their undead years as they seek out the origins of man and his sorcery, though not all are quick studies, and some take longer in their progress to understanding. The more in tune they become with nature and to the origin of humankind, however, the more they change.

Because of that wisdom and knowledge, the Akunanse lose more and more of their human features and resemble the animals of the Ebony Kingdom. While the majority of the Weavers maintain their control, a few beasts have been overwhelmed with knowledge and lost themselves to the Beast. Most Laibon think the Weavers waste their time in tracing fairy tales and mock their bestial appearance, but a few wonder long into the night that if, as the Akunanse believe, understanding the origin points the way to the future, then why does that knowledge strip away their humanity? And they brood over, as some do, just what the future holds in store for them.

Nickname: Weavers

Appearance: Young Akunanse most resemble West Africans with unremarkable features. They adopt trends at a much slower rate than mortals do, however, and many of the Akunanse favor traditional garb over the more disposable fashions of the modern world. The more learned elders, however, are another matter. Over the centuries, they have acquired animal features. Some have come to share features with the deadly snakes, while others resemble the great cats (lions, leopards and cheetahs), and others still carry the markings of the dogs of the savanna plains (jackals, hyenas and foxes). A small group has even taken on the aspects of the gorillas. Those who do not hail from that region of the Ebony Kingdom occasionally acquire the features of the animals that are indigenous to their region.

Haven: While the young and/ or inexperienced Akunanse maintain single dwellings among the kine, an elder Weaver often makes do with any suitable den he finds along his travels. Elders who share animalistic traits with similar Weavers (or even other Laibon) might share their dens if appropriate, while others guard their solitary lairs with ferocious intensity.

Stereotypes

Followers of Set: Although they have aligned themselves with a force of nature, they have become too narrow-minded over time. We would share what we have learned over the ages with them, but the Vipers do not have ears to understand our words. I pity them, lost in the trappings of the past and a dead god.

Guruhi: They cannot remain in power long without understanding what it is they claim.

Ishtarri: A sad reflection of us, they give in to their wants without truly recognizing what their needs are.

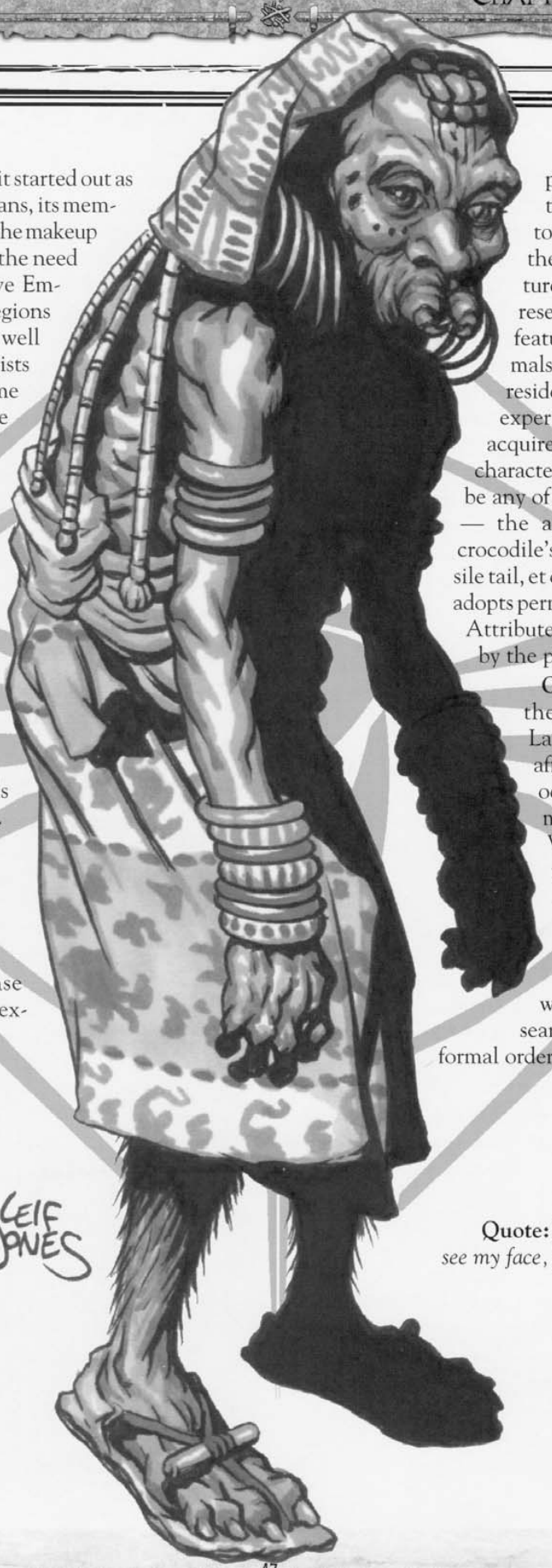
Kinyonyi: Wanderers like us, but without purpose, only self-interest. They operate under the illusion of freedom and so are trapped instead.

Naglopers: These Laibon are a mystery to me. I don't know what elemental power they have tapped into, but I fear them.

Osebo: How close to us they are! Now if only they could learn control…

Shango: Like the Vipers, they see themselves as divine and therefore are blinded to what they truly are.

Xi Dundu: We've seen those hungry for power rise up over the centuries, and we'll see them fall again, too.



Background: Although it started out as a legacy of mostly West Africans, its members' very nature has changed the makeup up the Akunanse. Driven by the need to travel, the Akunanse have Embraced the peoples of the regions they have traveled through as well as foreign visitors, archeologists and researchers who have come to Africa to understand the "cradle of humanity."

Character Creation: Weavers typically favor the more conservative Natures, but their Demeanor often varies by the animalistic traits that they develop, suggesting that some psychology is also inherited along with physical aspects. Physical and Mental Attributes are very common, as well as Knowledges, Talents (Empathy) and Skills (specifically Animal Ken). The Mentor Background is not unusual, either.

Legacy Disciplines: Abombwe, Animalism, Fortitude

Weaknesses: Akunanse who acquire knowledge and experience over the course of their unlives become closer to the Beast Within. The more they learn of the truths of nature, the more they come to resemble it. They take on the features of the dominant animals of the region where they reside the longest. For every 20 experience points an Akunanse acquires, he also gains one animal characteristic. This characteristic can be any of a myriad of animal features — the ape's elongated arms, the crocodile's protracted snout, a prehensile tail, et cetera. Every five features he adopts permanently reduces one Social Attribute by one, to be agreed upon by the player and Storyteller.

Organization: Weavers are the most disordered of the Laibon. The only type of legacy affiliation they maintain is the occasional exchange of information if they cross another Weaver's path, which they usually give freely. Ultimately, they want to share their stories with any who will listen. Beyond that, however, they are too wrapped up in their eternal search to care about any kind of formal order that is not natural.

Quote: *Don't be afraid when you see my face, for it is your face, too.*

Followers of Set

The African Followers of Set are the lore-keepers and the guardians of many ancient secrets. They abide in the darkest recesses of the Ebony Kingdom and remain a mystery to the other Laibon who tend to fear and avoid them. When a nest of Setites entrenches itself in a city, troubles and disorder usually follow. Things fall apart as they learn the fears and weakness of those around them, and the Followers of Set use that knowledge to turn both kine and Laibon against each other. From the resulting chaos, Setites hope to rebuild the Ebony Kingdom in the image of their god.

The Setites are not bothered by some of the differences between themselves and the Setites further to the north. They are quite comfortable not bearing any resemblance to their Egyptian brethren, recognizing that a snake must shed its old skin for new many times over in its existence. They know that they are as much the childer of the serpent god as any of the others, and they work to prepare the way for the return of Set like any other Follower. But these Setites believe that only one thing will ultimately bring about their god's return and that is the prize they work toward. While some of the other Followers only whisper of a Grand Temple, the Setites know it to be true. Their mission is to discover where on the Dark Continent this temple is, because within it dwells the first childe of Set. And the Setites are certain that this Methuselah will be able to direct them in the final preparations for the Serpent's return.

And so, many Setites are united in a single, dark purpose. Working toward this goal, they gather as much information as they can from indigenous mortals as well as Western explorers toward the location of the Grand Temple. And if they can sow the seeds of discord along that path, so much the better, as they are certain that other Laibon will then view them as a source of stability and look to them for guidance.

Some of the younger Setites, however, do not believe in the quest with the single-mindedness their elders have. As influences from the Western world have left their marks upon the Ebony Kingdom, the desires of the young Followers of Set have started to stray from the search for the first childe, and they are beginning to question both their elders' purpose and theirs within the Ebony Kingdom. They do it quietly, but a maelstrom often announces itself with the merest whisper.

Nickname: Vipers

Appearance: The sub-Saharan Setites, for the most part, have features typical for the area they inhabit, though they tend to be more sinewy than most. Red hair is not as prized here as in other nests because henna is all too common a cosmetic. Albinos are highly regarded, however, as their nearly translucent, white skin signifies a creature of the ultimate darkness and therefore, closer to Set. Both male and female Setites also sport decorative scarring on their faces and scalps.

Haven: Unlike many of their Egyptian and Middle Eastern counterparts, the Setites dwelling in the brush and jungles rarely nest in temples. The geography does not lend itself very well to any sort of ornate building that could show the proper respect to Set and survive the extremes of the wet and dry seasons. They maintain separate havens, suitable but slightly better than those of the mortals who live nearby.

Background: Many Setites who are Embraced in the modern nights were loyal servants before becoming Laibon, with years of dedication under their belts. Setites

Stereotypes

Akunanse: Foolish ones who have become so wrapped up in discovering the origins of humankind, they have lost themselves to the Beast. A waste of knowledge!

Guruhi: They use their fists to pound others into submission and then bully to maintain order. What they do not realize is that those trodden down are ripe for a sympathetic, whispered promise of change.

Ishtarri: A pretty and sensual lot. It is an easy enough thing to charm them to our will and drain them dry when we are done.

Kinyonyi: Outsiders who do not realize just what they have become mired in. Useful for more… distasteful tasks if the pay is high enough.

Naglopers: It is amusing to whisper in their ear and then watch as they terrify all other Laibon with their moonlit antics. They are completely enthralled by our knowledge and would do anything to have more.

Osebo: A force wasted through lack of discipline, but properly collared, they could be of some use.

Shango: We should be allies, linked by a unique relationship to divinity, but we're not. Just as we follow a god, they do as well. However, they see themselves as some sort of seat of holy judgment and make no effort to come closer to the one they worship. A mistake that borders on blasphemy, for certain.

Xi Dundu: They recognize the value of lore and use it to their advantage, though I am loath to admit it. That and their tactical minds make them a potential force to reckon with. They will bear watching.

are drawn to potential childer who display devotion and diligent purpose, as well as charm and physical strengths and capabilities. Such charm is often needed to gather information, and the physical prowess is necessary because of the grueling nature of the bush. The search for the temple is often led by a Setite, not just a mortal retainer, and it is no easy task.

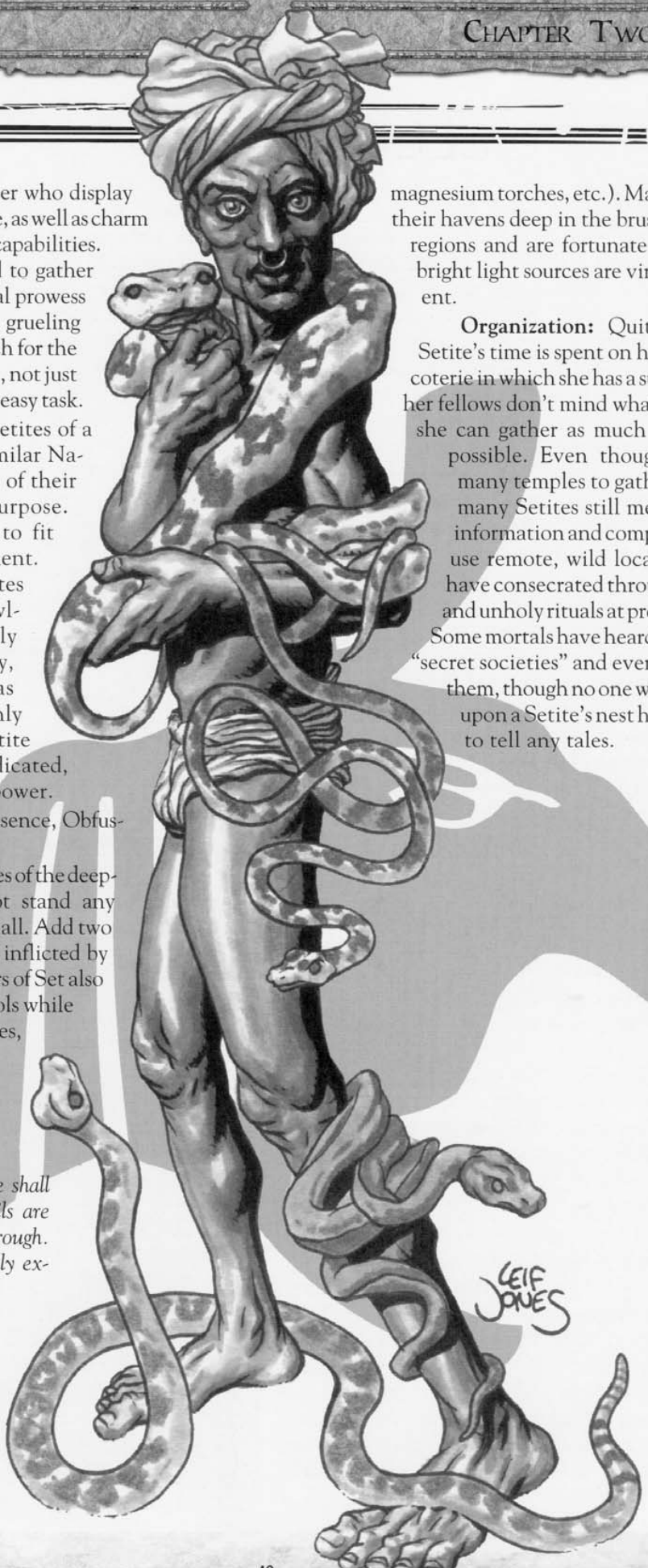
Character Creation: Setites of a given region often have similar Natures to each other because of their religious strength and purpose. Their Demeanor changes to fit the situation of the moment. Mental and Social Attributes are high on the list. Knowledge Abilities, specifically Occult and Politics, are key, and Backgrounds such as Herd and Influence are highly regarded. Above all, the Setite must be resilient and dedicated, often yielding a high Willpower.

Legacy Disciplines: Presence, Obfuscate, Serpentis

Weaknesses: As creatures of the deepest darkness, Setites cannot stand any bright light, sunlight most of all. Add two health levels to any damage inflicted by exposure to the sun. Followers of Set also subtract one from all dice pools while in extremely bright light (flares, magnesium torches, etc.). Many Setites make their havens deep in the brush of the various regions and are fortunate that artificially bright light sources are virtually nonexistent.

Organization: Quite a bit of the Setite's time is spent on her own or with a coterie in which she has a suitable cover (or her fellows don't mind what she is), so that she can gather as much information as possible. Even though there aren't many temples to gather in, however, many Setites still meet to exchange information and compare notes. They use remote, wild locations that they have consecrated through various rites and unholy rituals at prearranged times. Some mortals have heard rumors of these "secret societies" and even tried to spy on them, though no one who has stumbled upon a Setite's nest has ever returned to tell any tales.

Quote: *In the end, we shall circle the earth, for our coils are infinite and nothing will slip through. Sit with me, and I will gladly explain it to you.*



Guruhi

When the Laibon first found the lands that would become the Ebony Kingdom, the Guruhi walked first among them. Indeed, many Guruhi believe that the Gambian god from whom they take their name bequeathed all of the lands below the Sahara to their ancestors. As the rightful owners of the Ebony Kingdom, then, the Guruhi take their roles very seriously, and have laid claim to the land almost unilaterally as their domain. They consider themselves heirs to its thrones, masters of its beasts and lords of its men.

Reluctantly, the Guruhi share their domains with other Laibon, but they rarely make for loving chieftains. The Kings brook little dissent, turning loyal Laibon against would-be insurrectionists when they can and resorting to their effective Disciplines when subtlety fails. Without a doubt, the Guruhi are the dominant legacy in the Ebony Kingdom, and this makes them very conservative, for they have no great desire to see that change.

For the most part, the Guruhi maintain their positions through a combination of one-sided alliances and savvy. Few legacies care to cross them, as they can call upon untold numbers of favors and retainers to have their will made manifest. In fact, the only real challenge to a Guruhi's power is an overwhelming dissatisfaction with the way they handle affairs in their domains. Since the Guruhi aim to please the Osebo and Shango as well as themselves, such overwhelming resistance is rare. Still, it does happen, and proud Guruhi magaji have been brought lower and even sent to their Final Deaths when arrogance festered within them to replace their sense of duty.

Tonight, the Guruhi bear heavy weights upon their shoulders, however. The world changes at a frightening pace, and threats line up with ever-increasing ferocity and frequency. The Guruhi have more to worry about than just jealous Laibon in the modern nights — the old ways crumble, the Ebony Kingdom becomes more and more influenced by the rest of the world, and the rift between elders and younger Laibon of the legacy grows with each passing night.

Nickname: Kings

Appearance: By turns hideous and angelic, the Guruhi change appearance as their disposition alters. Some Kings appear as terrible demon-lords, while other seem to have descended from heaven itself. They often adopt clothing that speaks to their station, with Guruhi magaji wearing ostentatious finery and even the claimants to small domains choosing garments that make them stand out. They come from any and all of the African cultures, as they were there first and historically had the ability to select progeny before they allowed anyone else to.

Haven: Many Guruhi play a dangerous game when it comes to the matter of havens. They, of course, understand the need to hide themselves to some degree from mortals, and they follow the Tenets faithfully. Guruhi often bear great pride, however, and they choose showy homes and havens that let visitors know just how important the master of the haven is. From literal palaces down to well-appointed hovels, the Guruhi favor "dressing up" wherever it is they choose to make their private homes.

Background: When Guruhi choose to Embrace, they usually have the pick of the litter, as it were, unless their immediate superiors have something to say to the contrary. As such, Guruhi come from any cultural stock and even any social level that the Laibon are likely to encounter in Africa. Most hail from positions of authority, however, and many like to trace the blood of their prospective get back through the ages, hoping to link them to some dynasty somewhere in the Ebony Kingdom's history.

Character Creation: The Kings most often have forthright Natures, which they occasionally allow to shine through in similar Demeanors. Otherwise, they hide them with disparate Demeanors so as not to allow anyone insight to their true motives. Physical Attributes are usually primary, though many favor Social Attributes. Knowledges prove one's wisdom to other Guruhi and Laibon, while Talents demonstrate one's mettle outside the halls of power.

Stereotypes

Akunanse: I do not question the time they spend learning in hopes of understanding themselves, I question the subject matter.

Followers of Set: A snake ceases to be a threat only when its head has been stricken from its body.

Ishtarri: Useful and easily controlled — one need only look at them to discern which rewards earn the giver the greatest return.

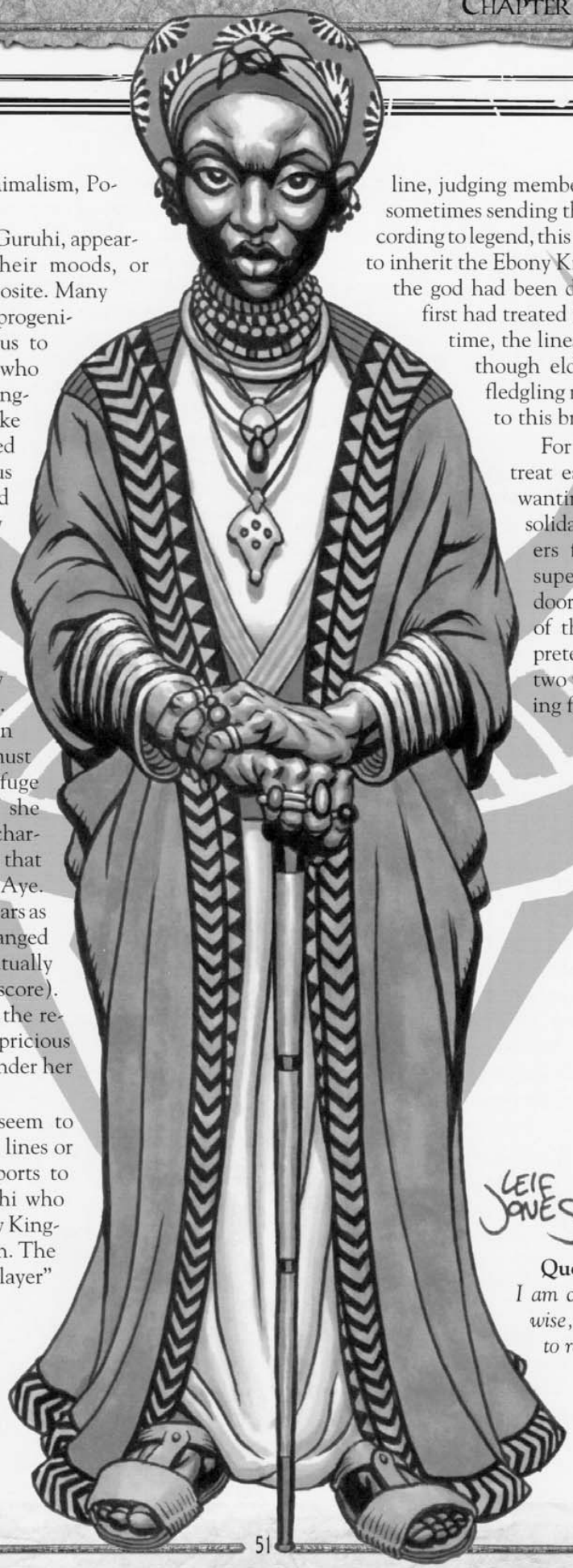
Kinyonyi: Birds, yes; the ones that feed upon detritus from the teeth of the crocodile.

Naglopers: The mongrels serve admirably to dig ditches or decorate the ends of one's spears.

Osebo: Strong enough to carry our words, smart enough to know that's what suits them best.

Shango: It is a shame that we already honor a god, for theirs is admirable as well.

Xi Dundu: Liars, usurpers and thieves, not to be suffered and useful only if directed toward plaguing one's enemies. Still, using them as a blade means the wielder must be wary of both edges.



Legacy Disciplines: Animalism, Potence, Presence

Weaknesses: With the Guruhi, appearance changes to reflect their moods, or sometimes to reflect the opposite. Many of the Kings believe that the progenitor of their line was hideous to behold, much like the god who granted them the Ebony Kingdom, and that he sought to make himself appear as an ennobled chief rather than a hideous monster. The god then cursed him for his vanity, mockingly mandating that he would be only so beautiful as his soul. As a result, the Guruhi's appearance varies much more so than her Orun and Aye score would normally stipulate (see Chapter Three). Any time the character's Orun or Aye changes, the player must roll Appearance + Subterfuge against a difficulty of 8. If she achieves any successes, the character appears as normal for that particular rating of Orun and Aye. If she fails, the character appears as if whichever score had just changed (necessitating the roll) was actually (10 minus her Orun or Aye score). It's not an exact opposite of the reflection of her soul, but a capricious change that could help or hinder her in any number of ways.

Organization: Guruhi seem to divide themselves along two lines or lineages. The first line purports to hail from the original Guruhi who led his fellows into the Ebony Kingdom under the god's direction. The second is somewhat of a "kinslayer" line, judging members of the other line and sometimes sending them to Final Death. According to legend, this second line was supposed to inherit the Ebony Kingdom from the first, as the god had been displeased with how the first had treated their new domain. Over time, the lines have grown indistinct, though elders and the occasional fledgling make much of belonging to this branch or that.

For the most part, Guruhi treat each other with dignity, wanting to maintain an air of solidarity that discourages others from challenging their superiority. Behind closed doors, however, or in the cases of the direst rivalries, such pretenses vanish, leaving only two vindictive Laibon howling for each other's blood.

LEIF JONES

Quote: *You exist only because I am courteous, and if you are wise, you will give me no reason to reconsider my generosity.*

Ishtarri

Whether or not these Laibon descended from the Babylonian goddess Ishtar is nearly impossible to prove, though they claim her name. Like her, they have cheated the land of death and escaped its clutches more than once, and they offer up others to take their place.

The Ishtarri are not truly natives of Africa, and they have never hidden that fact. Nevertheless, they strive to blend in and become an intricate part of the tapestry that is the Ebony Kingdom. They don't desire to usurp the Guruhi's influence, but they make themselves such an integral piece that Laibon society would fracture without them. Overall, they have done an excellent job at ingratiating their way in with equal parts diplomacy and espionage. Their network of spies and contacts covers most of the Kingdom and ranges from fellow Laibon to mortals. The Ishtarri have also established themselves as the merchants and procurers of the area. If you need something, you go to them because you know they can get it for you, no matter what it is you seek. When the Ishtarri turn on the charm, very few can refuse them.

Perhaps second to that need to belong is the Ishtarri's need to continue to be as much a part of the mortal world as their unnatural lives will permit them. They are compelled to seek out gratification and constantly gorge themselves on it. Moreover, they do so not because they are desperate to awaken their own, dormant passions, but simply to drown themselves in the experience of pleasure.

The Ishtarri barely keep their head above water because they become so distracted by their wants, but the Gluttons who can remain focused are powerful warlords, tribal leaders and politicians in their own right. As the young generations try more and more to accept and understand modernization and become a part of it, the Ishtarri just might be the Laibon who survive the Jyhad. That is, if those modern wonders and the temptations that accompany them do not destroy the Ishtarri first.

Nickname: Gluttons

Appearance: The Ishtarri have their origin in the ancient Middle East and many still carry that coloring, with glossy, jet-black hair and golden skin. They often Embrace beautiful kine, finding them irresistible. As such, many Ishtarri are striking individuals of diverse ethnicities. The Ishtarri are often victims of their desires as well, however, and their bodies can reflect those addictions, leaving some grotesquely overweight and others wasted thin from drugs and disease, for example. Since their skin occasionally sets them apart from the indigenous folk where they dwell, Ishtarri try to adopt the clothing and lifestyle of the regions where they abide, for acceptance of Laibon and kine alike.

Haven: The Gluttons have a presence in practically every major city. They tend to live in harem-style quarters, with only one Ishtarri to a haven, though many broods also maintain a common house for the exchange of information. These dwellings are typically decadent, lavish houses by local standards and filled to overflowing with that which they ache for the most. Some surround themselves with physical beauty, while others seek out stimulation that is more cerebral or chemical in nature.

Background: The Ishtarri are drawn to what catches their eye; what was their vice while they lived. Physical beauty is high on their list, and the Ishtarri are a sensual-looking legacy, for the most part. However, since they are drawn to what they want and do not hesitate to claim that repeatedly, not all the Gluttons are pleasing to behold. They Embrace the drug-addicted, as well as those affected by the wiles of Venus, and even those who wield political power if it is power they ache for. They also realize the value of spies and will just as readily Embrace visitors to the continent if only to maintain ties to the Western and Eastern worlds beyond.

Stereotypes

Akunanse: I wonder how closely we might be related, since they obviously give in to their feral nature as we do, though it changes them much more uniquely than it changes us. What do they feel that we don't?

Followers of Set: Like us, their look sets them apart. However, unlike us, they make no attempt to fit in. They slither where they will, and all else be damned.

Guruhi: Since they are the powers that be in most regions, we support them as best we can.

Kinyonyi: Outsiders who revel in their foreignness. They have the nerve to call us tourists when they are simply mercenaries for hire!

Naglopers: I can't see anything but horror when I look on these monsters. I leave them be to play with their gris-gris and bones and graveyard dirt.

Osebo: A distorted reflection of us if we were to lose total control. As long as they are under the dominant thumb, though, they have their uses.

Shango: They carry out many of the Guruhi's wishes coldly and efficiently. So long as the Guruhi remain dominant in the Ebony Kingdom, we will acquiesce to their lackeys' wishes. But when the Guruhi fall, I think they will be close behind.

Xi Dundu: I follow their movements closely. With their ruthless organization, they might be the next power, if they survive the Kingdom.

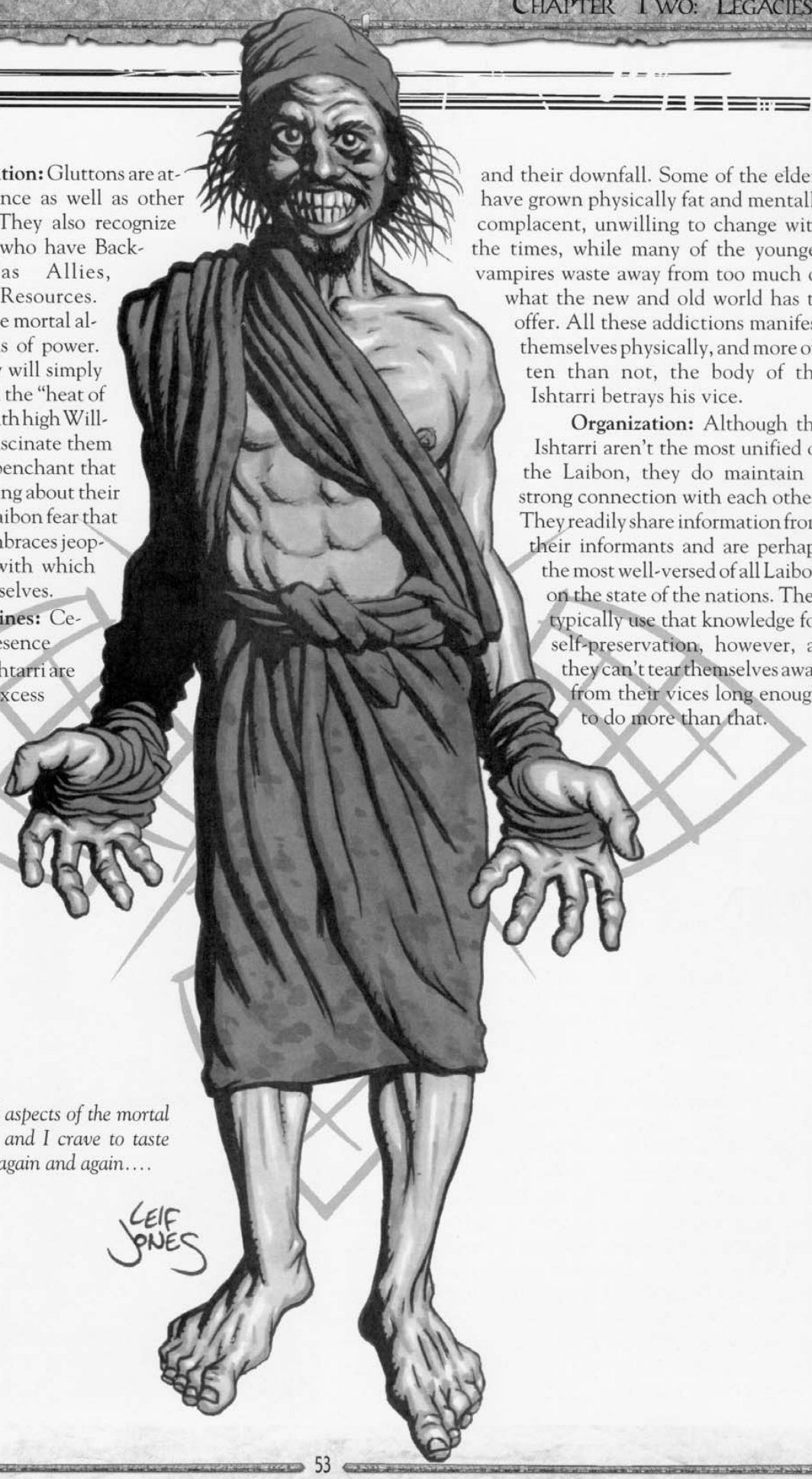
Character Creation: Gluttons are attracted to Appearance as well as other Social Attributes. They also recognize the value of those who have Backgrounds such as Allies, Membership and Resources. Ishtarri also cultivate mortal allies in key positions of power. Often, though, they will simply Embrace a mortal in the "heat of passion" and those with high Willpower traits often fascinate them the most. It is this penchant that potentially could bring about their doom as the other Laibon fear that their thoughtless Embraces jeopardize the secrecy with which they surround themselves.

Legacy Disciplines: Celerity, Fortitude, Presence

Weaknesses: Ishtarri are easily addicted to excess as their all-consuming needs drive them to fulfill those desires at the cost of everything else. It is their curse and their downfall. Some of the elders have grown physically fat and mentally complacent, unwilling to change with the times, while many of the younger vampires waste away from too much of what the new and old world has to offer. All these addictions manifest themselves physically, and more often than not, the body of the Ishtarri betrays his vice.

Organization: Although the Ishtarri aren't the most unified of the Laibon, they do maintain a strong connection with each other. They readily share information from their informants and are perhaps the most well-versed of all Laibon on the state of the nations. They typically use that knowledge for self-preservation, however, as they can't tear themselves away from their vices long enough to do more than that.

Quote: *I find all aspects of the mortal world to be alluring, and I crave to taste everything again and again and again....*



Kinyonyi

Originally outsiders, but now with their particular niche within the Ebony Kingdom, the Kinyonyi take their name from the Luganda word for "bird." Rightfully so, since as a legacy they travel more than any other. But for many Laibon, the Kinyonyi are more than simple travelers — they're Laibon of the legacy that most often can obtain items or carry out tasks for other Laibon. Although they still maintain their own peculiar organization apart from mainstream Ebony Kingdom society, the Kinyonyi are always willing to use their many talents to benefit others, so long as the price is right.

Those of the legacy who are old enough (or whose sires or grandsires were willing to talk about it) claim that the legacy migrated to the Ebony Kingdom from the East, though exactly where is a matter for speculation. Although a few Kinyonyi claim mortal descent from the "Gypsies," the legacy was already present in Africa long before that culture arrived there. Some lines trace their foundations all the way back to well-known trickster figures like Anansi or Eshu, but there's obviously no way to confirm these claims. The vast majority of Kinyonyi have much more important things to worry about anyway.

Although the Kinyonyi have a wide range of abilities represented in their ranks — in fact, it might be said that there's *some* Kinyonyi *somewhere* with a talent for nearly anything you can imagine — many seem to have an uncanny ability for stealth and subterfuge. Kinyonyi seem almost effortlessly able to circumvent cameras and security systems that leave even the Shango or visiting Malkavians exposed on film. Some Laibon whisper that the Kinyonyi are heirs to a magical tradition even older and more powerful than that of the Shango — that Kinyonyi can conjure objects from thin air, survive seemingly impossible amounts of damage, even summon the very ancestors or gods themselves to their aid. When confronted with such rumors, a Kinyonyi usually smiles and suggests that the legacy simply has uncommonly good luck.

Nickname: Nomads

Appearance: Because they travel often, most Kinyonyi prefer utilitarian clothing such as jeans, cargo pants or heavy fabrics. Modern waterproof clothing or breathable fabrics are also common. Those Kinyonyi who wear shoes usually tend toward hiking boots or well-constructed sneakers.

Haven: The Kinyonyi honor few standards for havens. Most who have a set place to stay choose one that appeals to them based on their mortal tastes, but mobile havens are also common among those who travel. They include vans, buses, RVs or even the more traditional tents or shanty houses carried by car or carriage. The main commonality between most Kinyonyi havens, even stationary ones, is that they're usually set up to be moved quickly if the need arises.

Background: The Kinyonyi usually look for self-sufficient people to Embrace, as an unlife of frequent moves demands it. Even more important are useful skills. Just what constitutes a "useful skill," though, varies widely among Kinyonyi, which is why the legacy is such an eclectic mix. Although the Kinyonyi certainly have their share of hunters, hired guns, freelance workers and the like, they also count among their number shamans, businessmen, archaeologists, scientists, psychologists and Laibon of nearly any profession or talent. For a legacy that often finds itself in the role of hired help, finding someone with a new talent or ability is far more important than whether they'll "fit in," as survival skills can always be taught.

Stereotypes

Akunanse: Y'know, much as I hate to admit it, some of these guys are really worth talking to. Ugly, though.

Followers of Set: Our main competition, if there is such a thing. Waste 'em if they try to sell you anything.

Guruhi: Hideous monsters who like to think they're in charge. Try to pretend you care when you're talking to them, mostly 'cause if you piss them off, they can crush your skull with one hand. Whether you like them or not, they're where we get a lot of our business.

Ishtarri: Hell, yeah. The thing I love about the Ishtarri is that they almost always want something. The only problem is that half of them will try at first to offer you their blood as payment.

Naglopers: What the fuck is wrong with these guys? Most of them seem to think that being vampires is an excuse for turning into complete degenerates. Take their money if they offer to pay you, but even then don't let them stand too close.

Osebo: These are the guys to avoid if you're going somewhere or doing something that might piss off the local magaji. Luckily, most of them are dumb enough that a quickly thought-up story will get you off the hook if they catch you.

Shango: If there's one legacy to say "please" and "thank you" when dealing with, the Shango are it. Do what they ask and you can end up with magical charms in exchange; stab them in the back and they'll fry your ass quicker than you can blink. Have to give them this, though — they do pay well when they want something.

Xi Dundu: These guys are damn scary, and considering they're about as likely as the Naglopers to ask you do something, I'd just say stay away from them altogether. Anything without a shadow is no friend of mine.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes are most commonly primary, with Social second, though the reverse is common also. Talents and Skills are usually held above Knowledges, but depending on character concept, such isn't always the case either. Most Kinyonyi have a few dots of Streetwise, Survival, Stealth or Subterfuge — even a bookish Kinyonyi usually picks up a few survival tips from his sire or other members of the legacy.

Legacy Disciplines: Animalism, Chimerstry, Fortitude

Weaknesses: Kinyonyi are known for their ability to get things done or find hard-to-find items, but they're also well renowned for their lack of tact. No one's really sure why, but it seems that whenever a Kinyonyi stays in a domain too long, he inevitably ends up doing or saying something he shouldn't and getting himself kicked out. It's possible that as frequent outsiders, they see things other Laibon don't, and for some reason are unable to restrain themselves from comment, possibly in the hope of remaining outsiders. In any case, for every two weeks a Kinyonyi stays in a given domain, she must make a check of Self-Control + Subterfuge (difficulty 8) to avoid mentioning or otherwise revealing some unpleasant fact — true or false, on purpose or by accident — about someone important in that domain. For each month she remains, the Kinyonyi also receives a one-die penalty to this roll. Keeping this in mind, it makes a bit more sense that Kinyonyi travel so frequently.

Organization: The Kinyonyi have a loose organization. No one's really "in charge," but they tolerate each other's company and know how to contact each other for the most part. It's generally a given that if a Laibon lets one Kinyonyi know what he needs, another Kinyonyi will show up within the next few weeks who can fulfill that need if the first cannot. The legacy maintains an informal network of mail, couriers, animal messengers and sometimes email to help its clients find Kinyonyi who are well suited to their individual needs. Informal gatherings happen on a semi-regular basis, usually outside of any established domain, for the Kinyonyi to tell tales and offer each other business and negotiation advice.

Of particular concern is a recent event that shattered even the informal nature of Kinyonyi society. No more than a few years ago, a terrible blood-thirst racked the legacy, sending its members into paroxysms of diablerie and frenzy. Since then, elders of the legacy have been fewer and farther between, and even the young members have been a bit more jittery than previously. Few outside the clan even know or care, but those who do simply shrug and accept strange curses as part of unlife — perhaps brought upon itself by the archetypal Kinyonyi mien.



Quote: *Sure, I can get those statues for you, no sweat. Just give me a few weeks to work out the details. Oh, and remind me which museum my guy needs to break into.*

Naglopers

Take every frightening rumor you've ever heard about Africa — cannibalism, bloody rituals, you name it — wrap it up inside a humanoid form, and most likely when you're done you'll be staring into the face of one of the Naglopers. If the Akunanse gain a measure of wisdom from attuning themselves to their Beasts, the Naglopers instead allow the urges of the Beast to surface more fully, influencing their actions and often reshaping the personalities that once made them human. Torture, murder, sexual perversion and worse are all commonplace for Naglopers, and indeed most Naglopers don't consider these practices remarkable at all. Torture is one of the favorite activities of much of the legacy, and some amount of internal legacy renown can be gained from devising new and creative forms of it. Beyond this, however, the Naglopers have little structure to speak of, and many tend to be quite territorial, especially where other uninvited Naglopers are concerned.

The name Nagloper comes, not inappropriately, from a Khoikhoin word for an evil sorcerer or night-walker. The legacy's nickname (in local language) comes from the Ashanti word *asanbonsam*, referring to a common legend of hook-footed men who lurk in trees in the forest, snatching passersby from above to feast upon their flesh and blood. In fact, variations upon this theme are one of the oldest and most popular torture devices among the Naglopers. Sometimes a Nagloper will twist his own feet into hooklike appendages and reenact the legend, but it's considered much more interesting to have mortals do it instead. Usually a Nagloper will kidnap a mortal, warp the unfortunate soul into *asanbonsam* shape, and promise to restore the person's normal physiology (or even just to give a quick and painless death) if they act out the role. This is a favorite method not only of torture, but also of finding prey. Needless to say, the promises used to entice an unfortunate to play the role of the *asanbonsam* are rarely carried out, and a lucky victim will find himself transformed into a ghoul, while an unlucky one will most likely become the focus of a different and much more painful torture when the Nagloper tires of the *asanbonsam* game

Because of their unpredictable and territorial nature, the Naglopers often find themselves distrusted by Laibon of other legacies… but then, most Naglopers don't trust each other much either. Many Laibon find the Naglopers' ability to warp flesh and bone disturbing in the extreme, and rumors that some also possess sorcerous abilities are certainly unsettling as well. In most domains, Naglopers can expect their actions to be closely watched and criticized, and those who wish to survive in mainstream Laibon society usually have made themselves useful enough through talents or contacts that their other habits are overlooked.

Nickname: Horrors

Appearance: Naglopers generally care little about how they look, often appearing in ragged or tattered clothing, or sometimes none at all. Some Naglopers have even been known to turn their body-warping abilities upon themselves, rendering them truly grotesque to behold.

Haven: Naglopers' havens share between them only one characteristic: They tend to be uninhabitable for all but the most depraved Laibon of other legacies. Usually Naglopers prefer secluded locations either deep in the woods, below the city or someplace in the wilderness (caves and the like), filling their havens with scores or even hundreds of twisted animal servitors and guards.

Background: Naglopers don't look for mortals who are "evil," *per se*, but rather ones who strike them as capable and well suited to unlife on their own. Hunters, mercenaries, thieves, cemetery groundskeepers, and other solitary jobs are some of the favorite professions of Naglopers looking to Embrace. Successful underworld figures or corrupt businessmen are also prime candidates, as they've already proven they're willing to do whatever is necessary to gain what they want.

Stereotypes

Akunanse: Hmm… Same as us, or not? Right idea, but not far enough. Foolish spider-men.

Followers of Set: Ah, yes. Such games they know how to play. Some will even teach us.

Guruhi: Pretentious parents. They do not own us, but they think they do. One night we will show them how sharp our fangs are.

Ishtarri: So easy, so ripe for the plucking. Their foolishness begs for them to be taught a lesson, and the fat ones are very tasty.

Kinyonyi: No fun. Too hard to fool into playing with us. We must learn their tricks, yes….

Osebo: Favorite lapdogs of the Guruhi. But make them angry, and see how quickly they turn into wolves and slaughter the sheep. Such fun!

Shango: No!!! [hissing sounds] It burns! It burns! [sound of fleeing footsteps]

Xi Dundu: They are much like us, and by helping them we may have much to gain. At least they hate the Guruhi as much as we do.

Character Creation: Naglopers usually tend to be either Physical or Mental primary characters. Most really aren't social creatures, but those who are primarily Social are among the most frightening of psychopaths. Talents are usually valued highest, with Skills second and then Knowledges. For more intelligent characters, Nature and Demeanor are usually very different, while less sophisticated Naglopers have similar Natures and Demeanors, not having learned yet to disguise their depravity when dealing with others. Some common Archetypes include Bravo, Child, Conniver, Deviant, Fanatic, Loner, Masochist, Monster, Rebel, Rogue, Survivor and Thrill-Seeker. Common Abilities include Brawl, Occult, Stealth, Streetwise and Survival.

Legacy Disciplines: Animalism, Auspex, Vicissitude

Weaknesses: No one is really sure why the Naglopers are forced to bury themselves in the ground before sleeping each day, though some Laibon believe that their Beasts force them to burrow into the earth just as lesser animals do. Whatever the reason for it, for each day a Nagloper does not bury himself in the earth completely before resting, his dice pools are halved (cumulatively, down to a minimum of one die). This penalty remains until the Nagloper rests one entire day in the ground. Because of their legacy's weakness, the few Naglopers who have heard of the Western Protean power Earth Meld are very eager to learn it indeed.

Organization: As mentioned previously, the Naglopers have only a loose organization at best. Occasionally a few work together when forced by circumstances or members of other legacies, but Naglopers are just as intolerant of each other as outsiders are of them. For the most part, this has to do with their territorial tendencies. The one major exception is the legacy's old pastime of torture games. A few Naglopers can temporarily forget their differences when comparing notes (and usually physical strategies) on torturing mortals or other Laibon. These contests can last weeks or even months, sometimes sending small villages or towns into panics as more and more citizens disappear, reappearing dead, mutilated or worse.



Quote: *Ah, a tasty morsel you are, yes. We shall enjoy dissecting you, slowly, with our teeth. Such a good addition to our little collection you will make. [sounds of lips smacking]*

Osebo

Notoriously undisciplined by themselves, the Osebo nonetheless make up one of the more numerous legacies in the Ebony Kingdom. Much of this reality stems from the fact that they are passionate creatures, who Embrace as the urge takes them. As such, it is difficult to generalize about the Osebo, except that they all suffer a fire in the blood, a heated temper.

About the only other generality that applies to the Osebo is that they are often the warriors of the Ebony Kingdom — the Blood calls to the Blood, and Osebo choose childer who are like them. Osebo himself is the leopard of West African Ashanti legend, fast and strong but proud. His Laibon namesake take after him in this regard, though pride often makes way for stubbornness. Many Osebo are quite conservative, thinking that the old ways are as good as any. They often grow set in their ways, as well.

Unfortunately for the Osebo, those ways are selfish and occasionally capricious. For this reason, Osebo often find themselves drawn to other Laibon, if only for the sense of purpose another night-walker can give them. Left to themselves, the Pride indulge their baser whims, stealing children from their cribs, abducting men from their homes, killing without need and otherwise watching their morals degrade as the Beast has its way with them. They support the Guruhi most often, as their order is the dominant one in the Ebony Kingdom, though an Osebo looking for an authority figure might well throw in with any individual — Laibon or otherwise — who demonstrates enough force of personality. It's not so much that the Osebo want someone to order them around, and anyone who assumes that's the case is likely to find his blood sating the thirst of the Pride. Rather, the Osebo know that they can't control themselves, so they look for someone to protect them from themselves.

Nickname: The Pride (collective)

Appearance: Osebo don't often bother disguising the fact that they're physically competent. Strong Osebo often bulge with muscle, fast Osebo have lithe figures and well-defined musculature, and other Osebo often "look the part" of their prowess. Their straightforward nature leads them not to put on airs, and few bother with grandiose clothing, while the less sophisticated among them rarely bother with hygiene. They often wear their emotions plainly on their faces, frequently making it easy to determine an Osebo's state of mind simply by looking at her.

Haven: If they have the fortune of a Laibon patron or mentor, most Osebo dwell with them. If left to their own devices, most Osebo treat havens as an afterthought, sometimes taking a mortal dwelling as one, sometimes settling for a relatively safe cave or glade. If a haven matters to the Osebo in question, she's likely to keep it well appointed. If the haven is merely a matter of survival, it's likely unkempt, if even permanent.

Background: Osebo often Embrace salt-of-the-earth types, occasionally swaying toward the more criminal side of the law. Given the Pride penchant for child-snatching and kidnapping, any number of whelps might have been brought into the legacy following such an event, though few of these victims survive long enough to make the transition. Osebo often Embrace on a whim, as well, meaning that anyone who takes the fancy of a Pride member at any given point might find himself left to his own devices shortly after becoming a Laibon.

Character Creation: Unsurprisingly, most Osebo favor Physical Attributes, Talents and Skills. Natures and Demeanors are often similar, considering that most Osebo don't put much stock in subterfuge. Backgrounds are most often afterthoughts (though Mentor is common), with Disciplines and other potential to make things happen here and now taking precedence.

Legacy Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Potence

Weaknesses: The Pride frenzies easily, its members becoming whirling dervishes of destruction. All difficulties to resist frenzy increase by two for Osebo characters.

Stereotypes

Akunanse: The tarantula may bite, but his legs break off if you drop him from high enough.

Followers of Set: They speak in lies, but their money spends well.

Guruhi: They are wise leaders, to be certain. Whether they are *good* leaders is not my place to say.

Ishtarri: Brothel-masters and pleasure-seekers — and for that reason, they pay admirably for protection.

Kinyonyi: Fly away, little bird, or the leopard will eat you.

Naglopers: Disgusting and foul, and remarkably hard to break.

Shango: They are weak, and they have turned to sorcery to aid them. Witchcraft is a cowardly way.

Xi Dundu: As long as the cart keeps moving, I don't care who's pulling it.



Organization: While they have little organization for themselves, Osebo often prove more than willing to adopt the customs of anyone who looks like he might be a good patron. An Osebo who knows another of his legacy for what she is might grant her respect and even treat amiably with her, but only so far as it doesn't harm his own goals or his mentor's preferences. It's a grudging respect given on an animal level, but it exists nonetheless.

Quote: *I was told you have to die. So be it.*

The Shango

A legacy composed partially of fearsome warriors, partially of enigmatic sorcerers, but almost entirely of devout worshippers of a powerful Yoruba god, the Shango have been in large part the power behind the throne of many of the Ebony Kingdom magaji. Through their devotion to Shango, Yoruba god of storms, magic and war, the Shango have cultivated abilities of both warfare and sorcery, making them formidable opponents to those who challenge the accepted order of the Ebony Kingdom (and thus, often valued allies of the Guruhi).

Although known for their magical prowess, the Shango tend to keep quiet about exactly what they can do, finding mystery to be a far more effective tool than force most of the time. The Shango are also well aware that they're the only major legacy with a talent for Obfuscate, a Discipline they guard almost as closely as their magic. This helps to keep up their reputation, since anywhere a Laibon goes, a Shango could be listening. Shango allow rumors about them to spread freely among the ranks of younger Laibon — rumors of trafficking with demons, or of using other Laibon's blood in magical experiments — for they know that such rumors only increase their hold on the minds of the same Laibon who spread them. The Shango know the truth (and so does their god), so what the rest of the world thinks matters little to them.

In times of need, however, the Shango are not afraid to bare their fangs (so to speak). Laibon who are foolish enough to overstep the bounds of plausibility with mortals or who defy their magaji one too many times can often expect the Shango to pay them a visit. They might best be compared to lightning — one of their god's favorite tools — in that they strike quickly, brutally and without warning, then disappear into the night. While most Shango are usually willing to help their fellow Laibon for a price, it's common knowledge that they are not to be trifled with.

Nickname: Judges

Appearance: While many Shango prefer the traditional clothing of a Yoruba *babalawo*, a significant number are practiced at appearing entirely ordinary. Particularly among the younger members of the legacy, Shango in Western business attire are just as common as those who prefer more conservative dress. Some prefer working more openly as wise men or shamans, but increasingly the Shango have found great rewards in blending into the background and letting their prey come to them.

Haven: Most Yoruba Shango prefer to gather in sanctuaries to Shango or whichever other god they hold to be most important. These shrines usually begin with only a few Shango, growing into large communal havens with time, and in any given area there are usually several from which to choose. All Shango are technically welcome at the shrines, but usually a follower of one orisha will stray to an unfamiliar shrine only if dawn is fast approaching or some other emergency occurs. Non-Yoruba Shango are also welcome at the shrines, but many find themselves uncomfortable in such an atmosphere. As a result, they establish their own havens rather than taking advantage of the communal ones.

Background: Because of their devotion to serving their god, Shango most often look toward the Yoruba or practitioners of related religions such as Santeria or Voudoun, who in most cases are already familiar with the god and his directives. Simple talent in magic or in war can be enough, however, and decorated soldiers or well-known sorcerers of non-Yoruba stock are also chosen for Embrace

Stereotypes

Akunanse: Wise and noble beasts, but few use their knowledge to greatest advantage. Listen to their words, but do not allow yourself to grow content wandering the jungle as they do.

Followers of Set: Accursed snakes. Deal with them when you must, but never offer them anything that could be used against you, for they will do so the first chance they get.

Guruhi: They are the lion to our hawk; while our power lies in speed and intelligence, theirs comes from strength and stability. Monstrous or unjust they may be at times, but when dealing with them never forget this: They rule the Ebony Kingdom so that we do not have to. Allow them their worldly power so long as they do not run wild with it.

Ishtarri: Poor, sad hedonists, wallowing in their excesses. Why our magaji still suffer them to survive, I will never know.

Kinyonyi: I would much sooner deal with a Kinyonyi than a Follower of Set when I need something. Most of them are very reliable when offered suitable payment. If you value your continued existence, though, never make the mistake of bringing one to court as your guest.

Naglopers: Neither wise nor noble, but certainly beasts, and they should be treated as such if you wish to survive long. If ever one offers to play a game with you, I suggest responding quickly and with deadly force.

Osebo: Ah, where would we be without the Osebo? They are our eyes and ears, our bodyguards, foot soldiers and lookouts. Sadly, most of them aren't too bright… But overall, that makes for a better soldier.

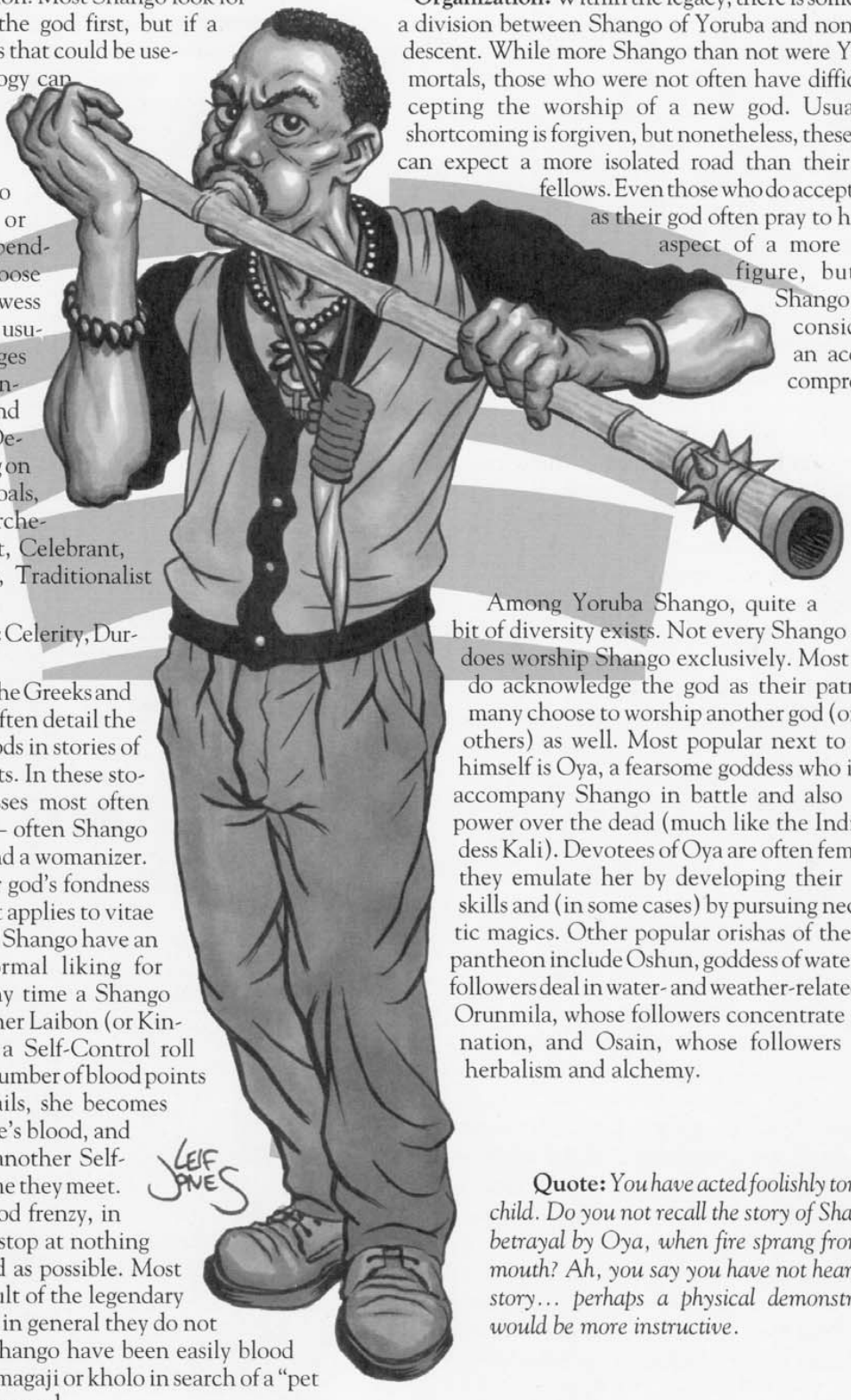
Xi Dundu: They seek to undo everything we have built with the Guruhi, and solely for their own personal gain. The shadow is truly a reflection of the soul, and the Xi Dundu have neither. Do not trust them.

by the Shango on occasion. Most Shango look for a devoted follower of the god first, but if a person possesses abilities that could be useful to the legacy, theology can always be taught after the Embrace.

Character Creation: Shango tend to favor either Mental or Physical Attributes, depending on whether they choose to focus on martial prowess or on sorcery. Sorcerers usually cultivate Knowledges first, while warriors concentrate on Talents and Skills. Natures and Demeanors vary depending on an individual Shango's goals, but some common Archetypes include Architect, Celebrant, Fanatic, Judge, Martyr, Traditionalist and Visionary.

Legacy Disciplines: Celerity, Dur-An-Ki, Obfuscate

Weaknesses: Like the Greeks and the Norse, the Yoruba often detail the shortcomings of their gods in stories of their exploits and defeats. In these stories, Shango's weaknesses most often concerned hedonism — often Shango is depicted as a drunk and a womanizer. The Shango share their god's fondness for drink, but for them it applies to vitae rather than alcohol. All Shango have an even greater than normal liking for vampiric blood, and any time a Shango tastes the blood of another Laibon (or Kindred), she must make a Self-Control roll (difficulty equal to the number of blood points ingested + 3). If she fails, she becomes addicted to that vampire's blood, and the player must make another Self-Control roll the next time they meet. A failure leads to a blood frenzy, in which the Shango will stop at nothing to ingest as much blood as possible. Most Shango see this as a result of the legendary temper of their god, but in general they do not indulge it. Too many Shango have been easily blood bound by unscrupulous magaji or kholo in search of a "pet Shango" or unpaid bodyguard.



Organization: Within the legacy, there is something of a division between Shango of Yoruba and non-Yoruba descent. While more Shango than not were Yoruba as mortals, those who were not often have difficulty accepting the worship of a new god. Usually this shortcoming is forgiven, but nonetheless, these Shango can expect a more isolated road than their Yoruba fellows. Even those who do accept Shango as their god often pray to him as an aspect of a more familiar figure, but other Shango usually consider this an acceptable compromise.

Among Yoruba Shango, quite a bit of diversity exists. Not every Shango actually does worship Shango exclusively. Most Shango do acknowledge the god as their patron, but many choose to worship another god (or several others) as well. Most popular next to Shango himself is Oya, a fearsome goddess who is said to accompany Shango in battle and also to have power over the dead (much like the Indian goddess Kali). Devotees of Oya are often female, and they emulate her by developing their fighting skills and (in some cases) by pursuing necromantic magics. Other popular orishas of the Yoruba pantheon include Oshun, goddess of water, whose followers deal in water- and weather-related magic, Orunmila, whose followers concentrate on divination, and Osain, whose followers deal in herbalism and alchemy.

Quote: *You have acted foolishly tonight, child. Do you not recall the story of Shango's betrayal by Oya, when fire sprang from her mouth? Ah, you say you have not heard this story... perhaps a physical demonstration would be more instructive.*

Xi Dundu

Presumably, the Xi Dundu originated from the Congo, the very heart of darkness. Now they can be found in both central and east Africa, though some remain in the Congo.

According to the legacy's own legends, the legacy splintered over its future many centuries ago. Part were content to remain as they were, while the other faction, mostly comprised of neonates, wanted to use sorcery to increase its strength and put it on a level with the Antediluvians. During a profane rite, something went horribly wrong. Many of the Xi Dundu fell to the ground, writhing in horrible agony. The only way they were able to escape the torment was by fleeing into the river.

The Xi Dundu's ancestral home had rejected them and they were forced to make their way by water, out of the Congo. Some migrated through to Central African Republic, while the majority traveled along the Congo River until they reached Lake Tanganyika, which bordered what is tonight the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania. The Shadows entered Tanzania, and when the earth did not reject them, they continued their migration into the Rift Valley and Kenya.

Whether it was because of their long ordeal and migration, or simply because of their very nature, the Xi Dundu are fiercely bound together. They have learned to work in unison, and (unlike many legacies) they are able to recognize the value in a concerted effort. Aggressive by nature, the Xi Dundu prefer to lead rather than follow. Although the Guruhi hold the seats of power at the present, the Xi Dundu have set their sights on usurping them.

Coming from the very core of the Ebony Kingdom, the Shadows have taken a mantle of supremacy as lords of the night. They use their network of allies to spread superstitious tales of their terror and power, to further claim the night as theirs and theirs alone. Headstrong and severe, the Shadows rarely bother to hide their ambitions. They can be cruel and forthright, or they can play at games of subversion suggesting that perhaps the Guruhi aren't the best leaders of the Ebony Kingdom after all — and that perhaps the "dark continent" needs a similarly dark faction to take up that mantle.

Nickname: Shadows

Appearance: Although legend suggests that they originated in the Congo, the Xi Dundu have Embraced many of the peoples indigenous to central and east Africa. Many of the Shadows most resemble the Masai. They are often tall and lean, with startling white teeth against their obsidian skin. They are comfortable wearing the suits of the affluent as well as the traditional Masai beads and red cloth. Xi Dundu also continue the tradition of piercing, mortification and body modification, and some of the females have holes so large in their ears that their lobes brush their shoulders. The women also sport intricate beaded collars while the men wear several bracelets on a single arm. If nothing else, the Shadows know how to blend in.

Haven: Xi Dundu typically keep close quarters. If out in the savannas, they often adopt the Masai habit of building a few dung huts and surrounding them with a stick fence with a diameter no more than several yards. If they are in Nairobi or other larger cities, the Shadows typically have quarters large enough to house most of the regional Laibon as well as their retainers so that they are all under the same roof.

Stereotypes

Akunanse: Their wisdom could be a power to reckon with and use, if only that wisdom didn't make them truly a part of the jungle and numbered as one of the beasts.

Followers of Set: I find it best to keep my distance, not knowing what it is exactly these snakes want. I'm not sure they do, either.

Guruhi: They are preeminent... for now. But times are changing, even for those who would resist it.

Ishtarri: Not originally one of us, though they have wormed their way in rather expertly. Useful warlords when they aren't lost to their physical desires and addictions.

Kinyonyi: From time to time, I have hired them. But I trust them only so far.

Naglopers: Witch doctors, sorcerers and graveyard scavengers. If I could get them to spread my sinister tales instead of theirs, the fears of both kine and Laibon would flow like an unstoppable wave over this Kingdom.

Osebo: These leopards are more like lapdogs to the Guruhi. And since they can't change their spots, they will be put down like rabid beasts when the time is right.

Shango: They spend too much of their time searching for their divine purpose and carrying out Guruhi business for my taste. Better to avoid them until the Guruhi finally fall and then annihilate them.

Background: Originally, the Xi Dundu were hunters from the Congo, skilled and fearless. Now, many of the legacy come from a variety of backgrounds. Imperious and ruthless personalities are highly prized, however, as well as political shrewdness and those who excel at the art of manipulation. In the end, the Xi Dundu Embrace those individuals they believe will best serve the collective legacy for however long they might be useful.

Character Creation: The Shadows often share similar aggressive Natures and Demeanors, and Physical and Social Attributes are the most valued, with Mental a close second. They have to have the strength to survive the plains. Skills and Knowledges are also common. Backgrounds many Xi Dundu find desirable include Influence, Allies and Resources.

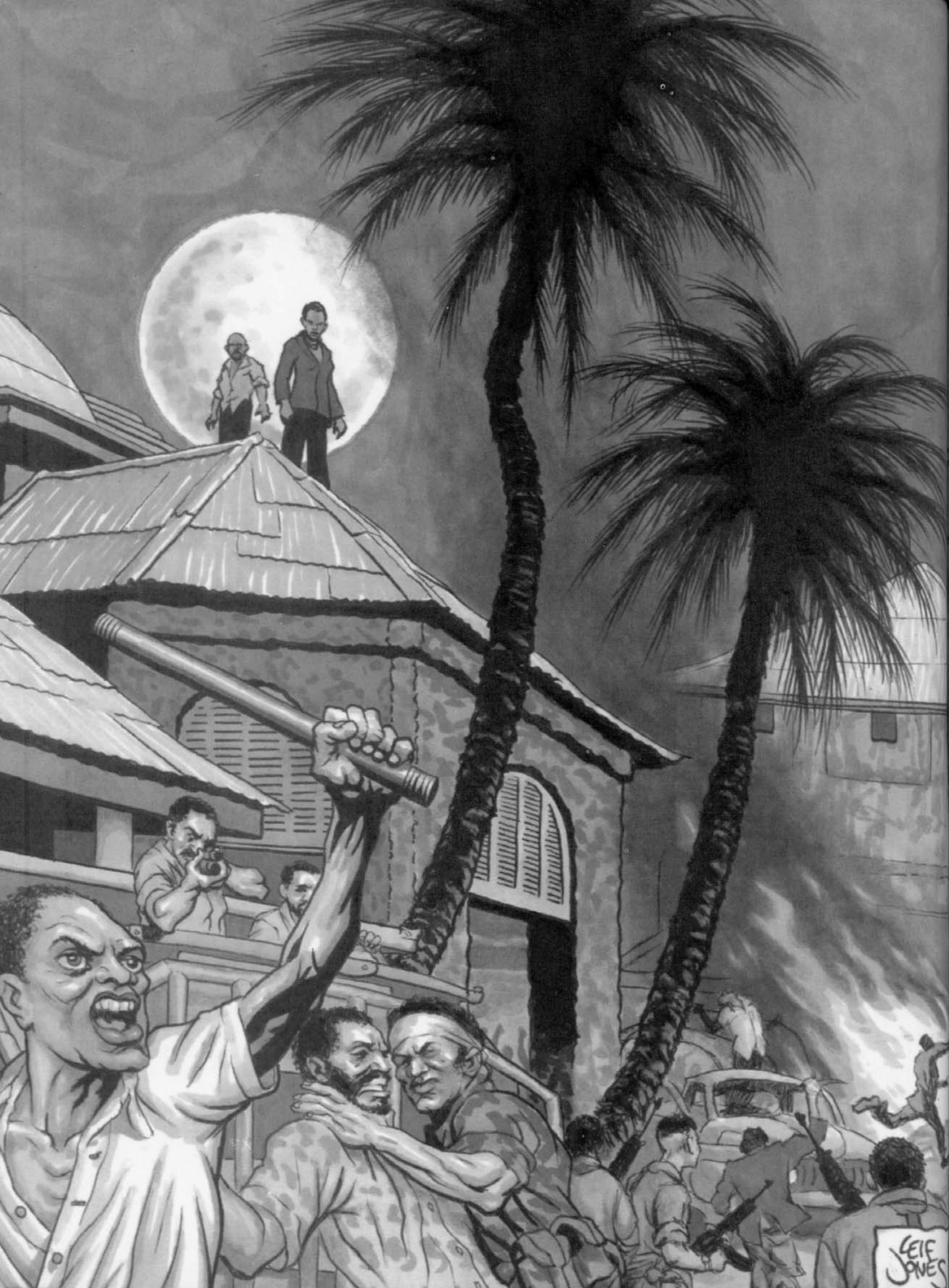
Legacy Disciplines: Dominate, Obtenebration, Potence



Weaknesses: Xi Dundu vampires cast no shadows. The Bavili believe that when a man dies, his soul flees though his mouth and he can no longer cast a shadow. Many suspect that this belief originated as the result of mortals' encounters with a Xi Dundu. Some ponder the obvious vanity of the Xi Dundu and wonder if the lack of a shadow is some sort of divine retribution, while others believe that the very earth rejects their touch. In fact, when the Xi Dundu rest, they must not be touched by their native soil or their strength is halved for 24 hours.

Organization: Unlike some of the other legacies, the Xi Dundu have a very strict and regimented loyalty to one another. That does not preclude them from eliminating a member of the legacy who has grown weak or useless if that is for their greater good, but it is something they prefer to avoid. As a method of weeding out some hidden infirmity, the Xi Dundu typically take a newly Embraced into the savanna where she must kill a lion barehanded… or herself be killed.

Quote: *I don't need to see my shadow to know that I leave my mark on the earth wherever I tread. Be fearful, because our darkness is growing, whether you can see it or not.*


LEIF JONES

Chapter Three: Character Creation

You know you can't ride the concept of a horse, but still I try.

—Andrew Bird, *Case in Point*

They are symbolic creatures; the bearers of a divine warning sent in flesh. Nothing lives inside a Laibon that is not stolen from mortals. Don't forget this. Whatever part of the soul is left, it swims in blood. Starve the monster, and the soul dries up. Gorge the monster, and the soul will drown.

In this way, **Vampire** characters are allegorical, just like the vampire myths that inspire us. The fictional undead monster evoked by the game is dead on the character sheet. You give it life.

Wherever your **Vampire** characters originate, they arrive in your creative effort. It is possible to create a character from a series of isolated choices about character-sheet dots and goth fashion, but such creations tend

not to exceed the sum of their inspiration. If you approach the generation of a Laibon character as a purely mechanical endeavor, you will not find that a whole lot has changed. Which is to say, you'll be missing out on the opportunity to surprise yourself.

Think about how you find your characters. Whatever it is you do, be aware of your methods. This is arguably the point in the game when you, as a player, have the most control. Everything about your character should be the result of a decision made in the pursuit of a goal. Don't just generate your character when you could *design* her. For this one character, you get to do all the directing, casting, make-up, costuming, writing and special effects.

Keep in mind the storytelling medium for which your character is designed, though. Other performers sit at the table with you, and they have other goals in mind for their characters. Sometimes your character will be the star, and sometimes she'll play a supporting role. Learn to recognize which character in the troupe should best occupy center stage in a given scene, then use your character as an instrument for all the storytelling tricks you want to employ in your roles as writer, actor and also audience. Play "good cop" to another character's "bad cop," or ask another character for advice based on his background. If your character doesn't serve a particular narrative effect, you should know why and share that with the troupe.

Using this Chapter

This chapter outlines the process for creating indigenous African **Vampire** characters. Old traits are re-examined, new traits are offered, and advice on a variety of player-specific topics is presented for you to review. Laibon follow a distinctly different moral barometer, and that is also explained here. Bring your creative tools with you, but leave your preconceptions at the border.

This chapter assumes that you have at least some familiarity with **Vampire: The Masquerade**. As such, the information herein expands on that which is found in the original rulebook. Though everything you need to create an African vampire character is explained in this chapter, novice players should familiarize themselves with the core ideas of **Vampire** before blazing new trails in the African setting.

Certain topics in this chapter deal with complicated optional elements of character creation that might seem like work to light-hearted players. Don't take on any challenges that could jeopardize your enjoyment of the game. Likewise, if you or your troupe has other methods for developing characters, use those. If you're looking for something new, though, you've come to the right continent.

Getting Started

Creating a character is a multi-step process that will help you turn ideas into a realized persona to serve as your agent in the story. You will turn inspiration into ideas and refine them into a character concept. Then, using this chapter as a guide, you will translate your concept into a character, modeled with game mechanics and tracked with a character sheet.

The character-creation system grants all players an equal number of dots to use as narrative instruments for the description of their characters. No matter how complicated or grandiose your character concept is, you have a finite number of dots to allocate. Be confident that you have all the tools you need to accurately model your character, regardless of the game's mechanical restrictions. The system is flexible enough to accommodate any character if you prioritize the descriptive elements of the character carefully. Those restrictions apply to every player, remember. Since **Vampire** stories usually involve an ensemble cast, the system keeps the characters relatively even-powered so that a character's importance cannot be undermined by statistical tweaking. This equality is meant to encourage you to focus on the storytelling game, rather than the numbers game.

Every circle you fill in on the character sheet evinces a small detail about your character, so the dots are empowered beyond a measure of dice. Anyone reading your character sheet should be able to infer some facts about your character from the selection of dots. Others might presume quite a bit about a person who places great emphasis on Finance and Subterfuge, for example. Whether your character exists as an example of (or an exception to) those presumptions is up to you, but know that everything the character sheet tracks can be considered a character trait and not just a mechanical trait.

This is one reason why the dots you have to spend during character creation are measured so strictly. An even scale supplies a sure context in which every dot has value. So placing three dots in Brawl doesn't just suggest that your character is a mean fighter, it also indicates what portion of your available descriptive resources you've spent to convey that fact to others.

Once again, keep your goals in perspective. Some day the troupe will fondly recall your performance during the game, not how cleverly you assigned three dots to Firearms.

The Storyteller and Character Creation

With the important change of environment from standard **Vampire** stories, it is a good idea for even veteran troupes to start new chronicles using beginner

Pitfalls

You could already have a marvelous character concept in mind but find yourself hesitant to actually put it in play. This can happen frequently with storytelling games based in real and foreign settings. Sometimes, regardless of genuine interest and enthusiasm, the following two hang-ups limit the imaginations of potential players.

Ignorance

Even restricting this setting to sub-Saharan Africa, the region is vast and diverse. Although the continent is commonly talked about as a whole, its parts are often fiercely independent and topically unrelated. It is a large and complicated subject to learn.

Start small. Most chronicles focus on a small section of Africa, be it a city or Laibon domain or a stretch of coastline, at least initially. Learn as much as you can (or want to) about that region. Read about the topics that are most relevant to a storytelling game: environment, culture, history, current events. One advantage you have is that the chronicle is not likely to be set somewhere boring.

Strictly speaking, this book contains all of the information you absolutely need. Not only does the World of Darkness deviate from the real world, it does so at the whim of the Storyteller. **Vampire** stories are a sort of modern myth, after all. While you should strive to bring real-world details into the story, your story does not need to be bound by facts. As long as your stories focus on the undead, you should be concerned foremost with atmosphere, theme and mood.

If certain facets of African lore have always been of interest to you, the story is a great way to make them interesting for others, too. At least it's a terrific excuse to lend out books on the subject. Telling stories has long been an accepted means of exploring topics, and you cannot be expected to explore only those topics on which you're an expert. You might not need to know anything before the game other than what you know now, anyway. Relevant information will be imparted through the chronicle's stories, and if you can keep track of vampire social structures, you can absorb new information about Africa.

Never forget that the antidote for ignorance is learning. If you don't know something, find it out. If a subject doesn't interest you, don't involve it in your **Vampire** stories.

Fear

For some people reading this book, the subject of Africa plays host to several delicate topics (colonialism, HIV, slavery, etc.) that might seem to be inappropriate for a game. The fear of dealing with serious topics in a storytelling game is common, and it stems from respect as often as it does from ignorance. If it helps, remind yourself that a storytelling game is as much a descendant of theater as it is of gaming. It is not inherently disrespectful to address real-world issues in the medium of a storytelling game.

Many fears are the result of ignorance. Beyond heeding the advice you've already been offered on that front, consider the consequences of examining real problems through storytelling. In all probability, your troupe is a collection of somewhat like-minded individuals who trust and respect each other on some level. As long as you are comfortable discussing a given topic with the troupe, you should have no other audience to fear. A private, creative and cooperative group of people sounds like a fine forum for the exploration of serious subjects. As long as you don't offend or pressure anyone at the game table, what are you afraid of? The international community isn't going to judge you based on your game sessions.

Besides, the game encourages you to see the world through someone else's eyes, which is an excellent way to better appreciate real issues. It's improvisational, too, so you can't expect whatever stories you play out to result in structured, meaningful revelations on such monolithic subjects as the HIV epidemic. The loose back-and-forth style of a storytelling game makes it well suited to topical exploration, though. The game is halfway between a theatrical parable and a panel debate already, so why would storytelling a parable be less acceptable than writing one? Confronting and discussing those things that frighten us is one way to disarm our fears. The bottom line is that if you leave the game table better informed (of the facts or of your own worldview) than when you arrived, you will have made the most of your hobby.

Unless your game sessions are being scrutinized by an outside party, you should decide as a group what is appropriate for your game and then proceed without fear. If it seems like contemplating the Ebony Kingdom's problems is detrimental to your good time, at least respect that such problems are a factual part of the setting. However you choose to play your game, make sure that the troupe has chosen one way or the other. Don't plow ahead on assumptions.

Remember, this is important. If someone is uncomfortable with the game for any reason, stop play and do what's necessary to make it fun again for everyone involved.

methods. Go back and re-examine the advice on p. 102 of **Vampire: The Masquerade** on this topic. It's a good idea to create characters as a group, with the Storyteller, and be sure that all players know what style of game the troupe has in mind. There are new challenges in this for long-time players, and, besides, your fun is worth the time.

Come to the gaming table aware of your own expectations, knowing that you might not be expecting the same thing your Storyteller has in mind. If your troupe has a complex, interwoven collection of chronicles in its past, you might be predicting the inclusion of familiar elements in an African chronicle. The Storyteller, though, might be planning an African story as an exotic or mysterious counterpoint to what's come before. By assuming, you risk missing out on fascinating characters and engrossing stories that you would otherwise imagine.

Worse, by not discussing the new chronicle as a group, you could leave some players confused or frustrated. So much of the typical **Vampire** setting is different in Africa that it's easy for even experienced troupes to find their common interests drifting apart. The story within the chronicle might be mysterious, but the goals of your gaming group should not be.

Concept

At the heart of every character is a key concept that explains her persona. This distilled summary doesn't have to be short, but neither should it be utterly complete. It's the gist of the character, the organ that gives life to the numbers.

A concept can be specific or general, wildly surprising or comfortably accessible. It doesn't describe the whole character or necessarily even her physical self. The best concepts are like kernels, an essential core that will grow in time into something more complicated or complete. Therefore, an ideal concept is open-ended, maybe describing someone on the cusp of a new era in his unlife (as all young vampires are) or a person involved in some ongoing scheme or organization that could support stories for the chronicle.

It can be enough to simply avoid picking a concept with too much backstory. If your character's defining moments are all behind her, what's the point of following her through a whole chronicle? You character might have a detailed or exciting history, but she must either be actively looking for more out of undeath or otherwise be willing to venture into the World of Darkness once again.

Finding a Concept

Concepts come from many places. Players have no protocol, no secret method for finding ideas. The game imposes no requirements that an idea must meet in order to be suitable for a **Vampire** character (though specific chronicles might have certain requirements). A good idea is one that fascinates, amuses, excites or even frightens you. A better idea is one that affects the entire troupe.

One reliable way to find a concept is to narrow down your inspirations. Use your interests, your available resources and your goals for the character as criteria to whittle down the possibilities and home in on the ideas that fulfill your criteria. Then you can assemble those ideas into a character concept.

The Ebony Kingdom setting does a great deal of this for you. This book contains inspiration for physical details, motivations, backgrounds and organizations for you to use. It also sketches out themes and atmosphere that serve as the criteria for selecting your inspirations. African history, culture and politics are bristling with details to inspire you. News, wildlife footage and art impart a visceral sense of the place and are easy to come across with Internet searches. Myths and folklore — vampiric or African — can lead you to strange and fabulous concepts. Even simple contemplation or brainstorming about narrative themes or classic human struggles can remind you of topics, theories or ideals that you can build a character to represent. Whatever works for you is fair game, as long as the resulting concept is vivid and captivating.

New concepts don't require breakthroughs. An unlimited number of characters could be invented as figures of religious crisis or political corruption or naïve loyalty. More than anything, don't be stymied by the desire for originality. Great ideas are routinely assembled from used parts. At the conceptual level, a great many of literature's most memorable characters are markedly similar. In fact, creating the next character in a literary tradition is established technique. Try playing the next descendant in the Captain Ahab line if you like. See what happens. Even classic character concepts look different when seen through the lenses of the vampire legend and the Ebony Kingdom.

What makes a classic concept fresh again is its intersection with the new component, African vampires. Combining two like (or unlikely) ingredients often results in a mixture that is intuitive but unexpected, easy to understand but maybe difficult to imagine. Many different ingredients could be combined this way, but you still have your advantage. Most of the character concepts that appeal to you haven't yet been paired with the idea of the Laibon.

Since the Laibon are creatures of duality, the creative benefit you get as a designer isn't very restrictive. Pair your character idea with the supernatural aspect of the Laibon or the mortal aspect, and you will find a playable character. Highlight the idea of the vampire as a deathless predatory monster feeding on its cousins, or focus on the spiritual ruin of a mortal damned with a

divine curse. Touch on the tensions of a secret civil war of ages or go with the fast rush of short unlives on the edge of society. These are all ideas evoked by the modern nights of Africa and each one of them plays out differently depending on which undead doctor, politician, warlord, businesswoman, actor, farmer, truck-driver or killer you match them with.

Refining the Concept

Turning a concept into a real-seeming character isn't easy. Designing a character who represents a moral, theme or conflict is as much an emotional endeavor as it is a cerebral challenge. Realizing a concept can seem to diminish it, but a realized, active character is the only kind valuable to a **Vampire** chronicle.

Concern yourself foremost with a character that is playable (by you) and compatible with the chronicle. That's your responsibility as a player. The greatest thought-provoking idea for a character does you no good if you are unwilling or unable to portray him in the game. A believable, enchanting character is wasted if it doesn't fit the chronicle. Once you have a concept selected from the multitude, use the boundaries of the chronicle to refine it.

An especially focused chronicle might make some of the thematic decisions for you. The Storyteller might let you know that he's interested in a chronicle that explores the young-versus-old conflict with episodic stories of brutal violence. Expert killers and other characters who are comfortable and experienced with violence will betray the chronicle's aim. Concepts that have natural or surprising associations with violence might include doctors, missionaries, tourists, untested soldiers and fiery rebels. Many possible concepts are still available to you, but you have a ballpark to play in now.

Bringing a concept into your reach as a player requires an honest awareness of your playing style. Certain character concepts might appeal to you intellectually but be unwieldy in practice. Avoid characters that you would be uncomfortable or unwilling to speak for, especially seriously. Roles that would thrill you on a movie screen are not always suitable as personas for storytelling games.

At the same time, go ahead and try concepts that challenge you as a player. Nuances add subtle realism to a concept while giving you a reliable grip on the character. Behavioral or speech quirks are good for getting you quickly into a character's routine and signaling to the other players when you're speaking in character. Variety is key here, lest you risk your character becoming a cartoon. A few various cues suggest habits from a lifetime of lessons learned. An exaggerated pantomime is comedy. Ground a character with details to help the whole troupe understand and imagine her. Burying her in minutiae will make any stray behavior seem out of character.

Fictional Ethics

As a player in a game, you might want your character's sense of right and wrong to resemble yours, especially if you don't have a lot of experience with storytelling games. Thus you can evaluate situations in the story from a single perspective (yours) and know exactly how your character would feel about the decisions you make (that is, she would feel the way you do). This method is acceptable in that it gets you playing the game right away, which is the real purpose of character creation. The drawback to this method, at least at the start, is that you miss out on the game's deeper challenges to your imagination and your worldview.

As the creator of an intriguing and engrossing alter ego, you might want to craft a character whose moral outlook is very different from your own. Every encounter your character faces is a potential thought-provoking quandary when you have to determine how things would look through someone else's eyes. On one hand, you might learn something about yourself or others this way by really stretching the way you think about the themes of the game. On the other hand, you risk alienating yourself from your character by playing like this. While you might stick with a novel or a movie with characters you can't relate to, you may not want to spend your time playing a character like that. Always leave yourself whatever characteristics you need to keep a grip on the character.

Designing the Brood

No one hits my brother but me. That simple rule, more than anything else, is what separates a Laibon brood from a Kindred coterie. A familial bond makes Laibon of the same legacy genuinely interested in the welfare of her legacy "relatives." While Ventrue Kindred checkmate each other in fatal political dances in New York, pockets of Akunanse gather briefly in Addis Ababa to share information. Of course, there are as many reasons for loyalty as there are children of Cagn and their motives frequently clash. Infighting is common, but it is overlooked in the presence of outside threats as a matter of custom.

This means that the members of a brood might have important responsibilities to the other legacy members in the domain, responsibilities that supersede those of the brood. A balance of allegiances is always necessary, and every vampire will be forced to choose some night. What choice your character makes is up to you, but as players, you could use this bond between legacy relatives to your advantage.

Maybe now is the time to try playing variations on a theme. Clever players and Storytellers will find all sorts of storytelling opportunities in a brood of like-blooded Laibon. The familial dynamic becomes the familiar

component in the strange new context of undead "siblings." A one-legacy brood makes it easy to fit within the geographic and cultural constraints of the chronicle and gives every player a roleplaying brace without putting the weight on any one player. A group of Kinyonyi fixers traveling Africa in a big rig could find itself entangled in all sorts of political threads across the continent. A small riverside settlement in Kenya might serve as the proving ground for young Xi Dundu; they claim the domain and dominate an unknowing flock until the Guruhi catch wind of what's going on. Suppose an internationally trafficked palace of sin is passed down to a young brood of Ishtarri with the understanding that only one of them will lay claim to the place in the end. There's plenty of room for every player in any legacy. Cagn's blood manifests in as many ways are there are bodies to house it.

A unifying concept for the brood doesn't have to be mechanically restrictive, either. The "default" story involves a brood of the Fourteenth Generation, which is weak and foolish and still swayed by ideas like companionship and trust. Whatever social ties exist between mortals could be twisted for vampiric purposes. If you can't manage to meaningfully connect every character due to individual concepts or chronicle requirements, look into forming a social chain between the characters. Make sure every character has an established relationship with at least one other character. These connections shouldn't be hierarchical unless such a relationship is implicit in a character's concept. Nor should these connections necessarily imply likes or loyalties unless that's the goal of the players. Just having the characters acquainted is enough to start with. Part of the fun in this method of brood-creation is seeing how these connections develop between the characters over time.

Pursuing more complicated links between characters has its rewards, too. Innately understood relationships can be a joy to storytell. Improvisation becomes a simpler thing when the players involved have a common situation of reference. Suppose two mortal brothers are Embraced by Laibon of different legacies. You and another player have the common relationship between brothers as a foundation and the complex relationship of divergent Laibon as a direction to explore together. Slight differences in concept can exaggerate the characters' differences in the game. Suppose those two brothers were Embraced by different sires of the same legacy. Now the contrast between characters aims at an even more specific theme: nature versus nurture.

Concept: Vampiric archivist, keeper of records for the Guruhi, based in Addis Ababa.

Step One: Akunanse are known for gathering wisdom, which fits the concept. Demeanor: Conformist (for the appearance of loyalty). Nature: Traditionalist (from a genuine belief in the old ways).

Step Two: Mental is primary (to reflect a predisposition to intellectual pursuits), Social is secondary (honed with appearances in Laibon domains).

Step Three: Knowledges are primary (from graduate studies paid for by the magaji of Addis Ababa), Skills are secondary (hobbies pursued after reading about them). Academics, Law, Politics and Computer get maximum dots (the magaji is paying for the best and will not accept shortcomings). Etiquette, Expression and Subterfuge get high ranks for presentations at court.

Step Four: Disciplines get low, unfocused totals. Mentor, Contacts and Status each get one dot from inclusion at princely functions. Aye gets seven dots, Orun gets three (this character is reserved, even mundane, confined by social limits).

Step Five: Freebie points go to increase Contacts to 3 and buy more dots in Linguistics, Investigation and Alertness (from a decade of experiences amidst vampiric trendsetters).

Concept: Treacherous antiquarian bastard, seeking out items of historical and occult importance while selling off the cultural heritage of Africa.

Step One: Legacy: Ishtarri, the legacy most likely to continue regular dealings with mortals. Demeanor: Architect (selling artifacts for the benefit of poorer nations), Nature: Survivor (whatever keeps him in goods).

Step Two: Social is primary (from fundraisers and finagling), Mental is secondary (business savvy and somewhat educated).

Step Three: Talents are primary (a natural with Empathy, Subterfuge and Expression), otherwise Performance, Occult, Academics and Finance are key to a successful antiquities agent.

Step Four: Two dots each in Auspex and Presence (an innate understanding and mastery of business associates). Contacts, Resources and Artifact each get one dot. Orun gets four dots and Aye six (almost halfway between human society and occult predisposition).

Step Five: Contacts, Resources and Retainers get attention here. Generation is raised to reflect a vampire old enough to appreciate certain antiquities when they were new.

Complex relationships cause a brood to face inward more often. If the brood is designed to evince the themes of the chronicle specifically, this might not be a problem. If cliques develop between the brood's players, a more serious problem is possible. Remember that no matter how your characters interact, you and the other players make up a troupe with a common goal. Players should respect the Storyteller's goal for the chronicle, and Storytellers should strive to cultivate stories centered on the brood.

The Process

All the steps of character creation are explained here. For Laibon characters, the information presented here supersedes that found in **Vampire: The Masquerade.** Players will still need to reference that book for descriptions of traits that are not reprinted here, however. Although the process is fundamentally the same, even experienced players should reconsider the steps of creation, rather than miss an important piece of information.

Examples of character concepts undergoing the creation process are found in sidebars throughout this chapter. Use one as the basis for your own character or just co-opt the odd idea here or there.

Step One: Character Concept

After everything you've just read, you still have one more thing to do with your character concept as the first step in the process of character creation. You must keep the concept clear in your mind throughout the process. Other ideas will occur to you during the process, many of which have nothing to do with your current character concept. Stay on course. Jot down whatever ideas come to you, and store them away for some future Laibon if they are not right for this character. Avoid accidentally drifting away from your concept during creation. A satisfying character requires cohesion in addition to great ideas. Start simple, and let your character become more complex through storytelling.

Legacy

As with Western Kindred, Laibon inherit the blood of their sires through the Embrace. A line of vampiric blood is called a legacy, and it is some measure of a Laibon's cursed genealogy. Certain supernatural influences are common to the blood, and behavioral changes might surface in a childe after her mortal blood is gone. Cultural commonality is typical, as Laibon traditionally Embrace only those sorts who would likely be welcomed by the legacy.

Legacies are regarded somewhat like families by Laibon. Although many bitter struggles go on within a family, it usually bands together to defend itself from outside assaults. As with mortal families, however, sometimes fatal rivalries grow out of strife between relatives.

The Storyteller has the right to forbid certain legacies from play for a given chronicle. The legacies have geographical, social and narrative connotations that must be superceded by the theme and mood of individual stories. Since Laibon associate so heavily along these family lines, an entire legacy may be restricted as a means of upholding the atmosphere of the game. Since every character is an individual foremost, and secondarily the member of a legacy, you should still be able to play any character you like with just a little bit of adjustment to your concept.

The thinning blood of African Kindred would seem to lend itself to larger numbers of rogue or Caitiff vampires, but in fact, the opposite is true. Laibon are less apt to tolerate the existence of a creature with no strong ties to the ancestry that grants him power. Such creatures are usually executed when they are young, and they're significantly less common than they are in the Western world anyway. Also, Laibon without legacies have very few avenues with which to interact with the larger Laibon society. This makes the number of rogue, "autarkis" Laibon extremely difficult to estimate. Since Laibon with no families have no rights or powers under the Tenets, there is little reason to keep track of them.

Nature and Demeanor (Archetypes)

These traits function exactly as they do in **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Select Archetypes that describe the sort of Laibon you want to play. Assign the extroverted descriptor to your character's Demeanor as an explanation of her behavior and attitude. A second (or, more rarely, the same) Archetype should be assigned as your character's Nature to describe her introverted attitude or the way she sees herself.

In **Vampire: The Masquerade**, Nature is defined as being "real," while Demeanor is called a "mask." Objectively, these are fine concepts for you to grasp as a player. If you have a lot of experience portraying that two-faced model and the Archetypes have become secondary to your roleplaying efforts, try to look at them in a different way. Every character in the World of Darkness has these traits, mortal and undead alike. How self-aware are most folk of these descriptors? How solid is the divide between them? Who is really capable of honestly identifying these sorts of character traits for herself?

You should strive to blur the lines between Nature and Demeanor. Especially for newborn monsters, it is often difficult to come to reconcile the difference between what you are and what you act or feel like. A character who begins with a clear picture of herself has a great deal of her story told before she steps foot on stage.

Finally, you should be aware that Laibon have greater difficulty separating their physical bodies from their psychological or spiritual selves. Make sure you understand the Laibon Virtues Orun and Aye so that you can wisely select your Archetypes in this step. Orun and Aye are explained on page 82.

Step Two: Select Attributes

This is the first step in illustrating your character with game mechanics. Attributes are unchanged, mechanically, from **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Every Attribute begins with one dot for free. Assign seven dots to your character's most developed group of Attributes, five dots to her secondary group and three dots to her weakest group.

Attributes are integral to a Laibon's survival. Don't underestimate the importance of your character's fundamental Strength, Charisma or Perception. Relying solely on education or tool-based skills results in the Final Death of a great many foolish bloodsuckers. Raw instincts, honed might and a pretty face have survived artillery and portable electronics all across the Ebony Kingdom.

Consider the wildly different environments that could shape your character's Attributes. Presumably, her primary Attribute group has been partly responsible for her survival. Cape Town might inspire Social prowess, but a shining morning on the veldt will incinerate the most charming vampire. A smart Laibon might manage to keep out of such situations.

Attributes do carry over from mortal life. Imagine what your character has faced prior to the start of the story and make sure that these traits reflect her successes and failures. Better still, the dots you have to spend are a fixed part of the game, but your interpretation of those dots isn't. Attributes don't just go up over the course of life or unlife. Your Laibon might be an inept loser with a single dot in Manipulation tonight, but she could have been a real seductress in the daylight. Maybe she was a sculptor with a good eye and a light touch when she breathed, but now her fingers feel dead and bloodless. The change into undeath is a curse, with real and ugly repercussions. Africa's a different place, so look at everything like it's new again.

Step Three: Select Abilities

The three categories of Abilities reflect the way those Abilities are learned. The application of those Abilities is up to you. Prioritize the Ability groups for your character and assign dots within them as you see fit. You have 13 dots to allocate for your character's primary group, nine dots for the secondary group and five dots for the tertiary group. No Ability may be assigned more than three dots during this step.

Don't miss out on this chance to render your character with details. A lot can be expressed through your choice of Abilities and the way you prioritize the groups.

The cultural and developmental disparity in Africa exaggerates the differences between Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Not every Laibon in every part of this huge continent has the same access to Abilities, but the game mechanics can't tell you what options were available to your character. That's up to you and your Storyteller.

When you prioritize the Ability groups, you are describing the options that were available to your character in life and, perhaps, in early unlife. Whether this is a factor of your character's geographic, economic or political origins or the result of cultural bias or something else is dependent on the concept you've come up with. Not everyone in Africa has access to public libraries and Internet bookstores for learning Knowledges. Many of the Abilities that a neonate can obtain by studying in Addis Ababa for a future as an Akunanse archivist are unattainable to an elderly shepherd embraced by Kinyonyi rebels in Mauritania. And, just as importantly, vice versa.

That said, there are all sorts of folk everywhere. Don't feel pinned down by stereotypes. Opportunities are circumstantial. Play an exception, if that's what you want to do. Knowledges are passed down in more different ways, and Talents can be learned under many circumstances. Three dots in Medicine learned from the Masai won't look the same in practice as three dots demonstrated by a Cape Town paramedic, but the game effect will be the same. Mogadishu has its computer experts and some Nuer tribesman know how to drive.

When you assign dots to Abilities, you're describing the choices your character made from her available options. Avoid assigning dots only to those Abilities that are most valuable for a kick-ass Laibon, unless your concept involves actual ass-kicking or experience in such matters. By selecting only those Abilities that you think will be most valuable to your character as a game construct, you risk forgetting those that your character learned as a mortal and expected to use later in life. **Vampire** isn't a game about tournament-style battle royales between supernatural competitors, even when a story teems with violence. The stories are about enduring through ingenuity and guile. It's about the survival of the self. Surviving a suspenseful jeopardy situation with unexpected uses of personally distinguishing Abilities is thrilling and surprising. Predicting that maximum dots in Firearms rock in a gunfight is neither.

Yes, Laibon survive in their brutal world through demonstrations of greater brutality many times. Part of playing a new Laibon involves learning that. At the same time, the cagiest of the old Guruhi manage to be responsible for the elimination of a great many Laibon without ever seeing them in person. These Laibon claim the greatest domains on the continent.

Remember that some part of every Laibon is a mortal in a horrific new context. When your Laibon was kine, did she expect to wax poetic in front of an undead king? Did she have any idea that her sculptor's hands would one night grow claws?

Step Four: Select Advantages

Now is the time when your earthly character becomes a supernatural monster. Most of the traits that define your Laibon against her kin are decided here, late in the process. Remember that your character will grow more distinctive as she goes through unlife. It isn't necessarily a drawback to resemble another character at the table at this point in the process. You'll need some similarities in order to keep your group operating together, after all.

Disciplines

The supernatural qualities that make Laibon eternal, masterful and hungry are passed down in blood from the earliest of their kind. The power that defined those who founded the modern legacies isn't the blood itself, but it burns blood like fuel. It is the curse, put into the world through Cagn and thinned with centuries of stolen life, that gives the monsters power and makes them terrible. It draws fools willingly to the curse and convinces the rest to endure through undeath. It's the Disciplines that give a legacy power and make neonates resemble their vampiric ancestors.

Allocate four dots to your character's starting Disciplines. Only those three Disciplines associated with your legacy are eligible for purchase in this step. You may purchase further Disciplines you like with freebie points later on.

A Laibon's mastery of the Disciplines is limited by her supernatural potential, which is itself represented by the Virtue called Orun (see page 82). Regardless of how many dots a Laibon has in her Disciplines or the Attributes and Abilities called into question by their systems, she may never use more dice on a Discipline roll than she has dots in Orun. It is suspected, but not empirically known, that Laibon fewer than three or four generations removed from Cagn might not be subject to this ceiling on supernatural power.

Laibon characters begin a full generation further removed from the source of their line than Western Kindred, yet they begin with greater supernatural power. Where does this added power come from? Do Laibon enjoy a special connection with Cagn, or are they somehow infused by some power of the land? Seeking the answers to these sorts of questions is a good way to make your allocations of Discipline dots a real part of your character. Avoiding the question is impossible; it runs red inside every vampire.

Disciplines are a part of the familial bond within the legacies of Africa. In a way, they are revered as physical manifestations of the first Laibon, like ghosts in the blood. These are heirlooms kept in the tribal body that all Laibon are destined to inherit. No Laibon is promised an explanation of her inheritance, however. Imagine the possible ways your new character could have gained her current mastery of her Disciplines. Experimentation or an accidental surfacing of power might explain dots scattered across the three Disciplines, while time with a mentor could result in a focus on one power.

If you decide that these abilities surfaced without training or education, consider how you could select levels in Disciplines that symbolize some inner working of your character. What Discipline powers could be interpreted as supernatural manifestations of your character's personality? To take the notion further, brainstorm some quirks that make your character's Disciplines distinctive. Brutal Laibon who think of their ancestors as the Beast might growl, hiss or drool with every display of power. A character who internalizes her curse as a well of magic might prefer to handle water or blood as symbolic foci of her power's source. It isn't necessary to be grandiose or shocking for your quirks to be effective. Any unique spice you can give to your Disciplines will give the game added flavor, too.

Some knowledge of Disciplines is taught from sire to childe. Certain circles of learned Laibon, usually in

Concept: Abandoned 14th-generation nomad, roaming under the radar of the elder establishment.

Step One: Legacy: Osebo (for the rough-and-ready appearance, as well as the nice complication that his absentee sire might work directly for the Guruhi). Demeanor: Deviant, Nature: Loner (damn the kingdom, unlife belongs to every undead).

Step Two: Physical is primary (as it was in mortal life, for survival), Mental is secondary (for planning, scheming and survival).

Step Three: Skills are primary, with Drive, Survival, Animal Ken and Crafts a point of focus since mortal life. Talents are secondary (and necessary for survival outside society). Knowledges are tertiary and actively regarded as blue-blooded fluff.

Step Four: Auspex and Potence get two dots, for recognizing and overcoming obstacles. Artifact gets a dot, as a means of tying the character into Laibon society and forcing him to deal with other vampires in the chronicle. Contacts and Resources each get a dot, for a truck/ haven and some favors owed.

Step Five: Freebies go to Celerity and more Abilities (Stealth, Melee, Dodge) to illustrate a long backstory of in-the-dirt survival and far-reaching travel.

domains that are close-knit for the sake of secrecy, elect to have a single mentor educate all fledglings. Sometimes they do so in order to control the flow of information, sometimes they do so to suppress or direct a naïve childe. It's not impossible that certain organized records concerning Disciplines are maintained in even the most loosely aligned legacies. Any Laibon who gains a certain level of power might wish to pass it on to those who follow behind. Beware all teachings, of course. Disinformation is the favorite defense of bloodsuckers on every continent.

Backgrounds

Backgrounds represent real, and sometimes physical, connections between the character and the outside world. Traditionalism, tribalism and sometimes severe isolation result in a small number of Backgrounds for starting Laibon. Your character has three dots worth of Backgrounds to distribute in this step. Where those dots go is largely up to you, but be aware that this trait is often subject to Storyteller adjustment.

The Backgrounds you choose have important effects beyond your character. They are external factors of your character, linked to you but not always under your control. Like a recurring location or supporting character, your Backgrounds will become part of the narrative architecture of the chronicle. The other players might have to interact with them, and the Storyteller will have to work with (or around) them when creating the chronicle. When you select Backgrounds, you must be either aware of the scope of the coming stories or willing to swap out your Backgrounds if the Storyteller asks you to.

Use the reach of your Backgrounds to form connections with the other characters in the game. Selecting similar Backgrounds can create a thematic link, but complementary Backgrounds are even better. As a player, you can help foster an intriguing relationship inside the group by picking Backgrounds that benefit characters in addition to your own. As a Laibon, your character wants others to find value in something she has. When they become dependent on it, she'll have a new way to influence them.

As the traits most restricted by the scope of a given chronicle, Backgrounds are also the most changed from **Vampire: The Masquerade.** These changes are practical, not mechanical. Those Backgrounds that are common in westernized **Vampire** games are sometimes outright absent in an African chronicle as a factor of the setting.

Virtues

Morality governs more than a Laibon's actions and restraints. It becomes the physical self. Laibon are literally shaped by their Virtues.

As a vampire, your character exists in the physical world at the intersection of two spiritual axes. You determine where between Heaven and Earth your character exists by allocating 10 dots between Orun and Aye (see p. 82). Note that these Virtues are dependent: Whatever you spend on one Virtue is sacrificed by the other.

Your character's Courage begins with three dots by default.

You may spend freebie points on any of these Virtues later, but right now you have to choose.

Without a biology or physical chemistry to influence their existence, all vampires across the globe are innately moral creatures. The course of a vampire's unlife is determined wholly by her ethics. Courage determines a character's Willpower. Orun and Aye, each a notion of existence in their own right, will fluctuate through time just as a Cainite's Humanity does, as a result of her story. The choices you make in this step create the criteria that your character will use to judge her own actions and experiences throughout the chronicle.

When assigning dots to Virtues, consider the sort of actions and environments you expect your character to be comfortable with. How far can her behavior stray from her ethics before she terrifies herself? You roll dice to determine the emotional effects of actions and experiences on your character because emotions are mutable, irrational and unpredictable. Right now, when crafting your character, is when you have a chance to determine what your character's limits are.

Remember that this is all just the starting point. The journey that every character undergoes as a protagonist challenges capabilities and comforts. Your character will change, too, as she faces eternity in the World of Darkness. How she changes depends on the choices you make and the consequences that result. Neither means anything until they are compared to the standard you set by assigning dots to your character's Virtues.

Step Five: Last Touches

The final step of character creation is a mixture of fixed figures and freeform tweaking. Following the given steps, determine your character's point-driven traits. Then go back and apply freebie points to any of the traits you defined in the first four steps.

Moral Traits

Laibon do not have Humanity scores. They have no moral traits except Virtues. A Laibon character's morality is determined by the relationship between her Orun and Aye scores.

Willpower

A Laibon's Willpower is only as good as her Courage, at first. Thus all characters have Willpower scores of three in the beginning. So much depends on a

character's Willpower rating that it is wise for all characters to spend freebie points here. The Willpower score is used by your character to deal with conflicts of resolve and overcome the limitations of the self, which are many among the scheming and emotionally volatile undead. Players use the Willpower pool to minimize random outcomes and impress their choices on the narrative action of the story.

Blood Pool

A Laibon is driven by blood, and young Laibon like yours need a lot to function normally. Roll a single die. The result is the number of blood points with which your character begins play. This number might suggest what sort of scene marks your character's debut in the chronicle.

Freebie Points

These points are essential to making your character match your concept. Use freebie points to color your character outside the lines laid out in the previous steps. Any trait may be raised with freebie points according to its cost, listed on page 104 of **Vampire: The Masquerade**. It's a good idea to prioritize the points you want to raise according to your character concept and budget your freebie points carefully. Note that several important traits such as Backgrounds, Disciplines and Willpower have different starting values that will affect the way you spend these points if you're accustomed to creating Western Kindred instead of Laibon.

The Prelude

The prelude is an exercise for you as a player and is fully explained on page 108 of **Vampire: The Masquerade**. The exercise is designed to help you figure out how to play the character you've created without complicating the debut of the chronicle with a lot of uncertainty and hesitation. Beyond that, it adds weight to the impact of the Embrace by giving you some contact with your character as a mortal. Ideally this gives you, and anyone watching the prelude, a firmer sense of the character and the change into undeath. In this regard, preludes are just the same for Laibon as for Kindred of the Western world.

Questions and Answers

By going through and answering the questions on page 109 of **Vampire: The Masquerade**, you'll develop a fuller foundation for your character. Ideally, this interview routine will provoke ideas that you might not have considered otherwise. The better informed you are about this imaginary person you've created, the more comfortable you'll feel presenting her to others. If you can develop an intuitive connection with your character *in addition* to an actor's understanding of her motivations, so much the better.

If you and the Storyteller don't do this together, you should do this by yourself. Either way, you should write some notes down about the answers you come up with. Once you've done that, keep the answers to yourself. Avoid the temptation to show them to anyone but the Storyteller. There are better ways to reveal this information to your fellow players.

Revealing Your Character

While you're going through the questions, compose a few lines of dialogue for your character that reveal her answers. Don't script her responses as though this were a televised interview. Write in her voice, but don't tell too much directly. Vampires need secrecy for protection, but they also desire recognition and emotional contact to make eternity bearable. Show us what your character remembers these answers to be.

These answers, when completed, become your secret resource. No longer are you left to improvise everything and hope that your bad day at work doesn't tinge your carefully crafted character for the worse. Use your answers to present your character to the other players like a television drama does, over time. Suggest little mysteries in your character's background, then offer up the answers when some conflict in the story suggests it.

Don't be stingy with your answers, though. The revelations about your character are ultimately more valuable than the mysteries, because at the gaming table you're not just keeping the audience in suspense, you're keeping your fellow writers and actors in suspense. Share in this process with the other players. Help them create scenes in which everyone can learn something about their characters, and they'll do the same for you. Your character isn't the focus of the chronicle, after all. The story is, and you contribute directly to that.

That's an important point. Remember that the story going on *right now* in the chronicle is always the priority. The game is an active, ongoing tale, not a retrospective. Move forward. Consider revealing just one interesting anecdote or fact about your character every game session. With the Storyteller's help, you'll have opportunities for your character's revelations to relate to the theme of the story. Keep your eyes and ears open. Watch for facets of the chronicle that relate to something in your character. Make the game fulfilling for everyone involved.

New and Adjusted Traits

A few new traits that are indigenous to the Ebony Kingdom and available for Laibon characters are detailed here. Africa is too diverse to be categorically summarized, so none of the traits presented in **Vampire: The Masquerade** could possibly be outright prohibited in the Ebony Kingdom. Individual Storytellers may restrict certain traits as a function of the chronicle, though.

Translating Abilities

First, understand that every Ability is open to interpretation. A large part of an Ability's worth is in its use as a measuring device between characters. By introducing new Abilities, you risk ruining the congruity of the whole scale. By flexing the existing Abilities, you can use dots to reasonably define any **Vampire** character from Mozambique to Seattle. You can interpret Abilities in new ways by creatively applying them to game situations. You can adjust Abilities slightly by selecting exotic specialties.

Players and Storytellers alike need to get comfortable with using the traditional **Vampire** game mechanics to describe the action of this non-traditional setting for **Vampire** stories. It's time to recognize how broad the Abilities that are available to you are. Examine everything again and imagine what *else* those familiar Abilities can do.

Whether you're slumming on asphalt boulevards beneath enormous sky-rises or scouting through rural townships with red dirt roads, Streetwise is the skill you use to recognize what's going on and know how to fit in. Remember that vampires are outsiders in mortal society, they just don't always look like it. With the comfortable moral distance many Laibon put between themselves and their prey, there is little difference between being streetwise with one group of mortals or another.

Applying Abilities to new and seemingly strange situations is easy. Concern yourself first with knowing what your character wants to do. Then identify every Ability that could make that happen. Choose the one your character would be most likely to attempt. Does she want to ingratiate herself with the local magaji? How does she do that? Etiquette would certainly seem to apply, even if you normally associate the word with white linens and shrimp forks. It's not your only option, though. If your character is a talented conversationalist with a respectful tone, Expression could be used instead.

Volunteer the Abilities you'd like to use when you describe your character's actions. The Storyteller shouldn't oppose you as long as your choices are based in the circumstances of the scene, and not solely on empty circles on your character sheet. By focusing on the needs of the story, you're putting your attention on the real needs of the game. Let the story suggest what the mechanics should do.

Deciding on a specialty before your character reaches four dots in a particular Ability reinforces the trajectory your character intends to take through unlife. This also gives you a few simple ways to get into character. If you know that your character is studying to specialize in international business law, you gain access to an associated set of concepts that you can draw on for roleplaying scenes. Describe your character as lugging around yellow legal pads. Use legal metaphors to relate to the current story. Punish a slovenly ghoul with the spine of a big brown legal volume. Brainstorm some images, props and language related to your Abilities and their specialties, then find ways to use them in your descriptions. Specialties can also serve as a kind of keyword cheat-sheet for you. Having a few words of reminder text in with your Skills or Knowledges is great when you're trying to improvise dialogue on topics in which your character is fluent but which you know nothing about.

Creating new specialties for your character helps set her apart from her colleagues and your own previous characters. It also roots your character in the game world with specific details. A Third-World Laibon might be an expert on tribal law or terrifically unusual avenues of finance. Specialties are more narrowly defined than their parent Abilities, but they can also stray a bit further in their applications. The intricate local politics your Laibon is familiar with could confound intruding Cainites and add strength to your attempts at Intimidation or Leadership, for example. Expert grace with an ancient melee weapon could result in a great performance that ends a fight before you have a chance to lose it. The Storyteller has the final decision on how these sorts of things affect the story, but these ideas are worth exploring as long as they help you get a tighter grip on your character.

New Abilities

Secondary Skill: Divine

Colored stones lay scattered across the plywood floor of Kirk's trailer. If he connected the dots between them, they vaguely resembled a horse shape. Kuila dragged them together in front of her, though, forming a rough circle. "This one's okay," she said, pointing. "It's Youth, which is about right for you, so that's fine. This one is Change, which would be bad," she glanced at him, "but it's next to Youth, so that makes sense. No trouble."

"What about that red one?" Kirk almost touched it, but he drew back his hand at Kuila's fork-tongued hiss.

"That one is..." she picked it up, turned it over a few times, then set it back down. "That's Harvest. I don't remember what that one means there."

Either formally or informally, you have been trained to read the messages sent by ancestor spirits or orishas. Sometimes you just notice religious symbolism and make sense of it. Sometimes you actually hear or feel something. Most of the time, though, you have to seek out signs through detailed, painstaking routines. One method requires an understanding of the mathematical relationship between patterns of thrown palm nuts and more than a thousand prescribed verses that the diviner must have memorized. The pattern suggests what bit of scripture might provide relevant insight. Such insight might be considered a divine message or a bit of spiritual advice. There are many, many other methods. All are covered by this Skill.

You may use this Skill to add an air of legitimacy to an act of Subterfuge, or you may use it to pursue an actual supernatural lead. After spending at least 30 minutes on your search for signs, you may attempt your reading. Start by asking the Storyteller a particular question. Once the question has been assigned a difficulty based on its wording, intent and quality of focus, you roll Perception + Divine or Intelligence + Divine, depending on your method. Success is met with a suggestive answer, very often metaphorical, which indicates a course of action rather the result of some action. The greater your success is, the more specific the advice becomes. You may attempt a reading only once in any given story with regard to a certain situation.

- • **Student:** You've read books that come with plastic rune stones.
- •• **College:** You've handled traditional tools and made successful readings.
- ••• **Masters:** You've been taught by a practiced believer.
- •••• **Doctorate:** You're respected for your readings.
- ••••• **Scholar:** Your readings are too precise to be shared with non-believers.

Possessed by: Cultural Leaders, Kooks, New-Age Mystics, Shamans

Specialties: Ancestral Guidance, Colored Sand, Flights of Birds, Stars, Thrown Beads

Translating Backgrounds

Unlike Abilities, Backgrounds are practical and finite, necessarily dependent on the context of the story. They're not dynamic descriptions of your character's personal capabilities, they're predefined features of your character's narrative presence and backstory. Backgrounds are measured against the realities of the game world, not against the abilities of other characters. That is, even if your character has suitable resources to justify the purchase of an enclosed hillside compound, her poorer enemy might still be equipped to break into the place.



Africa is a wildly different environment from that supposed by the Backgrounds in **Vampire: The Masquerade**, yet all of those Backgrounds have a place here. The rarity and appeal of certain Backgrounds are bound to change, but the worth of every one is preserved. Africa has Laibon who enjoy magnificent fame just as it has whispering liars who influence local and national rulers. The Backgrounds quantify stylistic and narrative elements that are inherent to the vampire myth. They're sure to be of continuing value to your stories.

Allies

Laibon organize along ancestral lines into groups that mirror familial relationships. If anything, Laibon are more likely to associate with mortal organizations that fall under the category of Allies. African Kindred have the advantage of underdeveloped lines of communication between mortals on the continent. It is much easier to avoid being captured by a camera, recognized by overheard voicemail or dated by metropolitan records. Therefore, a Laibon can slip out of regular communication for a few years and then resurface when Allies are dead and unable to testify to the agelessness of their old friend. The close ties that distinguish Allies from the other Backgrounds make it easier for Laibon to reconnect with familiar groups over time. Distinctive physical features and genuine recollections about distant relatives go a long way toward seeming like one of the family, even after the Laibon has been dead two or three centuries.

Contacts

In large African cities, this Background works just like it does in Europe or the United States. In smaller environments of local faces and intimate villages, it becomes somewhat less valuable. The tight-knit social groups that can make allies last lifetimes can work against the collection of Contacts. Implied in this Background's description, however, is a reach of influence. Having contacts in one city doesn't give you contacts in another. By defining a reach of influence other than city limits, you can get renewed mileage from this trait.

If your character is a frequent traveler, such as a Kinyonyi caravan master, you might declare your reach of contacts to spread over the length of a familiar trade route. If you're playing the agent of an especially social magaji, you could define your reach as any village wherein a subordinate Laibon makes her haven. Major contacts should still be described during character creation, and they might themselves suggest the avenues wherein you could have minor contacts.

Fame

Fame is a funny notion in the Ebony Kingdom. The reaches of Fame described in **Vampire: The Masquerade** are almost useless to the many Laibon who dwell in small communities or large cities with few meaningful media resources. Many players assume that fame is based on frivolous success in entertainment magazines or pop culture, but there are a great many reasons why individuals enjoy adoration by their people. Important cultural or political positions grant fame, too. Any structured society has social mechanisms in place to recognize or reward fame. Vast cultural variety in Africa might serve to make translations of Fame difficult from one part of the continent to another, but if your character concept requires your character to be instantly recognizable, you're probably playing in a chronicle concerned more with international maneuverings than local relationships.

For your own understanding, realize the meaningful thresholds between the dots one has in Fame here in the Ebony Kingdom. If you have Fame 5, you're known internationally and you circumvent these thresholds. Otherwise, don't expect a Fame score of 2 to mean much when you leave the nation where that fame originated. Faces and voices might not be recognized the way they are in other countries, even if your name would be. Many Laibon enjoy this. It allows them better control over the circumstances (and thus consequences) under which their fame is revealed to a population.

Generation

The blood has spread far… and thin. Characters in the Ebony Kingdom begin stories at 14th generation. Having just a few dots in this trait doesn't mean much relative to the powerful elders of the land, even if it suggests diablerie. Young Laibon who run wild often go missing, and no one keeps track of neonates well enough to find the appearance of another 12th- or 13th-generation vampire unusual. Three or more dots implies either further connections to the entrenched establishment or a suspicion of diablerie.

- • **13th generation:** 10 blood pool, can spend 1 blood point per turn.
- •• **12th generation:** 11 blood pool, can spend 1 blood point per turn
- ••• **11th generation:** 12 blood pool, can spend 1 blood point per turn
- •••• **10th generation:** 13 blood pool, can spend 1 blood point per turn
- ••••• **9th generation:** 14 blood pool, can spend 2 blood points per turn

Herd

Evil bloodsuckers find many ways to herd mortals, especially in a land where screams have so far to travel. Cultivated ignorance, brutal tyranny, fabricated occult bullshit and fiery political ravings are just the most popular ways to sway a populace. With Influence or Fame, a great many people can be reached, from which it is relatively simple to select the most gullible, loyal or needy few who are willing to bare their necks.

Herds are easy for Laibon to form because they have all the components in great supply. The fractured cultural and political environments common on the continent create extremists who are hungry for a sense of belonging. Economic ruin results in needy do-gooders who find blood to be a small price. Geographic and social isolation grants the Laibon a theater free of distractions. With hunting grounds so severely divided by difficult travel and vampiric customs, a herd is often essential to a powerful Laibon's longevity. And longevity equals power.

Influence

Every society has invisible strings that can be pulled, knotted or cut to affect social processes. Laibon are adept at this sort of manipulation, but they are also more likely than European Kindred to create wholly new methods of influence. African tribes foster a tradition of secret societies all across the continent. Many of these societies historically operate at night for the purposes of stomping out witchcraft or passing judgment on common folk. The vast majority of these societies were created by mortals. A good deal of them are subject to the whims of some Laibon tonight.

An environment of disjointed, conflicting cultures makes it easy for outsiders like Laibon to do their work. Residual tides of post-colonial mistrust wash through every level of society in nations all over the continent. Leading politicians often have nothing in common with their citizens and make disjointed decisions contrary to popular sentiment. Hundred-year-old mandates divide one tribal group between handfuls of nations or place traditional enemies together under one flag. Disinformation runs rampant. Happy and ugly truths alike are lost, mistaken or outdated before they clear government offices, much less reach the rest of the world. Who would notice the subtle plays of a Laibon in all this? Who could trace one more hidden atrocity or lost shipment?

Mentor

The Jyhad in the West makes this Background less common than it is in the Ebony Kingdom. The elders of some legacies encourage relationships that develop into mutually beneficial dynamics such as this — to a point. The many splintered domains of the Guruhi make it rare for someone to obtain the level of power represented by a five-dot Mentor. It is even more rare for such a powerful creature to have any interest in mentoring a Laibon to one night compete for his place in the social hierarchy. As a guideline, a mentor worth more than three dots is very uncommon. The relationship between mentor and student will be somewhat contrary to Laibon custom. On the other hand, this trait is common when it refers to multiple Laibon of limited influence. The small scale of many domains makes it possible for just a few Laibon warmongers to make a play for territory. Many magaji have an interest in advancing their "lesser" to a level of power unheard of in Western domains. At the same time, apprentices learn that little but ruin meets those who pursue greater power. Therefore, many Laibon with mentors have an investment in maintaining the status quo.

In the modern nights, consider the likelihood of any Kindred of importance being willing to associate with a neonate of the Fourteenth Generation. A young Laibon might take an inspiring neonate under his wing, but such immature creatures rarely have any knowledge that has been tested by time. Perhaps more seriously, 14th-generation Laibon should be suspect of the plans of any elder who chooses to take him on as an apprentice.

Resources

More than ever, homeless vampires prowl all of Africa. Still, these are the exceptions. Most Laibon prefer some degree of stability, but they don't require the elaborate protections that mortals do. Laibon do not fear disease or predatory animals. Prior to the modern nights, many enjoyed safe havens not far from the haunts of their sires. Tonight that is not as often the case. Young Laibon have grown so plentiful that they must carve out a place for themselves in a dark continent claimed shore to shore by invisible kings.

And yet some Laibon command such estimable wealth that it drives colonial Ventrue mad. Vast, fenced-in compounds of open savannas and air-conditioned villas represent untold fortunes spent to preserve the domain of a magaji. Sprawling ramshackle villages with ditch roads and open sewers sometimes result from profit-minded Laibon sucking money from the populace. A thousand international organizations throw billions of dollars at African causes, and a terrifying total never sees the light of day because of the Laibon. The standards might be slightly different, but the Laibon have lifetimes to horde resources and let them appreciate in value.

Retainers

Elder Laibon regularly assemble flocks of retainers including mortal or ghoul messengers, craftsmen and observers. It's somewhat more common for these folk to have roles outside of simple servitude. Often it's the retainer's job to take care of those tasks deemed too menial for his master. Some retainers are employed solely to be available should the master need to be moved during daylight.

Younger Laibon don't bother with retainers much anymore. They get in the way of mobility and grant others unnecessary avenues of influence. Besides, in smaller population centers it's difficult to explain how someone could employ retainers without a position of respect or wealth in ordinary life, and the wise Laibon turns to his allies instead.

Status

Unlike Fame, which is a measure of one character's widespread recognition among mortals and undead alike, Status describes the extent to which all Laibon characters are aware of one other character. This trait is an absolute, however, describing your character's notoriety or respect among the active members of the Ebony Kingdom's social landscape. In the grand scheme of vampiric maneuverings, the respect of a domain that is five Laibon large means nothing. Status is about having people you've never heard of respect or fear you. It's about having power waiting for you when you get there. That is, it means exactly the same thing it does among all other Kindred in the world. In Africa, it's just harder to secure. Therefore, in Africa, it is more valuable.

New Backgrounds

Ancestor Spirit

"Not that one," Haath said in Agru's head. Agru glanced through the parking lot marketplace again, looking over women with watermelons, children fighting with sticks, men loading a truck. Agru lingered on a man near the edge of the market, trying to light a cigarette. "Him," Agru stated. "No," Haath's voice was a remembered sound. For some reason, Agru thought of burnt squash when he heard it. Haath had been dead for nearly 70 years.

"Why not?" Agru said. "Her," Haath thought. Agru looked to his right, saw her at a stall and remembered the smell of cooked steak. Undercooked steak. He walked up next to her, plucked up a gourd and pretended to smell it. When he smiled at her, she smiled back.

Something about you attracts the attention of your ancestors from beyond the grave. You have earned their favor or fear or even reverence. The ancestor spirit who watches over you grants you the benefit of the insight and experience it had in life, if you will just learn to listen.

No conduit or heirloom is needed to make this Background work for you. Once per story you may roll your Ancestor Spirit trait against a difficulty of 8. Every success you achieve grants you a temporary dot in an Ability of your choice, representative of subtle guidance and warnings from your ancestor spirit. This bonus lasts just one scene. Alternatively, you may attempt to contact your ancestor spirit directly for advice, warnings or research. The difficulty is 10 for this purpose, but only a single success is required. Your ancestor spirit is the psychic remnant of a real person, so he or she will be only as helpful in a dialogue as any other overseeing relative with a lifetime of experience to hold over you.

At the Storyteller's discretion, this Background might not apply to certain situations. It is unlikely, for example, that an ancestor spirit would know enough about nuclear physics or macrobiology to be of much help (though certain humbler, "hedge" wisdom might apply, again, at the Storyteller's discretion).

- • You probably don't know where your insight comes from.
- •• You have a rare, vague connection. You wouldn't call it "contact."
- ••• The signals — such as faint whispers, urges in your muscles and tingling in your dead flesh — are yours to interpret.
- •••• The connection is strong but somewhat impersonal. Whose voice is that?
- ••••• Your spirit has a name and attitude — and maybe an agenda.

Artifact

In the dim light, Kenneth couldn't be sure that someone was there. Just a dark shape between him and the glass looking out over Cape Town's nighttime lights. He leaned over and snapped on his bedside lamp. At the foot of the bed was a pair of green wooden eyes bored through with holes and set against a frame of woven reeds. "What the hell?" he said like an idiot.

"This mask was not yours," a voice said from within it. Kenneth started to understand legs, arms and a body wearing the thing. Long beaded braids hung down. "You shouldn't have sold it."

"I thought you were dead," Kenneth's mouth barely moved. He was sweating in his silk pajamas now.

A hooked tail twisted up into the air behind the mask. The bed sheets began to smolder, then burn. "Not me, Kenneth."

You have come into possession of a magical artifact. It might have a complicated, dangerous history, or it might be a mysterious bit of powerful junk. It might have been given to you, or you might have gone out and found it. It might be yours or someone else's. A higher Artifact score represents a more powerful artifact or a collection of lesser artifacts.

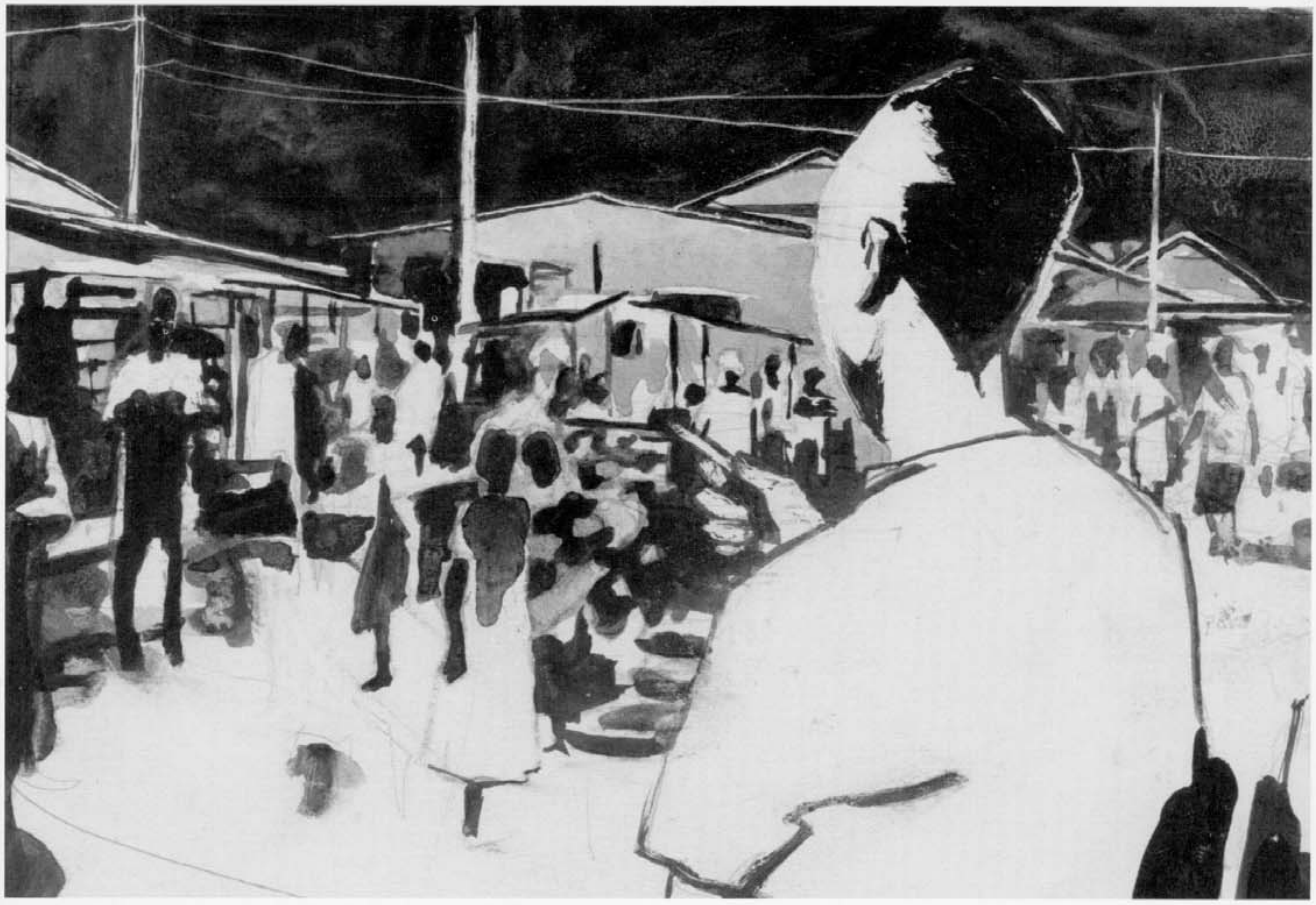
- • You have a Level-One artifact.
- •• You have a Level-Two artifact or two Level-One artifacts.
- ••• You have a number of artifacts with a total of three levels.
- •••• You have a number of artifacts with a total of four levels.
- ••••• Your have a number of artifacts with a total of five levels.

For more information on artifacts and artifact levels, see Chapter Four.

Membership

"It's said they gather at night, in the silo near the river. I don't know how many there are, but I think they killed those tourists. At least they covered it up. I don't know if it's even real, but what if, right? They'd kill us for talking about it." Dougray was trembling. "Do you believe those stories?"

Khalu smiled into the oil drum's orange coals. "Well, rumors are rumors, you know. One part truth, right?" The firelight bent shadows from his eyeglasses up around his face.



His eyes, Dougray thought, seemed bloodshot. With one hand, Khalu touched Dougray on the shoulder. The other hand, at his side, grew skinny yellow claws.

"I tell you this, Doug. You get scared if you want. I know they're not coming after me."

Many African cultures contain secret societies. Unlike many such organizations, however, common citizens often know of the society's existence. What they don't know is who belongs or how they function. One Yoruban secret society took it upon itself to pass secret judgment on village troublemakers or suspected criminals. Another organized nighttime society hunts for evil women and witches. A society might give clues about those in its ranks by requiring particular manners of dress or special behavior. Anyone who reveals the specific practices or members of a society can usually expect to be killed by magic. The benefit of this Background could be turned against you. Membership in a society is usually only offered to influential or respected elders, though members of much-loved families might be invited. The vast majority of such societies are led by mortals who know nothing of Laibon, though. There are exceptions.

Membership is similar to other Backgrounds, but it requires a closed network of interaction outside of which membership might mean nothing. Since membership is a secret, it does not guarantee a position of influence or any level of fame in the outside world, though such correlation of power is common. Membership supplies a special source of intelligence, a certain freedom from culpability and a ripe opportunity for blackmail. You might need to roll against your Membership (difficulty determined by the Storyteller) to gain information or otherwise benefit from the intelligence network. You may also roll Membership (difficulty 8) once per story for an effect similar to Allies, Contacts (minor only) or Herd as though you had one of those Backgrounds rated two dots lower than your Membership score. You select which Background to emulate each time you roll.

- **Initiate:** You overhear things and get out of speeding tickets.
- •• **Member:** You are actively kept current on goings-on.
- ••• **Trusted:** Your word is superior; you can get away with theft.
- •••• **Advisor:** You are consulted before the society takes any action. You hear everything.
- ••••• **Leader:** What you say is truth. You get away with murder.

Reliquary

Tsuva's remains gathered in a pile near the window. Langa sifted through flaking sheets of flesh and crumbling ribs for the foot-high wooden statue. It was caked with soot, but Tsuva had saved it from that morning's sunrise. Its smooth, black wood swelled to depict a head and telltale grin. Between the teeth, Langa could make out a dry and wrinkled eyeball.

With his mouth to its ear, Langa whispered a prayer. Blood beaded on the statue's sheer surface, which Langa wiped on his neck. Then he bit his wrist and pressed the statue's mouth to it. When it was full, he packed it with Tsuva's ashes. "So long as one of us walks to tend you," Langa said to the statue, "they will have to do more than kill us."

You are one part of a line, bound to your ancestors through blood. As you have a duty to learn from them and respect them for giving you your place, so do they help you — as long as you have the reliquary. It is imprinted with (or contains) some part of an ancestor. Usually this means that the reliquary is a source of wisdom or power or unnatural perception. Commonly the relic is a mask, a votive sculpture, a bit of ornamental jewelry or some other easily portable art object like a scepter or club. It might contain psychic remains of a mortal or vampiric ancestor.

A reliquary is like a tangible, reliable and limited ancestor spirit. The more dots you have in this Background, the more powerful the reliquary's contents are. Be aware that this rating does not reflect the relic's relationship to you, exactly. For the Background to mean anything, it must be related to you by blood, but it doesn't have to like you. Every dot you have in the Reliquary Background grants an automatic success in two Knowledges contained by the artifact. This is the wisdom of your dead relative stored away in wood or gold. You must somehow consult with the reliquary to use these successes. Alternatively, you may define your dots in Reliquary as automatic successes to Perception + Empathy tests, representing the relic's supernatural insight into people. This insight is delivered either through visions or by a voice audible only to you. Additionally, vampiric (and only vampiric) relics might mystically augment one of their legacy's Disciplines for one scene. Dice added in this manner are not limited by the character's Orun score.

Laibon relics need blood to function. Their reliquaries store a number of indefinitely preserved blood points equal to their Background rating and can be reimbursed with new blood. Therefore, more powerful reliquaries are larger and heavier than weaker reliquaries. They might drip, ooze, sweat or otherwise lose blood when used.

A reliquary must be defined as possessing wisdom or imparting insight when this trait is purchased.

- Your reliquary is a trinket. Once per game session, you enjoy a single extra success when rolling one of the relic's two Knowledges or reduce your difficulties on Perception + Empathy rolls by one.
- •• You have something handsome and personally valuable. You gain two automatic successes from one of relic's two Knowledges once per game session or reduce your difficulties on Perception + Empathy rolls by two.
- ••• You have an heirloom, passed down to you by tradition. You gain three automatic successes from one of the relic's two Knowledges once per game session or reduce your difficulties on Perception + Empathy rolls by three.
- •••• Your relic is an item of distinction for your family or your legacy. You gain four extra successes from one of the relic's two Knowledges or reduce your difficulties on Perception + Empathy rolls by four. You may also store up to four blood points in your reliquary.
- ••••• You have been given an object of great importance within the legacy: the remains of a Laibon. Through consultation, you gain four automatic successes as above. You may also store up to five blood points in your reliquary. By consuming blood from the reliquary, you can augment any one legacy Discipline with a single extra dot for one scene (even a Discipline you don't possess, as long as it is a legacy Discipline for you).

Orun and Aye

Laibon exist in a purgatorial state between the domains of Heaven and Earth. Their damnation proscribes them from both realms. They teeter between an earthly death and the next world.

Western vampires on the Path of Humanity tend to believe that their undead state places them on the brink of mortality and that they will fall away into the unknowable nothingness of Wassail without a firm grip on their human mores. Therefore, most Kindred interact with the mortal world as though it were the only material option. The supernatural is regarded as a resource to be tapped, a tool accessible through damnation.

Laibon belief doesn't focus on the isolation of the individual from the cosmic order. It doesn't pit the cursed soul against a nihilistic force that erodes *humanitas*. It traps the soul between the terrestrial threat of physical destruction and the spiritual crisis of psychic dissolution. It recognizes vampires as just one conductor of the supernatural power that makes everything go.

Common custom holds that people do not "die," exactly. Many Laibon subscribe to the Yoruban notion that the word *fa*, "to die," does not apply to mortals. Instead, it is said that a person's life has "gone out" like a fire. Laibon, then, are damned to exist as the smoke from a snuffed life, drifting through a world of fire with the hope that their life may one day be rekindled.

Endurance being both the goal and the reward for most Laibon, the undead existence often falls into a routine. Centuries of the same habits leave an elder few chances to challenge his morals, so his Virtues grow stable and even stagnant. His soul grows still and static, unaffected by time and having no impact on history. Therefore, while a Kindred erodes, a Laibon calcifies.

As Traits

The two traits, Orun (Heaven) and Aye (Earth), make every African **Vampire** character a part of the allegory of the Ebony Kingdom. They are the essential traits of the African vampire's moral dilemma. The intersection of these two scores indicates the character's spiritual situation and suggests her physical appearance. Neither one can offer a clear picture of a character's morality. To appreciate the struggle of any Laibon character, you must compare these two traits. Somewhere between the axis of Heaven and the axis of Earth lies the link to humanity.

Orun and Aye are each measured on a scale of 1 to 10, as a finer resolution is necessary to closely examine the themes these traits represent. Both are initially defined from a single reservoir of 10 dots assigned between them as you see fit. Once the chronicle has begun, they fluctuate independently of one another based on the experiences of the character and the experience points you spend as a player. For this reason, Orun and Aye seem diametric to the recently mortal minds of young Laibon, although the two traits can coexist at equal levels for better or worse.

Aye and Orun are dependent traits. Most characters' combined Orun and Aye may not exceed 10. More information on the balance of Orun and Aye follows.

Seeing Orun and Aye as opposing forces puts a Laibon in a difficult position of juggling two hierarchies of sin. Imagine how difficult it must be to protect two different moral traits on the journey through undeath. This viewpoint causes these traits to be worn away like a Cainite's Humanity over the course of the chronicle, and it is a common trap of the Fourteenth Generation. Wise elder Laibon practice an existence between the two extremes by recognizing the path formed between the two moral poles and sticking strictly to it. Either through a protective emotional distance from their fellow kind or through a rigid social barrier (such as leadership), elders avoid any challenges to their morals and keep their unlives intact. Like great mountains, they endure the slow eons as landmarks.

For every character, Orun and Aye are each associated with a different hierarchy of sin. The conceptual hell of each Laibon defines a different set of exact standards for these paths. On the whole, however, a few standards are common to most Laibon. Aye typically tracks a hierarchy concerned more with mortal practices and terrestrial concerns, so it is somewhat similar to the Path of Humanity. Orun usually tracks a path more concerned with spiritual ideology, be it some sort of religious conviction or belief in a proper cosmic order. When Laibon pursue distinctly vampiric paths, it is usually under the jurisdiction of Orun rather than Aye.

Aye paths are frequently devoted to the avoidance of certain behaviors: interference in someone's life at the highest level, social or societal crimes in the middle range, crimes against natural law at the lower level. At the absolute bottom of the scale is a disgusting, destructive force totally devoid of awareness or reason, existing only as a force of unnatural hunger. Laibon are no strangers to the Beast.

Orun paths tend to encourage adherence to certain ideals: strict practice of spiritual focus in all actions at the highest level, disciplined periodic demonstrations of the ideology in the middle range and occasional reinforcement of the higher order at the lower level. The lowest point is an internal void, a psychic oblivion with no awareness of anything greater than the immediate environment, existing totally at the mercy of any supernatural force. This spiritual collapse leaves the vampire a feckless, thirsty corpse. If such a measurement were possible, even a mortal would have an Orun score of at least 1.

Effects of Aye

A Laibon's Aye score reflects the strength of her connection to the Earth, but also the quality of that connection. It measures first a closeness to the state of mortality and then, above that, a resemblance to humanity. This trait does not indicate a Laibon's "goodness" or compassion. Instead, it is subject to those actions that portray or betray such things.

- Aye tracks the vampire's position along a hierarchy of sin. Whenever the vampire commits an act that is considered to be lower on the hierarchy than her current rating in Aye, she must roll her Aye score (typical difficulty of 6) to determine how she deals with her actions. Failure on this roll indicates the act has little emotional impact on the character except perhaps relief or mild surprise. The character therefore loses a point of Aye. Success maintains the current score and indicates that the character is uncomfortable with her own

behavior and feels remorse for her actions. Therefore, the score actually reflects what a Laibon *believes* her moral code to be until it is tested after dark.

- Whether or not a Laibon frenzies is governed by an Aye roll. A vampire with a high Aye score is composed, in control of the lower earthly instincts and even serene. A vampire with a lower Aye score exists more like an animal, perhaps out of a love for the simple thrill. Resisting frenzy requires a roll of dice equal to the vampire's Aye score against a varying difficulty as determined by the stimulus of the frenzy. See page 228 of **Vampire: The Masquerade** for examples of frenzy situations and their difficulties. Resisting Rötschreck — "the red fear" — also falls under the auspices of Aye.
- Aye determines the resemblance a vampire bears to a human. An Aye score of 6 or higher lets the Laibon pass as mortal. A score of 8 or higher is remarkable even to other Laibon. Human-like Laibon wake earlier than feral Laibon, who dwell daily in a death-like hibernation. A low Aye score gives a vampire a more feral or corpse-like look, but it doesn't add any features a human body shouldn't have.
- Certain other traits might be limited by a vampire's earthly quality. During the day, a Laibon's player cannot roll more dice for any action than the character has dots in Aye. No more dice may be used for a Courage roll than the vampire has in either Aye or Orun, whichever is greater.

Effects of Orun

The Orun score first indicates the magnitude of a Laibon's infusion with supernatural power, then the quality of that infusion. Control of that power is limited by this trait but not measured by it. Rather, Orun indicates the character's closeness to the stuff of the spirit realm, next world or Heaven, if you like. It's a rating of one's supernatural potency and distance from the mundane. This trait doesn't assume a certain religious affiliation or belief, it reflects a generalized otherworldliness. It does not govern or reveal a vampire's "goodness" or "alignment." Needs and actions do that.

- Orun marks a vampire's distance down the path of another hierarchy of sin. When the vampire intentionally or inadvertently commits an act lower on the hierarchy than her current score, the player must make an Orun roll for the character to come to terms with her actions. Failing this roll results in the loss of a point of Orun; presumably the character discovers she is willing to accept this level of behavior. Success maintains the current Orun score; presumably the vampire rationalizes her actions or feels genuine remorse.
- A Laibon's appearance depends on her Orun score. A lower Orun score means that the character is mundane-seeming, even if she is pallid or grotesque. A higher Orun score yields an unnatural or even supernatural appearance, be it horrific or pleasing. Laibon who possess great supernatural powers usually appear as if they do.
- A vampire's Orun score puts a ceiling on her mastery of Disciplines. Players of none but the most ancient Laibon may roll more dice for any Discipline than the character has dots in Orun.
- Orun measures a Laibon's supernatural influence; not susceptibility. Orun is rolled to oppose the Disciplines of enemy Laibon and other works of witchcraft. In the event that a Laibon is pitted against a supernatural effect typically opposed by Willpower, use her Orun score instead.
- A Laibon's player may never roll more dice for Courage than the character has in Aye or Orun, whichever is greater.

The Appearance of Virtue

For Laibon, the body and the soul become confused after the Embrace. The two intertwine and transmogrify according to the individual's position between Heaven and Earth. Each trait governs a facet of the undead body's appearance. Sometimes the result is just a subtle array of clues to a Laibon's true nature. Sometimes grotesque or bestial demonic bodies emerge around an evil soul and become the stuff of legend.

Within the framework of these traits, you are free to invent a visage for your character. There is no rule that mandates the exact influence of Orun and Aye, but keep the guidelines that follow in mind when determining the severity of a character's appearance. Consult with the Storyteller before bringing an extreme idea to the table, lest you end up with a character that is unsuitable to the chronicle.

For purposes of appearance, consider a "high" rating to be 8 or greater and a "low" rating to be 3 or less. An "average" rating (if such a thing is relevant for Laibon) is between 6 and 7 for Aye, between 4 and 5 for Orun.

High Aye, Low Orun

Something akin to the existence of Western vampires, this moral split makes a Laibon appear convincingly mortal. She might appear to breathe or even be warm to the touch. Supernatural clues are mostly invisible to normal eyes, unless Disciplines are employed.

Very few Laibon even attempt existences as difficult as this. Not only does a vampire risk destruction at the hands of rivals and hunters by forsaking supernatural power, other Laibon actively regard those who cling so desperately to lofty mortal rules as weakling cowards or naïve poseurs. It's rare that the vampires who work to ignore their unnatural qualities were so dedicated in life. Such humane folk are rarely Embraced in the first place. Those few undead who do attempt this existence are typically terrified of somehow becoming a monster worse

than they already are. Perhaps they expect to wake up one day forgiven and free of their curse. Still, it is common for young Laibon, upon learning of what they are, to take this position in an almost reactionary defense of their new condition. Such Laibon must learn to adapt to their state or suffer as described previously.

Low Aye, Low Orun

An Aye score as low as 5 marks a Laibon with mildly monstrous characteristics, such as subtle claws or more pronounced fangs. A lower Aye score brings with it obvious predatorial features and feral behavior. Such Laibon might ignore the filth of their own bodies or pounce on their prey like animals. Claws, obvious fangs and inhuman hissing is common. In this depraved state, a vampire's body language is clearly inhuman.

This state is not one that many vampires aspire to, though some Naglopers are rumored to exist for decades or even centuries like this. Laibon who dwell outside the social laws of the Tenets are most likely to sink this far, especially if they have no religious or spiritual motive to endure as anything but predators. A few Laibon experience moral breakthroughs through this sort of existence. Despite their curse, they recognize their lot and strive against damnation to become something better. Sometimes, a Laibon suddenly realizes how simple it is to control such feral monsters and strives to attain power over his former peers.

Average Aye, Average Orun

At the point of balance between Orun and Aye is a monster of convincing lure and unnatural evil. Such Laibon pass for mortal in most nighttime conditions, seeming normal enough at a glance and behaving with enough self-control to pacify prey. Supernatural clues are obvious upon discovery, such as a hunched back or slump-shouldered arms, a forked tongue, unhinging jaw or goat's eyes.

Laibon who manage to reach this sort of equilibrium in sin can maintain it for untold centuries. This is a common state for magaji and important elders, because it combines the ability to move among humans with the unnerving monstrosity necessary to secure and maintain followers and supporters. A fair number of Laibon consider this state to be dishonest and opportunistic. Remorseful vampires see it as a reckless use of damned powers at the expense of mortal lives and self-improvement. More monstrous vampires regard balance as shyness and a waste of vampiric potential. A large portion of newly created Laibon — still hung up on their prior lives, still shocked by their curse — start with this kind of moral split.

Low Aye, High Orun

This is the recipe for a menacing undead demon. Vampires with the lowest Aye scores are truly animals, bound to mortals as a wolf is bound to sheep. Like wolves, they are fearsome in appearance and obvious amidst the



flock. High Orun scores reflect the true power of a Laibon with unnatural displays of supernatural features. The truth Orun reflects for monsters of this morality is ugly: tails, hooves, burning footprints, mouths for palms, a nimbus of unholy radiance, extra rows of teeth and worse.

No one sees one of these monsters and continues to disbelieve in the supernatural. Laibon who exist this way hunt (sometimes in packs) on the edges of civilization, dragging prey out into the night for feeding frenzies. These sorts of creatures might be eliminated by Shango or Osebo executioners on Guruhi orders in adherence to the Tenets, or they might be led toward mortal hunters for mutual slaughter. More Laibon exist in this state than is commonly believed, and a surprising number retain their human cunning. Such monsters subscribe to an ethic that values power, consumption and survival at any cost. Many of these gruesome Laibon believe that the purpose of their curse is to warn the mortal populace through unmistakable carnage. Therefore, they have no regard for their own humanity, yet enough devotion to their damnation to maintain their supernatural potency.

High Aye, High Orun

A high Aye score colors the unnatural magnificence of Orun with exaggerations of moral strength. These rarest vampires appear unearthly, even angelic, despite their damnation. The body of such a Laibon might be impossibly flawless or beautiful, but the highest Orun score goes beyond that. The creature might literally illuminate the night, soothe or calm otherwise furious animals and humans or dispel misery in its presence. For all that such a wonderful being would seem to have overcome the curse from Cagn, he still must feed. Marveling mortals might willingly offer up their blood (never considering the vampiric act monstrous), thus freeing the feeder from the moral challenge of stealing sustenance. This sort of Laibon would possess incredible self-restraint and compassion, after all.

Most Laibon do not accept that such a state is possible. Stories are told of nearly transcendent Laibon whose presence cured disease or ended drought. Many of these stories end with the vampire starving itself to death and salvation in a demonstration of piety and restraint. Of course, these stories are told to make Laibon feel weak in comparison, to undermine and disempower gullible vampires. To attain this level of moral control, a vampire would need total insight into the workings of the spiritual world and utter acceptance of her earthly existence.

Self-Image or Symbolism

The influence that a Laibon's Virtues have on her body cannot be denied, but neither can the precise manifestations of Orun and Aye be neatly explained. Two like-minded Laibon of the same generation and legacy with very similar moral codes might still develop vastly different appearances as a result. Horns do not always decorate a debauchee.

Elder Laibon maintain that a vampire's appearance is based on inner factors and occult correlations between human attitudes and archetypal animals or demons. Such is often the base for arguments belittling Cainites, who so closely resemble feeble and mundane mortals because they have little supernatural significance. More importantly, the idea that one's appearance is an inescapable, indecipherable symbolic revelation made by the cursed blood of Cagn keeps young bloodsuckers focused on the power of those who came before them. It adds another layer of mystery that elders can pretend to have penetrated long ago. It's largely propaganda.

Newer Laibon, who as a rule pay more attention to modern psychology than their ancestors, submit that one's appearance is based on one's psyche. Wild mutations and deformities reveal the deep trauma inflicted by the curse of the Embrace. No Laibon is granted power under this model. Mortal-seeming vampires are ignoring their plight, denying the terrible truth of their existence. Monstrous vampires are tormented or demented, shaken

The Balance

For most Laibon, Orun and Aye cannot exceed 10 when combined. In some cases, however, particularly potent or enlightened Laibon transcend this limitation. In most cases, this depends upon the Laibon's generation, but characters of Willpower greater than 7 might also develop the strength of self necessary to harbor such distinct yet fundamental forces.

Note that, during character creation, the starting Laibon's maximum combined Orun + Aye is still 10, regardless of generation. Only by spending experience points (not freebie points) can the character exceed her initial limit.

Generation	Maximum Combined Orun + Aye
3	?
4	20
5	18
6	15
7	13
8	12
9	11
10+	10

Also, a Laibon can exceed her generational combination capacity by one for every point by which her Willpower exceeds 7.

or broken by damnation. At best, elders recognize the appeal of such a modern theory. Some night the young will overcome their current state, outsmart the curse and be free of the mystical nonsense. The elders know it's meant to empower an impotent generation trying to avoid the consequences of their fate. It's an excuse. Cagn was not cursed by his psyche.

Neither theory is empirical. No Laibon knows where the altered body comes from.

For your character, though, you should know. It's not the other vampires that get real mileage out of the wicked visage you choose, remember. Stomping through the World of Darkness in a badass body is a cheap trick. Aim higher. Describe supernatural manifestations that symbolize some aspect of your character, whether she'll recognize those symbols or not. Project her fears or ideas about herself onto her body. Even if your character is tortured by the incongruity of her appearance to her intentions, you shouldn't be.

Hierarchies of Sin and Degeneration

Orun and Aye are both tracked individually using hierarchies of sin, as are other paths and Humanity. The differences in these traits is that every Laibon has *two* hierarchies of sin to worry about, one each for his Virtues.

Handling the morality and degeneration falls to the Storyteller, as always, who must be a bit more vigilant than if her players simply had one track with which to concern themselves. The benefit is that the Ebony Kingdom characters all observe the same concepts. The Storyteller applies the hierarchies of sin to all characters, rather than having to monitor several different hierarchies for players whose characters observe different Paths of Enlightenment. Note, also, that some acts might requiring checking for degeneration of *both* Orun and Aye, while strictly following one path might by its nature cause a character to violate the other. Welcome to duality.

Virtues and Archetypes

The Archetypes are descriptions of your character's behavior. They have no cost or restrictions in dots and are never rolled. The Virtues represent your character's moral fortitude (or flexibility). The strengths of Virtues are finite and frequently tested. These traits complement each other. One is the theory, the other is the practice.

It shouldn't be hard, then, to relate your character's Nature and Demeanor to her Orun and Aye scores. You need no game system for such a correlation (and it isn't truly necessary), but finding a conceptual connection between these two pairs of descriptors could be of great use to you, the player, especially early on. The exploration of relationships between compared values is the

Hierarchy of Sin • Orun

Orun	Moral Guideline
10	Contradiction of one's undead nature (refusal to feed, attempting to be active during daylight, etc.)
9	Using one's supernatural gifts and powers for temporal benefit
8	Acting openly against another Laibon or supernatural creature
7	Acting out of pride, greed, gluttony or other selfish impulses
6	Failure to observe cultural traditions
5	Placing mortal welfare before the welfare of the Laibon
4	Acting openly against another Laibon or supernatural creature *who deserves it*
3	Ignoring the will of the gods, spirits or ancestors
2	Any act that endangers the sanctity of the Ebony Kingdom (collusion with Kindred to overthrow a magaji, cooperation with a company to despoil natural resources, etc.)
1	Blasphemy against the gods, spirits or ancestors

Hierarchy of Sin • Aye

Aye	Moral Guideline
10	Selfish thoughts
9	Minor selfish acts
8	Injury to another (accidental or otherwise)
7	Theft
6	Accidental violation (drinking a vessel dry out of starvation)
5	Intentional property damage
4	Impassioned violation (manslaughter, killing a vessel in frenzy)
3	Planned violation (outright murder, savored exsanguination)
2	Casual violation (thoughtless killing, feeding past satiation)
1	Utter perversion or heinous acts

heart of many great stories and, abstractly, is the source of the game system. You explore these concepts of your character yourself, internally, and no one can override your findings. Question the effects of your character's Archetypes on her Virtues. When the game presents moral obstacles, question them again. See how the relationships change, or ask yourself why they don't.

There is no fixed relationship between Archetypes and Virtues in the metaphysical design of the World of Darkness. A Survivor might be earthy or otherworldly, an Architect might visualize an actual temple or a spiritual construction. Your character isn't bound by a system in this matter.

Still, these traits can be related. The possibilities are just infinite and subjective. The connections you create between a Martyr and her devilish physique might not make sense to the rest of the troupe, but they should make some sense to the character. Nature might correspond to the character's dominant Virtue, while Demeanor might allude to the other.

If the idea of exploring these moral issues within your character excites you, then do it. If the Storyteller is intrigued by your work, welcome the opportunity to have these themes reflected in the larger story. By using your character as a vehicle to explore themes larger than unlife, she becomes symbolic.

If all of this strikes you as something other than a good time, ignore it.

Blood Pool

Characters with no dots in the Generation Background begin play as 14th-generation Laibon. Like humans and 13th-generation vampires, the bodies of this "last generation" hold 10 blood points. Only eight of these points may be used for vampiric purposes (see **Vampire: The Masquerade**, page 138); the bodies of Cagn's most-distant spawn are so close to a state of mortality that a reserve of blood is required to keep the body from becoming an outright corpse.

Should a 14th-generation Laibon be starved of blood, the body will continue to consume the last two blood points as normal. This not only leads to ravenous frenzying, it sometimes results in rot. Laibon with Aye scores of 8 or above and Orun scores of 3 or less dry out, flake and otherwise slowly decompose over the two days it takes the body to burn its final two blood points. With no blood in their systems, such Laibon are considered to have an Appearance of 0. Worse, when they next feed, they will have to endure the awful pain of blood returning to rotten fingertips and split skin. The undead body does not take any real damage from this process, though a Storyteller can require a point of Willpower be spent to act normally during the scene when a desiccated Laibon's body returns to normal.

Merits and Flaws

Players often use Merits and Flaws backward. A Merit or Flaw should not be applied in order to open up some other avenue of roleplaying or character development. These are powerful distinguishing traits. Having one is a potent descriptor, but having a handful becomes white noise. If you want a character with a fine palate, you should strive to describe scenes of snooty blood-swishing and prepare vivid, discriminating dialogue. If you want a character whose sense of smell is so strong that it nightly affects his unlife, sending him sniffing through crowds of ravers after a whiff of familiar hand lotion then you could highlight his Acute Sense. You don't need a receipt of anguishing characteristics to validate your character concept.

Social Merits and Flaws might seem essential, given the distinctly different behaviors of Laibon versus Camarilla or Sabbat Kindred. Not so. African vampires are predominantly from Africa and typically dwell within Africa. Local customs therefore seem normal. Neither will European vampires need a few Social Flaws applied when they visit (or are stranded in) the Ebony Kingdom. Merits and Flaws are not circumstantial. They are not a license to roleplay the distinguishing quirks your character should have anyway. A Social Merit or Flaw should influence every part of your character's unlife. It shouldn't be avoidable through witty dialogue or stand in for good roleplaying. Regard them as a challenge that must be overcome in every story. If your character's Social Flaw wouldn't keep a less-dedicated roleplayer from playing her, then you don't need it.

Although none of the Merits and Flaws listed in **Vampire: The Masquerade** are unavailable to the Kindred of Africa, a few have very different applications in certain regions of the place. Sweeping declarations of changes to these traits is contrary to their function, so each Merit and Flaw must be evaluated for each chronicle by the Storyteller. A guideline here, using the *Probationary Sect Member* Flaw, which is indicative of the social difference between African and European Kindred: Consider banning this Flaw in Africa. Laibon place such weight on the origins and loyalties of their brethren that the idea of them accepting a defector is too extreme to be explained away with a simple Flaw. The highly inconsistent methods that Laibon use for organization do not create many circumstances where this Flaw could be anything but a big deal. To be a defector, a character would need to come from a social group totally outside of the accepted dominance of the Guruhi. A Malkavian, for example. A complicated, compelling backstory is a much more suitable way to explain this sort of relationship, so it's a good example for new Storytellers of the Ebony Kingdom. You're not entitled to extra points just for making an interesting character — that's the whole point of roleplaying, anyway.

Many of the traits that vampires fear or regard with disdain have become more common among the Fourteenth Generation. Weak-blooded childer plague the domains, sired by careless young sires with little regard for the prophetic implications. What would be considered exploitable flaws by elder Laibon have become common features of existence for tonight's new blood hunters.

The weights of certain Merits and Flaws are different for those of thin blood. *14th Generation* is not a Flaw for Laibon characters. It is the norm, surmountable only with the Generation Background or through liberal diablerie. *Thin Blood* becomes a 2-pt. Flaw for 14th-generation Laibon. Whatever link the elders thought these two qualities had with each other, they were exaggerated. This newest age of childer is disgusting, to be sure — and more likely to be innately frail on the whole — but they generate large numbers of exceptions through mass production.

Physical

Well-Marked (1-pt. Merit)

You have been ritually scarred as a warrior with a famous mark of protection and favor. This spot, no more than two adult handprints wide, is especially tough and resistant. Unless your enemy knows to avoid the mark, you enjoy one automatic success on soak rolls.

Earth-Feeder (1- to 3-pt. Merit)

You are a rural Laibon raised to feed on the blood of certain animals. The spiritual bond you have with such beasts has altered your curse, so that you manage to draw extra nourishment from their blood. You can draw double the blood points, to a maximum of 10 points, from any mundane animals. For every point you place in this Merit, you may select another specific species of animal with which you share the bond. Humans and supernatural creatures do not qualify. You may select this Merit only if your Aye score exceeds your Orun score. The bond is broken if this relationship between Virtues changes.

Milk-Fed (2-pt. Merit)

You have been weaned on an evil variant of the Masai blood-milk. Beyond being able to stomach fluids other than blood, you can also draw power from the Laibon warrior-drink, a concoction that raises Strength and Stamina by one dot each for every three blood points of the mixture consumed (if you can get your hands on it).

Excellent Thirst (3-pt. Merit)

Disciplined fasting teases the thirst into more efficient burning of the blood, and you are practiced at doing this. By letting your blood pool drop to a rating less than your Stamina and not feeding for at least three nights, you gain two blood points worth of blood for every one point you drain from a living vessel the first time you feed thereafter. With regard to vampiric blood, this technique doubles only the first point you consume after fasting, though other (usually overwhelming) effects might result at the Storyteller's discretion.

Malleable Visage (4-pt. Merit)

Regardless of your Virtues, you can alter the supernatural features of your appearance to suit your mood or your plans. By spending a point of Willpower, you can change the severity of your appearance as based on either Orun or Aye by temporarily using one scale in place of the other. Therefore, your footprints might burst suddenly into flame or your leprous scales might fade away. No actual values are altered, merely the appearance of the character to normal vision. The effect lasts for one scene or until canceled by the player.

Ill-Marked (1-pt Flaw)

You have been ritually scarred against your will. Somewhere on your body is a large marking or collection of markings at least the size of two adult handprints. Besides being symbolic of something (but what?) the mark has left you especially vulnerable in one spot. Anyone who learns of the mark's purpose gains an automatic success against you in combat.

Contrary Visage (3-pt. Flaw)

Something about your appearance does not correspond to your Virtues. Worse, you might not even know why. Most often, moral Laibon with this Flaw seem like monsters, though it's possible that this Flaw might make vile isolationists somehow attractive to unwanted parties. Whatever you want, your physical form portrays or invites the opposite.

Corrupt Embrace (3-pt. Flaw)

For some supernal reason, your Kiss is cursed. Most of your attempts to sire or make something your ghoul result in a monster more foul than anything spawned by Cagn's curse. Your progeny become brutal, senseless killers hungry for blood and bone within an hour of receiving your Embrace. With nothing else to feed on, they'll tear themselves to pieces without understanding why. Any attempt to Embrace has a one-in-10 chance of being successful, with all other attempts resulting in aberrations. This Flaw may not be taken by Laibon of 14th generation or higher.

Fixed Generation (3-pt. Flaw)

Your body is so thinly infused with the Curse of Cagn that its potency cannot be heightened. Your Laibon spark cannot be stoked for long. Your generation is permanent, regardless of diablerie. Whatever effects you would gain from drinking vampiric blood last only a single scene. Incredibly powerful vampiric blood is even



rejected by your body once the scene is over, usually by vomiting ash. Only Laibon of the Twelfth Generation and thinner may have this Flaw.

Wretched Embrace (4-pt. Flaw)

You are the progeny of a weak-blooded neonate, arguably a being of the Fifteenth Generation, more likely some damned anomaly or the result of sloppy work. Your vampiric state is incomplete. You're dead and you must feed on mortal blood, but you're missing some of the supernatural might that the curse should afford you. You may never possess more than seven dots worth of Disciplines in total. Your Attributes may never be raised above 5 except through short-term applications of blood. You may not sire your own progeny or form blood bonds. You may not begin the game with any dots in Status.

Mental

Foreign Taint (2-pt. Flaw)

Bias, bigotry or overwhelming ignorance stands between you and any appreciation for your surroundings. You might be new to the local workings of Africa, or you might simply be a hundred-year-dead fool. Any action that requires you to demonstrate respect for distinctive local customs has its difficulty raised by two. Experience costs are doubled to learn Abilities or Disciplines that you would consider indigenous to Africa. Yes, this includes the local variations of the "Western" Disciplines.

Rural Fear (3-pt. Flaw)

You have no prior experience with the outdoors whatsoever. Worse, you have been brought up to believe that the wilderness is a vast catalog of possible catastrophes. Every ticking moment outside brings you closer to dawn. For you, all outdoor-specific activities (survival, hunting, even running across certain terrain) have their difficulties raised by two.

Social

Plagued (2-pt. Flaw)

You are followed everywhere by bad signs, ill omens and ugly portents. Flocks of inauspicious birds crowd the trees behind you or yellow-eyed hyenas stalk you everywhere. Whether or not there are meaningful supernatural effects (perhaps illustrated with another Flaw), you are sure to be poorly regarded. This Flaw might be out of place in densely populated areas, though a clever Storyteller should be able to adapt this Flaw to more civil environments.

Unfeeling (2-pt. Flaw)

Your heart is dead and you act like it. It's difficult for you to raise any concern for mortals or other undead, though you can fake it. You may never roll more dice for actions involving Charisma or Empathy than you have in Perception. You must notice something outright as you have no sense for these things.

Supernatural

Strange Day (5-pt. Merit)

Some bond exists between your blood and the land, some trace of mortal life left in your flesh. One day a year, you may walk outdoors in the sunlight. This day usually falls on the anniversary of some personally or spiritually significant event (birthday, wedding, miraculous survival of a car wreck, etc.), though not necessarily. It cannot always be planned for. Sometimes you're just unable to find the undead sleep and know that this is the day this year. By succeeding at an Aye roll and burning all your blood, you may force this year's occurrence and survive the touch of sunlight for a number of hours equal to your Aye successes. Laibon lower than 13th generation may not take this Merit.

Earth-Bound (3-pt. Flaw)

You are spiritually linked with some place on Earth. Travel far from this place results in nightmares, lethargy and madness. Every night you must make a Willpower roll with a difficulty equal to the number of nights you've spent away from your spiritual site. Every time you fail this roll, your Willpower drops by one dot until you return home. A botch indicates intermittent hysteria, depression or panic. Two consecutive botches result in frenzy.



Chapter Four: Disciplines and Other Witchery

Our parents used to tell the women who had young children to cut out a piece of the hartebeest's foot between the toes, to thread it upon a sinew and make a charm and put it on the little child. For these are things upon which Kagn sits, and Kagn would smell the thing's scent on the child and would not press its head.

—Bushman folklore

Disciplines

For the most part, the Disciplines of the Laibon are identical or nearly identical to those of the Kindred. In fact, the majority of Discipline powers differ only in name between Laibon and Kindred. Still, you might notice the absence of Protean, which Abombwe replaces, and the supplanting of Thaumaturgy by Assamite Sorcery. Auspex and Vicissitude also differ somewhat between the Kindred and the Laibon; the Laibon versions are generally wilder and more primal in performance.

Among the Laibon, views on the origin of the Disciplines vary. Shango and other religiously minded Laibon believe that they are gifts from the gods to aid in performing their work on Earth. Many feel that the Disciplines are given in exchange for the curse of vampirism. Those who are scientifically minded prefer to conceptualize their condition as a virus or mutation consider Disciplines to be a natural outgrowth of their "disease." Laibon who aren't particularly well educated in religion or science generally come up with their own explanation — a favorite is that everything has a positive and a negative side, and that Disciplines are the positive side of vampirism. Naturally, those who consider their abilities to be god-given tend to be much more careful in when and how they use them. Still, even though others might be more inclined to using their powers unwisely, fear of the local magaji or kholo (or their scouts) is usually enough to deter them.

It's certainly possible for Kindred and Laibon to learn each other's Disciplines if they come into contact, but there isn't much point to it. If a player wants his character to do so anyway, a good guideline is that the first section of Disciplines that follow can be treated as functionally identical to their Kindred counterparts. The second section's Disciplines should be treated as different if the student already knows another Discipline by the same name. For example, Kindred Vicissitude and Laibon Vicissitude should be treated as entirely separate Disciplines for the purpose of learning and experience expenditure. At Storyteller discretion, a character who hasn't yet reached his greatest possible level of a given Discipline (for example a 13th-generation vampire with Auspex 3) may switch mid-stream from the Laibon version to the Kindred version (or vice versa), provided he has a willing teacher. Otherwise, he may instead choose to start at the beginning.

This chapter focuses first on the Disciplines that remain entirely or mostly unchanged between the Kindred and the Laibon. Next are the Disciplines that change significantly between the Ebony Kingdom and the outside world. Last will be a treatment of the indigenous magical systems of Africa, most of which are usable by both mortals and Laibon.

Similar Disciplines

The majority of Disciplines remain unchanged between the outside world and the Ebony Kingdom. Still, the focus of some of these Disciplines is different, even if the powers remain the same, and local reactions to many of the powers are different from those in the West. As a result, many Discipline powers have different names among Laibon than they do among the Kindred. Some alternative uses for established powers are also detailed here for powers that might be used creatively in the wilder areas of Africa. For ease of use, individual powers are not reprinted here; instead, page references in **Vampire** or other books are given when necessary.

Animalism

Animalism is best known as a power of the Akunanse, though Guruhi, Kinyonyi and Naglopers also show a talent for the Discipline. Akunanse most often use it for purposes of survival, while Guruhi and Kinyonyi sometimes summon animals to act as messengers. Naglopers often to use it to hail potential subjects for their twisted experiments.

Animalism functions identically in the Ebony Kingdom as it does in the outside world. It's common for Laibon to call upon the gods or upon animal spirits when summoning or commanding animals.

Among Laibon, the powers of Animalism are known as Animal Speech, The Call, Pacify, Ride the Beast and Bestial Vengeance.

Celerity

This Discipline is responsible in large part for the Ishtarri's reputation as great warriors, and for the Osebo's effectiveness as scouts and messengers. It is also at least part of the reason the Shango command such fear and respect among other Laibon. Among other clans, the Discipline is used for both combat and enhanced travel speed. When used for travel, Celerity allows the user to run at a speed equal to [(1 + his Celerity rating) times that of his normal running speed] for up to an hour per blood point spent. If the user enters a battle while running, he is considered to have already activated Celerity for the first round of combat only, regardless of the number of blood points spent for travel.

Chimerstry

Unique to the Kinyonyi, Chimerstry has taken on a different role in the Ebony Kingdom than it has elsewhere. Because the Kinyonyi do not have the same association with the Roma as do the Ravnos, their role in the Ebony Kingdom is as mercenaries and facilitators rather than the roles more traditionally associated with the Deceivers. As a result of this difference, other Laibon do not automatically assume that Chimerstry is an illusionary power. Rather, most consider it to be the

Kinyonyi's own particular brand of sorcery, perhaps better suited to conjuration than that of the Shango, but even more mysterious and seldom used.

The Kinyonyi perpetuate this idea, as it helps them avoid that constant thorn in the side of the Chimerstry user — disbelief. Of course, Auspex can still pierce Chimerstry creations as normal, but even in this case, it's more common for the Auspex user to notice that something is "not quite right" or "transparent" about the object being viewed than the fact that it's necessarily an illusion. Disbelief is most common when the Kinyonyi performs "magic" without the proper components — without using a focus, gestures, special words and so on — and someone with knowledge of Occult happens to be watching. Savvy Kinyonyi adopt an African style for their Chimerstry to avoid these difficulties.

The powers of Chimerstry are known in the Ebony Kingdom as Minor Conjuration, Major Conjuration, Summon Life, Permanency and Phantasmagoria.

Dementation

Dementation is most likely the reason many Laibon find the Malkavians so distasteful. Beyond simple madness, many Laibon believe that insanity is caused by possession by malicious spirits. The power to invite such spirits into a person's body at will is just as repulsive to these Laibon as controlling the spirits of the dead through Necromancy. Even the Malkavian clan's peculiar form of insight is often seen as no more than a power of the demons inhabiting them, which could be why so few magaji or kholo will even have them as advisors.

To those who know of them, the powers of Dementation have the same names in the Ebony Kingdom as elsewhere.

Dominate

Among the major legacies, only the Xi Dundu possess Dominate, and the Ventrue presence in the Ebony Kingdom is weak enough that for all intents and purposes, Dominate is unique to the Xi Dundu. Small wonder, then, that the Xi Dundu are feared and disliked by most other legacies, for they possess not only power over shadow, but also the ability to command their enemies against their will. No doubt this power has helped immensely in the Xi Dundu's inexorable rise to prominence in the Ebony Kingdom, and the Guruhi's lack of it has made retaining control all the more difficult. Naturally, the Xi Dundu prefer allies who cooperate of their own free will, but those who refuse to cooperate can always be turned into conditioned soldiers or bodyguards.

Among Laibon, the powers of Dominate are known as Command, Servitude, Sculpt the Memory, Erase the Mind and Orisha's Ride (after the ability of Yoruba gods to "ride" and control their followers).

Fortitude

Whatever else can be said about them, the Akunanse and Kinyonyi generally become quite tough in their travels. No one is really sure how the Ishtarri came by this Discipline, except perhaps in their migration to the Ebony Kingdom, but they possess it as well. Fortitude in the Ebony Kingdom is usually considered to be an extension of the vampiric condition — all vampires are tough, and some are just tougher than others. It's natural that those who travel through perilous areas or often engage in battle will develop a certain vigor, and Storytellers might even consider allowing characters of other clans to develop Fortitude (or the other physical Disciplines) without a teacher if their unlife demands it. Not all vampiric Disciplines need be taught by another Laibon; some can be learned by experience alone.

Necromancy

Those unaccustomed to the fourfold souls of *abombo* (African wraiths) often have trouble controlling them. (Mechanically, an inexperienced Kindred suffers a +2 penalty to the difficulty of rolls to use Necromancy on the ghosts of indigenous Africans.) Former slave traders, the Ghiberti Giovanni combined elements of their prior profession and their unwholesome sorcery to create a path of Necromancy that made the enslavement of Ebony Kingdom wraiths easier to accomplish. Studying the strange powers of African wraiths, the Ghiberti learned to trace wraiths and bind them. Note that few (if any) Giovanni who are not members of the Ghiberti family have access to the knowledge of how to compel *abombo*, much less mastery of the Cenotaph Path.

The Cenotaph Path is largely indistinguishable from its forebear, the Path of Abombo. It is printed here, as it originally appears in **Clanbook: Giovanni**, for the sake of completeness of this book. Although the names change, the effects remain the same.

The study and control of the spirits of the dead in the Ebony Kingdom is the sole province of the Mla Watu (save those few Shango who also choose to study it, often against the counsel of their superiors). The legacy has long studied death, and its approach to the study of ghosts reflects this preoccupation. Mla Watu begin with the Mortuus Path (see p. 108 of the **Guide to the Sabbat**), and most focus on the Path of Abombo or the Bone Path afterward. Conversely, the Shango who study Necromancy usually begin with the Sepulchre Path, followed by study of the Ash Path. Rumors exist of yet another, albeit secret, path that allows the user to feed upon the very essence of ghosts, but if any of the Mla Watu know of it, they aren't telling.

The majority of Necromancy powers are known by the same names in the Ebony Kingdom as elsewhere, though Shango practitioners have their own names for them. The only main difference is in the final power of the Mortuus Path, which is usually used to inflict a disease similar to smallpox and is therefore known as Shokpono's Touch.

Obfuscate

Obfuscate is most common among Shango and Followers of Set, although Malkavians possess it as well. Shango usually use it to watch over their domains and weed out possible traitors, while Setites are fond of using it to learn secrets about their rivals, as well as to aid them in searching for artifacts and ancient lore. As for the Malkavians, most Laibon are thankful that they disappear from time to time.

Laibon who study such things know that Obfuscate is not true invisibility, instead simply causing those around the user not to notice him. As a result, many Shango and Followers of Set call upon their god before using the Discipline, asking for the help of Shango (or Set) in not being discovered. At the Storyteller's discretion, a particularly earnest supplication to a god might increase the difficulty of detecting the Laibon by one.

The powers of Obfuscate are known in the Ebony Kingdom as Cutthroat's Stealth, Hide in Plain Sight, Trusted Friend, Disappear and Blinded Eye.

Obtenebration

If Dominate adds to the Xi Dundu's bad reputation among other Laibon, Obtenebration is the fount from which it springs. As if it weren't bad enough that Xi Dundu lack a shadow — an integral part of the soul, according to many African religions — they command shadow itself with their unnatural power. Many Laibon consider the Xi Dundu to be soul thieves just like the Nkulu Zao, snatching and harnessing the souls of others to power their foul shadow magic. Since most Xi Dundu care little about their reputation, these rumors are widespread.

It might seem that since the Xi Dundu lack a shadow rather than a reflection like the Lasombra, it could be possible to circumvent the clan weakness through use of this Discipline. That's true to a point, but Xi Dundu attempting to do so soon learn there's more to their new "shadow" than they might expect. Since shadows created by Obtenebration are unnatural, they do not respond normally to light, and one conjured to circumvent the legacy's weakness usually tries to be as obvious as possible, dancing around, changing shape without explanation, and flitting about the heels of those who step near it. The Xi Dundu's player makes a Manipulation + Occult roll (difficulty 7) to keep the shadow in check for one scene. For every hour it remains, however, the Xi Dundu's player must make another roll, with difficulty increased by one each hour. If he fails, the shadow runs wild; if he botches, it goes berserk, attacking its creator and anyone else in the area as if it were an Arm of the Abyss. The shadow continues attacking until either it or its creator is destroyed.

Potence

Potence accounts for much of the force through which the Guruhi have maintained supremacy in the Ebony Kingdom, and by which the Osebo have helped them. Unfortunately, the Xi Dundu also possess it and have also used it to great advantage in their attempts to seize influence. Because mortals are seldom a concern in the deep forests, epic battles have sometimes occurred between rivals with Potence, using trees as weapons or hurling great stones. The more primal focus of the Ebony Kingdom often allows Laibon to use Potence more openly than they could elsewhere, with often devastatingly brutal results.

Presence

One of the most important powers in maintaining the power structure of the Ebony Kingdom, Presence is a staple in the repertoires of Guruhi and Ishtarri in every domain. Followers of Set likewise find it useful in swaying servants and in gaining new ones. As for the Ventrue, though many Laibon hate them, the few who have met one have often come away feeling that the legacy should nonetheless be respected, and Presence is likely the reason behind this sudden change of heart. In a land where influence is key and protocol is often more important than justice, Presence can sometimes mean the difference between maintaining order and allowing chaos to set in within a domain. Some Laibon have speculated (quietly, of course), that the Guruhi would have fallen from power long ago without it.

The powers of Presence are commonly known among Laibon as Respect, Banishment, Regal Air, Call the Servant and Majesty.

Serpentis

Serpentis in the Ebony Kingdom is much the same as Serpentis elsewhere — it fits with and helps reinforce the Setites' reputation as snakes and as corrupters. With its Egyptian focus, Serpentis also suggests to many Laibon that the Followers of Set consider themselves superior, being descended from what's supposed to have been the greatest civilization in history, which, coincidentally, might very well have been run by "white" people. Still, not all Setites are white, and the Discipline's particular effects vary depending on the beliefs and predilections of the user. Some say that a small group of Setites who worship Set as Aido-Hwedo, the Rainbow Serpent of the Dahomey people, even manifest rainbow eyes and scales when using Eyes of the Serpent and later transformative powers.

With possible local exceptions, the powers of Serpentis are known by the same names in the Ebony Kingdom as elsewhere.

Changed & New Disciplines

The following Disciplines are significantly different from Kindred Disciplines of the same names (or, in the case of Abombwe, unique to the Ebony Kingdom). Kindred who wish to learn these Disciplines may do so either as entirely new Disciplines, or as new powers to replace their Western counterparts. The one exception is Abombwe, which (if a Kindred is ever lucky enough to find a teacher) is always treated as a new Discipline. At the Storyteller's discretion, if a character who already has Protean wants to learn Abombwe, the character's experience points spent in Protean are removed, halved and applied toward Abombwe. Be aware, though that this implies that Abombwe is, in fact, the older power — which isn't necessarily true. (But that's why it's a Storyteller option.) Again, at her discretion a character who knows Abombwe may use the opposite system to gain mastery of Protean.

Abombwe

Unique to the Akunanse legacy, Abombwe is a Discipline in the truest sense of the word, for in addition to closeness to the animal kingdom, it also confers a heightened awareness and control of the user's Beast. Akunanse are known for both their jungle experience and their overall wisdom, and their control over frenzy and Rötschreck contributes to the air of wisdom they project. Some Laibon believe that the Akunanse learn control of their own Beasts by studying and emulating the wild creatures of the rainforests, gaining a level of instinct unknown to other Laibon. Some believe that the power focused almost entirely on control over the Beast in the past, but in its current form, it blends this with transformative abilities, possibly learned from outsiders during the Dark Ages, when some Akunanse ventured into Europe. For their part, the Akunanse tend toward humble silence on these questions.

In addition to the powers detailed here, Abombwe gives an additional measure of control against the Beast. When rolling to resist frenzy or Rötschreck, a character's rating in Abombwe adds to her dice pool. If the character succeeds, she does not enter frenzy or Rötschreck. With fewer than three successes, however, she must continue to placate her Beast by "tithing" it one point of blood each time she spends blood for the rest of the night. If she does not succeed, the Beast overpowers her defenses, and she may not use her Abombwe to resist frenzy or Rötschreck for the rest of the night.

• Predator's Communion

The Akunanse uses her Beast's primal senses to detect other Beasts in the area. This applies to vampires and other supernatural creatures, so results can be ambiguous, but it



does allow detection of hidden creatures at times. Akunanse most often use this power to detect potential threats before entering a new area or settling in to rest at sunrise.

System: The player spends a blood point. For the rest of the scene, the character can sense other Beasts in the area (including other vampires, shapeshifters, ghosts, predatory animals and mortals and ghouls with Humanity scores of 4 or less). The character automatically knows if another Beast is in the vicinity. To pinpoint the location (or to find a hidden character by "sniffing out" its Beast), the player rolls Perception + Survival (difficulty 6, modified by the strength of the Beast, as determined by the Storyteller). Stronger Beasts (from evil ghosts or vampires with low path ratings, for example) are generally easier to detect than weaker ones.

•• Invoking the Beast

By calling upon the feral nature of her Beast, the Akunanse temporarily takes on one characteristic of a particular animal. Akunanse use this power to temporarily grow claws, poison glands, wings, exoskeletons or nearly any other minor feature they can imagine. These modifications aren't always fully functional — wings are only useful for slowing a fall or gliding a short distance, for example — but still, this power has helped save quite a few Akunanse who found themselves in difficult situations.

System: Invoking the Beast is similar to Feral Claws, but with a broader focus. If used to grow claws, they inflict Strength + 1 lethal damage (not aggravated) and reduce climbing difficulties by two, but the power can also be used to create other small appendages (only one at a time). The transformation takes one turn and requires expenditure of one blood point. For anything particularly exotic (such as poison glands, wings or webbed toes), the Storyteller may require an Intelligence + Survival roll (difficulty 7) to correctly manifest the desired feature. A botch on this roll still results in the creation of the desired item, but along with it come several permanent cosmetic changes (scales, skin markings, gills, hair, etc.).

This power is meant to be useful, not cinematic, and Storytellers are encouraged to use any overly wild suggestions creatively. Despite the origin of their legacy's name, Akunanse should not be seen swinging from the trees and buildings with this power like a certain comic-book superhero. In most cases, weight is the easiest solution to this problem. Spider silk isn't nearly strong enough to hold a 150-plus pound Laibon, and no set of wings could possibly support one in flight, either.

••• Unseen Hibernation

This power is likely the reason so many Akunanse are able to survive the harsh forests, jungles and savannas of the Ebony Kingdom without so much as a tent or a hut to protect them from the sunlight during the day. Unseen Hibernation allows an Akunanse to use the natural world as a temporary haven, taking sanctuary in a tree, a rock formation, even the ground. Mystically fusing herself into a chosen resting spot, the Akunanse becomes hidden from both the physical and the astral planes, protecting her while she slumbers during the day.

System: Mechanics for this power are identical to the Protean power Earth Meld, but the Laibon may choose any stationary natural formation or plant in addition to the ground. Trees and rock formations are the most popular alternative choices. Some prefer to use caves, particularly those where lions or other predatory animals live. Anything sculpted by man is no longer considered "natural" for the purposes of this power, so rock sculptures or wooden dwellings are not an option. A tree with carvings in it is probably (Storyteller discretion) still usable, though. If the Laibon's resting-place is disturbed (by axe, pick or whatever means), she is expelled the same way as with Earth Meld, usually destroying the tree or rock formation in the process.

•••• Devil-Channel

One of the most mysterious and powerful abilities of the Akunanse, Devil-Channel is the ability to harness the Beast by imbuing its power into a specific part of the body. Depending on which part of the body he chooses to imbue, a variety of different abilities may be gained.

System: The player spends two blood points. All difficulties to avoid frenzy increase by one because the Beast is literally very close to the surface. The Beast manifests as a film of black, clotted blood that cakes the affected body part. Only one power can be activated at one time.

Storytellers are encouraged to cooperate with players to create their own manifestations of the Devil-Channel. Examples of use include:

Hands: The Laibon inflicts aggravated damage with punches. The power lasts for the scene.

Head: The Laibon gains the ability to see perfectly in normal darkness and a -2 difficulty to seeing in supernatural forms of darkness. He can also spit [Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7)] a toxin that paralyzes whichever of an enemy's limbs it touches — which the target may resist with a straight Stamina roll (difficulty 7). This power lasts for the scene.

Back: The Laibon sprouts four evil-looking "spider legs" from his back. These legs provide two additional actions if used to grapple or attack. Any attempts to climb automatically succeed, and attempts to escape by running are at -2 difficulty. This power lasts for the scene.

Legs: The Laibon inflicts aggravated damage with kicks. He can also leap up to 10 times his normal jumping distance. He also receives -1 difficulty to landing without hurting himself (on rolls requiring Dexterity + Athletics). This power lasts for the scene.

Throat: The Laibon can roar. Mortals (and ghouls) flee unless they succeed on Courage rolls (difficulty 9). Players of supernatural creatures must make successful Courage rolls (difficulty 8), lest their characters become weak with terror (all dice pools reduced to half, rounded up). This effect lasts for the scene.

••••• Predator's Transformation

By slaying a creature and drenching herself in its blood, the Akunanse can enshroud herself in the creature's Beast. Doing so allows the Akunanse to transform herself into the slain creature. Laibon who wish to transform into a particular type of creature often use this power in conjunction with Animalism. After learning to transform into a certain type of creature, skilled Akunanse can even re-create the transformation later without slaying another of the same type of beast. Thus do the Akunanse become true masters of shapeshifting.

System: The Laibon must anoint herself with the creature's blood then successfully invite the spirit of the creature into herself [requiring a Charisma + Occult roll (difficulty 7)]. If successful, the Laibon transforms physically into that creature. The creature in question must have at least one blood point's worth of vitae (that is, it must be at least as large as a cat or large bird) and must be a predatory or omnivorous animal (no elephants or rhinos). The blood must be fresh. The Laibon gains all physical traits of the creature (so a Laibon transformed into a vulture can fly, and a vampire transformed into a leopard has claws and increased speed). Humans and supernatural creatures may be duplicated in this fashion, though such changes are limited to appearances (no Disciplines or other supernatural powers are gained from such transformations). The transformation lasts until sunrise or until the Laibon "sheds" the skin he's taken.

A Laibon may also attempt to duplicate a previous transformation without slaying another creature. Doing so requires an Orun roll (difficulty 10), with difficulty reduced by one for each time the Laibon has killed and transformed into a creature of that type (down to a minimum difficulty of 7). For mortals and vampires, this means that the Laibon may become only an "average" member of his victim's particular ethnic group or legacy, unless the player succeeds on the roll at difficulty 10 (in which case, a previous transformation is completely duplicated in every way).

Auspex

Auspex in the Ebony Kingdom functions slightly differently from elsewhere. Rather than progressively increasing a vampire's senses (from the physical to the psychic), it gradually imparts a connection to the ghostly realms. Some Laibon have suggested that the barrier between the physical world and the Underworld is thinner in the Ebony Kingdom than elsewhere. Others believe that the Laibon's closeness to death allows them to learn some of the abilities of the true dead — ghosts and the like. Whatever the true reason is, though, Auspex is somewhat more mysterious and less defined in the Ebony Kingdom, making it both more flexible and less predictable than the Auspex of the Kindred. The Discipline can still be used simply for increasing one's senses or reading auras, but even in these cases, sometimes it reveals lingering phantoms as well.

Like Western Auspex, Ebony Kingdom Auspex does have caveats. Loud noises or bright lights still have the potential to deafen or blind characters using Ancestors' Vigilance, with a Willpower roll (difficulty 4) necessary to ignore them. Difficulty should still be adjusted based on how extreme the stimulus is. In addition, a botch on an attempt to perceive ghosts with Auspex will often alert malicious spirits that the character is trying to peer into their world, usually with unpleasant results.

In the Ebony Kingdom, the Naglopers use Auspex to greatest advantage in their work, as do the Mla Watu. Osebo often find it to be useful in their tasks as scouts or guards. Malkavians and Nkulu Zao likely also find it useful, but both legacies are rare enough that it's not known how they generally use the Discipline. It's not uncommon for Akunanse to learn it in their travels, as well, since it helps in traveling the fractious domains, from desert to forest.

A high Perception is still very helpful in using Auspex, but some amount of Occult or Lore can also be useful depending on the application. On any Perception-based Auspex roll, five or more successes reveal any ghosts (and possibly nature spirits as well) in the area, whether or not the character was specifically looking for them. These spirits appear in their normal form, but they seem insubstantial to the Laibon and the surroundings can still be viewed through them.

• Ancestors' Vigilance

It's not uncommon in traditional African religion to invoke the ancestors — spirits of departed chiefs or great warriors — to watch over young children or areas of great significance to a tribe. Most of these tribes believe that death grants the ancestor a clarity of vision (and of the other senses as well) unknown in the living world. Whether or not such is truly the case, Laibon with Auspex seem to have inherited a similar ability; hence the name of this power.

Although it's possible to invoke the ancestors quickly with little ceremony, many Laibon consider such an act to be sacrilege. The vast majority perform some kind of ritual that lasts at least a few minutes, asking the ancestors to lend their power (and thanking them for their graciousness afterward). Even Christian Laibon are likely to recite a prayer to the saints or to a particular angel (Samael is a favorite) asking for aid. It might not be

technically necessary, but the practice is widespread among Laibon nonetheless, and many believe that those who invoke the ancestors without properly thanking them will eventually incur their wrath and meet with a violent demise.

System: The primary use of this power is identical to Heightened Senses. It extends the senses of the user, aiding in tracking, observation and the like. It can affect normal Perception rolls, as well as rolls to notice those hidden with Obfuscate or some other supernatural power, and finally notice immediate threats. Storytellers should use their own discretion as to whether such a use reduces difficulties (usually by the user's Auspex rating) or adds to the dice pool instead.

In addition to mimicking Heightened Senses, this power has several secondary uses. First is the ability to use it to perceive ghosts. While Kindred can scan for ghosts using Aura Perception, Laibon can pinpoint their location and actually see how they appear. Trying to do so deliberately requires a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 9), so it's actually more likely that a Laibon will accidentally run across ghosts by getting five successes on a different Perception-based roll than that he'll succeed when trying deliberately to see them. Such is the nature of Auspex in the Ebony Kingdom.

The other main difference is that Laibon can exert more control over which senses they choose to affect with this power. When activating Ancestors' Vigilance, each success on an Orun roll (difficulty 6) allows the Laibon to select one sense to be unaffected by the power. This might seem counterproductive at first, but with four successes, a Laibon can choose to use only one sense. Savvy Akunanse and Osebo have used this ability to heighten only smell, allowing them to track their quarry without risking being blinded or deafened by an unfortunate accident.

•• Sense Vibrations

According to a fair number of people in the psychic and paranormal communities, ghosts are separated from the physical world only by vibrations. Because their substance vibrates at a different rate from physical matter, ghosts are unable to affect or manifest in the physical world unless or until they learn to control the rate of their vibration. Some also believe that once they do attain this precise control, ghosts are able to read information about others from their vibrations or emanations (sometimes referred to as their aura). Laibon who study Auspex learn a similar ability as their skill in Auspex increases.

Once learned, this power is always active unless the Laibon possessing it consciously chooses to ignore the vibrations of those around him. Similar to the Western power Aura Perception, Sense Vibrations gives an idea of a person's current emotional state. It also yields basic information on the subject's supernatural ability, but unlike Aura Perception, it does not reveal the type of creature — only whether or not it has supernatural abilities and generally how powerful it might be. Sense Vibrations also does not allow detection of diablerie, though it can be used to detect the emanations of unseen creatures.

System: Because it's always active, Sense Vibrations does not normally require a roll. When active, it provides the user with the ability to discern the current emotional state of anyone in the immediate vicinity, once per scene per person. An Orun roll can be used to deactivate it for one scene. The base difficulty is 6, modified by how many people are present. (Having more people increases the difficulty because of a greater volume of emanations.) To discern more complex information about motivations, mixed emotions and possible reasons for them, the player may roll Perception + Empathy (difficulty 7).

Unlike Aura Perception, this power reads only the strongest "vibration" from its targets. Only the most passionate feeling registers when this power is used, and the subtleties and nuances of Aura Perception are a refinement unknown in the Ebony Kingdom.

••• Spirit Ties

Along with the theory of vibrations goes the theory of psychic residue. Many people believe that the emanations of a person at a particular moment become fused into any object he or she touches during that time. Objects of special significance to a person often collect many different emanations, becoming charged with a resonance relating to their owner. Some believe that such resonance is stored on the ghostly plane of vibrations, in the same space the objects occupy in the physical world, and knowledgeable Shango have confirmed that these lingering energies are sometimes strong enough to draw ghosts back to objects that seem important to them in life. The third level of Auspex allows a Laibon to read these psychic "fingerprints" left on objects, and often to learn far more than just the emotional state of the person who left them. Except for those with exceptional supernatural prowess, most Laibon must enter a light trance for a few minutes to gain this information. During this time, they are only partially aware of their surroundings, but a loud noise or other strong sensation is enough to rouse them from it.

Many Laibon of traditional African religions believe that this ability harnesses the power of the sympathetic bond, the same principle best known for use in the "voodoo dolls" of popular culture. The idea is that a bond forms between a person and something he owns, however briefly. Length of ownership strengthens this bond, as does proximity. In other words, parts of the body hold far more information than inanimate objects. A lock of hair,

a tooth or even a small puddle of blood can reveal more information to a well-trained Laibon than even a person's most dearly held possession would.

System: When used on normal objects, this power is functionally identical to The Spirit's Touch (see p. 151 of **Vampire: The Masquerade**). When used on parts of the body or blood, roll Perception + Medicine. The difficulty varies by how old the item is and how much pain was involved in its removal. Gleaning useful information from a lock of hair that was cut in a barber shop would be difficulty 9, while a finger that was recently severed in battle might have a difficulty of only 5. Body parts or blood used in this way are best when fresh — dried blood or rotten flesh should increase the difficulty of the attempt dramatically, maybe even preventing it entirely. Information gained from body parts is usually more immediate than that from objects, generally concerning the circumstances under which the item was removed, who did it and possibly the reasons (depending on the number of successes). Laibon with Orun 8 or greater need not enter a trance to use this power. Their skill is such that they gain the information from the object instantly.

•••• Ancestors' Insight

One of the most renowned powers of the ancestors is speaking directly to the minds of their tribes, and to learn their deepest desires and secrets. Many tribes' coming-of-age rituals include some kind of vision quest, during which the ancestors use this ability to induce trances of wisdom and self-discovery. As they progress in the powers of Auspex, the Laibon learn to mimic the ancestors' ability to speak to and listen to the thoughts of others. Like Ancestors' Vigilance, Ancestors' Insight is often accompanied by prayers invoking the spirits and asking for their aid.

Although this power is similar in many ways to the Kindred power Telepathy, Ancestors' Insight has one subtle but important additional use. Beyond communication or finding secrets buried in the depths of the psyche, the power also allows thoughts to be planted in the mind of the target. It's a difficult and delicate process, but with practice, a Laibon skilled in Auspex can rival one with Dominate, commanding her subjects through impulses that they believe to be their own. This ability is part of why the Naglopers are so feared in the Ebony Kingdom.

System: Ancestors' Insight may be used identically to Telepathy for mental communication or digging for information in someone else's mind, and like Telepathy, it requires Willpower expenditure to affect the undead. Once the character is inside someone's mind, the player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty equal to [10 – the subject's Orun], or Willpower [for characters who have no Orun]) to plant a single thought that the subject will take to be his or her own. This effect might be immediate, or it might be triggered by a future event (the next time the subject goes to a certain place or speaks to a particular person, for example). A failure on this roll alerts the target that someone is trying to manipulate his thoughts. A botch hits the user with psychic feedback, inflicting four dice of lethal damage and paralyzing the user for a number of turns equal to (10 – his Stamina).

••••• Spirit Travel

One of the best-known abilities of the truly dead is the ease with which they are able to travel. Most people believe that ghosts are able to walk through nearly any barrier in the physical world, excepting only those that are magically barred to ghosts. Many have also suggested that since ghosts are thoughts freed from their physical bodies, they might be able to travel as quickly as they can imagine, so at a nearly limitless speed. The final power of Auspex confers both abilities to a Laibon, allowing expedited travel through the spirit realms. In most cases, however, the transformation into a ghost is only a virtual one, leaving behind a soulless husk of the user's body. With some difficulty, it is possible to transform oneself into a ghost entirely, bringing one's body into the spirit world, but if he is defeated there, a Laibon doing so is destroyed completely.

Use of this power projects the user into the astral plane, a plane between the physical and the Underworld, so that she can view both but (usually) affect neither. If the Laibon using the power has a great enough knowledge of the Underworld, though, she can try to travel to a specific realm or area within it, or even to other, more distant spirit realms. According to some, it might even be possible to travel to the realms of the gods in this way, though such a journey is rarely undertaken (and never lightly).

System: In most cases, Spirit Travel is identical to Astral Projection, but the user is able to view both the physical world and the Underworld at all times while projecting. If the user is trying to travel to a particular area of the Underworld or the spirit realms (if you're using **Mage** or **Werewolf**, this does mean a Laibon can travel to specific sections of the Umbra), roll Orun (difficulty 10 – the character's Occult). When using Spirit Travel, a Laibon may attempt to bring his physical body along with him, rather than leaving it behind and vulnerable in the physical world. Doing so requires a roll of Wits + Meditation (difficulty equal to the user's Aye score). A failure on any roll related to the use of this power cuts off the user from the spirit realms in every way for the rest of the scene, while a botch casts him into a particularly dangerous area of the Underworld, possibly with his physical body with him.

Because of the transformative nature of this power, Laibon who are projecting using Spirit Travel do not have a silver cord. Instead, they should be seen as having health levels equal to their Orun score, and if destroyed, they snap back to their physical body, taking lethal damage equal to that suffered while on the astral plane. If the user takes his body with him into the astral plane, destruction there is permanent and irreversible. When using this power for purposes of travel, follow the guidelines under Astral Projection (see p. 152 of **Vampire**). A Laibon may also attempt to discorporate and re-form at any location familiar to him. Doing so requires an Orun roll (base difficulty 8), and is possible only for locations that the Laibon has visited previously, either in the physical world or astrally. Attempts to travel or manifest in a warded location result in appearance just outside the edge of the ward. For the purposes of wards, projecting Laibon are considered to be vulnerable to both wards against Kindred or Laibon and to those against ghosts or spirits.

Dur-An-Ki

The sorcery of the Shango works much like Western Thaumaturgy. Assamite Sorcery, which is similar to Dur-An-Ki first appeared in **Blood Magic: Secrets of Thaumaturgy**, while Dur-An-Ki first appeared in **Blood Sacrifice: The Thaumaturgy Companion**. Two of the more common paths are printed here, for the sake of this book's completeness, though players and Storytellers who wish to expand the base of Shango magic are encouraged to seek more information in those other volumes.

When practiced in the Ebony Kingdom, Dur-An-Ki paths require the expenditure of one blood point and an Orun roll, in which the difficulty equals the power's level + three. Failure indicates that the effect does not come to be, while a botch costs the character a permanent Aye point.

Dur-An-Ki also includes the ability to create and use rituals, though none are included here. See the aforementioned companion volumes for advice on this subject.

The Evil Eye

African people have feared the Evil Eye since time immemorial. To look upon a person or object with malice or envy can inflict a curse upon them. Surprise or admiration may have the same effect, and so a person who delivers praise exorcises the potential evil with an exclamation of "God is great!" or "What the spirits will!" Some people possess a powerful Evil Eye whether they want it or not. Such people can kill animals with a careless word or glance, shatter stone, or in extreme cases make a person's eyes explode out of his head.

Naturally, Laibon sorcerers had to claim such a formidable power. The Path of the Evil Eye inflicts a variety of calamities upon its victims. Although the powers take little time to use, the effects might take hours or nights to manifest, and the sorcerer often does not know or control the exact nature of the curse.

The powers of this path do not cumulate. While affected by a curse, a victim becomes immune to further use of that specific power by that specific vampire. For instance, if a Shango inflicted a peril on a victim, he could not curse that person thus again until the first curse had run its course. He could, however, still attack that victim with a loss or any other Evil Eye power. Likewise, another Shango could impose his own Evil Eye curse (making a very unlucky victim.)

The victim also has ways to remove an Evil Eye curse before it runs its course. Occultists and healers (see Inyanga and Sangoma) can work out rituals to weaken or void a curse with a Wits + Occult roll (difficulty 8). Each success rolled by the player cancels out one success of the Evil Eye attack. For some powers, however, the exorcism works only if it is performed very soon after the Laibon lays the curse. No exorcism can restore what the victim has already lost.

• Humiliation

With a venomous glance, the vampire inflicts bad luck upon his victim. This bad luck attacks the victim's social standing. The victim suffers some terrible embarrassment within the next few nights. Neither victim nor attacker knows what form this embarrassment will take, so the victim has no way to defend against it. Will you say something incredibly stupid? Will a waiter trip and drench you with soup? Will a magaji or ghoul commit some hideous blunder? You have no way to tell. The humiliation inflicts no real harm, but it can ruin a person's prestige or credibility for a while.

System: The attacker's player makes the usual Orun roll. If the roll succeeds, the victim suffers humiliation some time within the next week.

•• Loss

This curse affects the victim's property. Within a few nights of the curse, the victim loses both real wealth and some possession of emotional value (assuming the victim has such a thing). Lost property does not magically vanish; some natural explanation (such as a fire, accident, theft, confiscation or unexpected legal fees) causes the loss. Even the Shango who casts the curse has no idea what form the loss will take. Loss is permanent, barring special exertions by the victim. Lost money and possessions do not magically reappear, either.

System: If the Orun roll succeeds, the victim loses one dot of Resources within the next week. The Storyteller decides what sentimental loss the victim suffers. If

all else fails, the victim might lose a retainer or a dot of Herd. Even if a victim completely lacks resources, the curse still finds *something* to strip away. Perhaps the victim loses his wedding ring, the last memento of a happier life, or an abandoned building used as a haven might burn down.

••• Peril

This power puts the victim directly in danger. Over the next few nights — neither victim nor attacker knows precisely when — the victim finds herself in dangerous situations. The victim might cleverly escape the danger, and Laibon can probably survive even the worst perils. Then again, they might not.

System: The number of successes on the Willpower roll gives the number or severity of the perils:

1 success	One mild peril (Example: a rogue soldier)
2 successes	Two mild to moderate perils (a car crash)
3 successes	Three mild to moderate perils
4 successes	Three moderate to severe perils (a collapsing building, locked out of haven near sunrise)
5+ successes	Three perils, one catastrophic (captured by shapeshifters, haven catches fire during the day)

Each night is 50 percent likely to bring a peril, and the curse continues until all perils have occurred (or the victim finds a way to lift the curse).

•••• Enemy

This level of Evil Eye has the most far-reaching effect on a victim. Friends turn away; enemies appear (and could be former friends). Perhaps the victim can recover lost allies and placate new enemies, but the Storyteller should not make it easy.

System: For each success on the attacker's Orun roll, the victim either loses one dot of Allies, Contacts, Influence or Retainers, or gains an enemy worth one point (as the Flaw; see **Vampire: The Masquerade**, p. 300). For instance, with four successes on the roll, the victim might lose two dots in Allies and gain a two-point

••••• The Eye that Wounds

The Eye that Wounds represents the most immediately dangerous use of the Evil Eye. Unlike the other powers, this power acts immediately. The magician expresses fulsome praise, vicious insult or utter astonishment at the target person or object — and on the next turn, something *really bad* happens to the target.

System: If the player's Willpower roll succeeds, the target person or object suffers one health level of aggravated damage per two successes rolled (round up). The magician's speech shapes the form of the damage. For instance, saying nasty things about a person's car could make the engine explode, while praising a person's tennis backhand could make her arm instantly wither. Mortal victims generally suffer some permanent maiming. Animals affected by the Eye that Wounds usually drop dead on the spot.

The Hunter's Winds

• Scent of Deception

When this power is employed, the recipient can mask or completely alter her scent. The original purpose for this ability was to avoid the hunting dogs of nobles and crusaders, but it proves just as effective at throwing off any shapeshifters, ghouls or Akunanse who might be following too closely for comfort.

System: Success indicates that the Shango can change or simply negate her scent, making tracking her far more difficult. Failure means that nothing happens, while a botched roll actually amplifies her scent or makes it noticeably offensive.

•• Chameleon's Skin

The subject can change the color of his skin and the texture as well. If he is resting against a tree with rough bark, his skin and clothing alike take on the same coloration — including any variations — and change to mimic the form.

System: If successful, this power makes the subject virtually impossible to see (+4 difficulty on all Perception rolls) as long as he remains stationary. Slight movements might be mistaken for the wind, but any sudden change in position negates the effects. The player must roll

System: If successful, people simply do not notice the Shango, no matter how hard they might be looking. Observers using technological means of surveillance such as video cameras can still see him, though. This power lasts for one scene.

•••• Ecstatic Ruse

The Shango distorts the perceptions of those around him, so that they experience a distractingly powerful feeling of intoxication. They might enjoy a pleasant hallucination or just stand there blissing out, not caring what the Shango is up to.

System: Any character looking directly at the Shango as the effect is activated must roll Wits + Alertness (difficulty 7) or face intoxication. Any obvious threat to a character activates his subconscious defense mechanisms and snaps him out of the trance. Otherwise, this power, once activated, lasts for one hour for every success garnered on the activation roll.

••••• Ghost Body

The Shango triggering this power can move through solid objects, without being seen or heard. For all intents and purposes, the Shango becomes intangible. The side effect of this power is that the Shango cannot affect anything material around her any more than it can affect her.

System: This power requires three blood points instead of the usual one. Once he is in the Ghost Body, the subject cannot be seen, heard or touched. Despite the name, this power does not actually place the character within the realms of the dead, nor does it allow interaction with the ghosts from the Underworld. Some Shango have reported seeing very strange things while in this form, however, and most are very cautious about attaining the Ghost Body. Once the character decides to affect the physical world again, she is once again visible and solid. No other Disciplines work while the Shango uses this power. She cannot dominate anyone, activate Celerity or even use Auspex, if she has it.

Necromancy: The Path of Abombo

Abombo Necromancy functions on the principle that a Laibon, already a cadaver, is an unnatural bridge between the living and the dead. Through this principle, the path allows the necromancer to find other, similar linkages. The basic rudiments of the Path of Abombo function easily enough once the Kindred learns to attune himself to these connections. Advanced mastery of the path usually entails some brief ritual to forge artificial connections, either through breaking taboos to draw the Shadowlands closer by focusing unsavory passions or through techniques of authority and purity designed to command the two disparate worlds together. (See **Blood Magic: Secrets of Thaumaturgy** for information about Necromancy techniques.)

• A Touch of Death

Just as a necromancer exerts mastery over the Shadowlands, so too can some ghosts exert themselves in the mortal world. Whereas obvious displays of wraithly power such as bleeding walls or disembodied moans certainly won't be mistaken, some ghostly abilities exert subtle effects that aren't easily recognized. A necromancer who is sensitized to the residue of the dead, though, can feel whether an object has been touched by a ghost or sense the recent passage of a wraith.

System: The necromancer simply touches a person or object that he suspects is a victim of ghostly influence. The player rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 6). If successful, the necromancer can determine whether a ghost has exerted any sorts of wraithly power on the subject, or even crossed nearby, to the duration detailed as follows.

1 success	Last turn; detect use of ghostly powers
2 successes	Last three turns; detect use of ghostly powers
3 successes	Last hour; detect ghost's touch and use of ghostly powers
4 successes	Last day; detect ghost's touch and use of ghostly powers
5 successes	Last week; detect nearby passage of ghost, ghost's touch and use of ghostly powers

On a failure, the necromancer receives no impressions. A botch reveals a misleading answer (an object might seem tinged with ghostly power when it's not, or vice versa). Should the necromancer succeed in detection while touching an object or person that a ghost is possessing, he immediately becomes aware that the ghost is still inside. The impression gained in such a case is sufficient to count as a "strong psychic impression" for purposes of the Sepulchre Path's powers, so the Kindred might be able to (for example) immediately command a ghost to exit a person whom it possesses.

•• Reveal the *Catene*

Necromantic compulsions function much more effectively when the caster uses an object of significance to the ghost in question. Such fetters tie the dead to the living lands through their remembered importance — a favored recliner for relaxing, a reviled piece of art foisted off by hated relatives or some object of similarly intense emotion. Many Mla Watu can detect such *catene* through the use of rituals (see Ritual of the Unearthed Fetter, p. 165 of **Vampire: The Masquerade**). With this power, though, the Laibon can determine a fetter with just a few moments of handling. The Laibon simply runs his hands over the object and concentrates on it. He quickly receives an impression of the item's (or person's) importance to wraiths, if any. Should the wraith be one known to the necromancer, he immediately recognizes the



object as a fetter to that (or those) wraith(s). Successful identification of a connected wraith is not exclusive; that is, if the necromancer determines that the object is important to a given wraith, he can also determine if there are other wraiths tied to the item, though he must use the power again to gain their identities.

Many necromancers use this power on objects that they've already identified with A Touch of Death, in order to determine whether the ghost is trying to attune a given fetter or simply toying with the world of the living.

System: The necromancer holds and examines the object for at least three turns — if it's an item, this means turning it over in his hands, running his fingers along it or otherwise giving it a critical eye. With a person, this act might require a more... invasive... examination. The player then spends a blood point and rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 7). If successful, the vampire determines whether the object holds any significance to any wraith and, with three or more successes, the identity of at least one such wraith (which of course allows the Laibon to use the Sepulchre Path on that wraith). If the necromancer already knows any of the wraiths involved, their ties are revealed with their identity. Therefore, if the necromancer already knows of a wraith well enough to summon and compel it with other powers, successful identification of a fetter tells whether the object is tied to that wraith, in addition to any other impressions gained.

If a botch is scored, the Laibon can never successfully use this power on the item being examined.

••• Tread Upon the Grave

The extended awareness granted with the Path of Abombo allows the necromancer to sense the vagaries of the veil parting the worlds and to find locations where the Shadowlands and the living world come close. Often, the necromancer experiences a chill or shiver when stepping into an area where the Underworld lies near the living one. With practice, the Mla Watu can tell exactly where such locations are.

Experienced necromancers learn that certain locations are susceptible to ghostly influence. These haunted areas often become homes of a sort for wraiths. A knowledgeable vampire can thus discover places where the dead are likely to congregate, the better to snare them with other Necromancy powers.

System: The player simply declares intent to sense the Shroud in an area and makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). Success reveals the Shroud rating. The Storyteller informs the player of the rating, while in story terms the Laibon learns that the location is highly attuned to the Shadowlands, about average (not very close

to the world of the dead) or far removed from the realm of death. Failing use of the power has no adverse affect, though it can be attempted only once per scene (so the necromancer must either wait for a time or move to a different area before attempting to use this power once more). A botch stuns the Laibon into inaction for a full turn as well as costing him a temporary Willpower point, as he is overcome by shivers and the sense of overwhelming despair from the Shadowlands.

With three or more successes, the necromancer can determine whether the Shroud's strength has been artificially altered in the area (perhaps through the use of the Ash Path or certain ghostly powers).

•••• Death Knell

Not all who die go on to become ghosts — many lack the drive to hang on after death or simply have no overwhelming needs that compel them to stick around. Normally, even necromancers have no way to sort those who might become ghosts from the masses who go on to whatever rewards await. Over time, though, a necromancer can become sensitized to the pull of death that occurs when a soul escapes from a body only to hover in wait, enslaved by its postmortem desires. The weight of desperation becomes like a tangible tug, and some necromancers even learn to savor this emotion even as they follow the sensation to find the new ghost.

Of course, actually discovering the new ghost can be problematic. The Kindred might need some means to see through the Shroud, or he might have to send other wraiths to look for the new unfortunate, especially if a large accident or massacre leaves too many corpses for the vampire to easily discern and test names with other compulsions. Furthermore, new ghosts typically enter the afterlife insensate and covered in a sticky plasm that clouds their minds. The ghost must be freed from this spirit sludge before she can be useful, which again requires the necromancer either to reach through the Shroud himself or to send a wraithly proxy to do so.

System: Whenever someone dies and becomes a wraith within a half-mile of the Mla Watu, the necromancer automatically senses the demise (though many choose to ignore this "always-on" power unless they are actively seeking someone). This power does not automatically pinpoint the location of the new wraith or identify it, but the player may spend one Willpower point and roll Perception + Occult (difficulty 7) for the necromancer to gain a vague sense of the distance and direction to the new wraith. With one success, the Kindred may sense a vague pull in a general direction; with three successes, the necromancer can sense the direction and guess distance to within a quarter-mile. With five successes, the necromancer immediately senses the location of the new ghost to within a foot. A failure carries no penalty but a botched attempt naturally sends the necromancer scurrying off in the wrong direction.

The Storyteller may rule that disturbances in the Underworld, intervening magic or other similar phenomena cloud this sensation, simply to prevent overburdening a chronicle with constant ghost-hunting and dice rolling.

••••• Ephemeral Binding

The most puissant necromancers learn not only to sense the ties between living and dead, but to forge such ties themselves. The master of Ephemeral Binding turns an otherwise mundane object or person into a depository for his own mephitic energy, the undying Curse transforming the subject into a sort of linkage between living and dead. The Laibon smears his blood on the item in question, which mystically absorbs the vitae and, in doing so, becomes a vessel to anchor a spirit.

System: The necromancer must coat an object with his blood (a full blood point's worth); if the subject is a person, then that individual must ingest the vitae. The player marks off the blood point, spends a point of Willpower and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 8). If successful, the item temporarily becomes a fetter to one wraith. If the Kindred already knows the name of the wraith or has a strong psychic impression, then the object can become a fetter at any range, even to a ghost who normally does not come near the living world (as long as the ghost still exists). Otherwise, the Laibon must be able to see or sense the ghost (with Shroudsight or other such means).

A fetter artificially created in this fashion functions for all necromantic and ghostly purposes as a normal fetter. It can be detected with other necromantic powers, the Giovanni gains a bonus to Necromancy against the wraith attuned to it, and the ghost similarly finds exertion of its powers easier upon the subject (so the Mla Watu might turn an unwitting ghoul into a consort for a wraith who is familiar with possession...). The wraith can sink into the fetter to heal. Conversely, if the fetter is destroyed, the wraith is banished to some inaccessible region of the Underworld, perhaps never to return.

A fetter created with Ephemeral Binding lasts for one night per success scored. The expenditure of an additional point of temporary Willpower increases this duration to a week per success, whereas spending a permanent point of Willpower extends the duration to a year and a night.

Botching with this power not only causes failure but also makes the ghost immediately aware of what the necromancer was trying to do. Most ghosts do not take kindly to meddling Laibon trying to make artificial chains for them.

Vicissitude

If one single thing contributes more than any other to the near-universal hatred and fear of the Naglopers by other Laibon, Vicissitude is definitely it. Vicissitude in the Ebony Kingdom is both wilder and more powerful than the Vicissitude known to the Kindred. It's much less a Discipline of fleshcrafting and bone-sculpting than the ability to warp the bodies of one's enemies, up to and including the point of death. Naglopers use it to great advantage in their "games" of torture, forcing mutilated mortals and ghouls to perform tasks for them, fight each other to the death and engage in other similarly degrading activities. Masters of the Discipline are said to be able to twist and destroy internal organs simply by touching their victim, causing instant death in mortals and ghouls.

The Naglopers are not the only Laibon who show potential for this Discipline; in fact, any Laibon who tastes the vitae of a Nagloper can eventually learn to use Vicissitude. Most shrink from the idea, though, unsure whether Vicissitude's unnatural power is a result or a cause of the depravity into which the Naglopers have sunk over the years. Indeed, this question is a matter of debate among Laibon scholars, particularly those who have encountered the Tzimisce's more... refined approach to the Discipline (though when referring to the Tzimisce, the word "refined" is most certainly a relative term). Some believe that the corrupt nature of the Naglopers simply allows them to defile others by their touch.

Healing unwanted uses of Vicissitude is possible for victims with equal or greater Orun than the Nagloper using Vicissitude upon them; in this case, each limb affected may be healed as a single aggravated wound. Laibon of lower Orun than their assailant must either learn to deal with their new appearance or seek out another Nagloper (or other sorcerer) to help them.

• Chameleon's Kiss

The most basic use of Vicissitude allows Naglopers to alter their own appearance, including such characteristics as height, build, voice, facial features and skin tone. This is mainly a cosmetic power, so no more than a foot of height may be gained or lost through it. Although it is possible to imitate a specific person through use of this power, doing so is exceedingly difficult because of the wild nature of Vicissitude in the Ebony Kingdom.

System: This power is nearly identical to Malleable Visage, with one exception. Imitating a specific person is difficulty 10, not 8, and five successes are still required for a flawless copy. The Nagloper must touch her victim to use this power on another.



•• Corrupt the Mortal Flesh

The second power of Vicissitude allows a Nagloper to twist his own or someone else's face (or other body parts) into a terrifying mask of contorted flesh. This can be used for purposes of intimidation, of which many Naglopers are quite fond, or as a minor affliction upon an enemy. Naglopers with exceptional skill may even contort an enemy's skin and muscle to the point where it rips itself from the bone.

System: Corrupt the Mortal Flesh is similar to Fleshcraft, but touch is not required. The intended victim must be within 20 feet, however, and skin-to-skin touch does reduce the Nagloper's difficulty by one (base difficulty is one higher than for Fleshcraft). The mechanics are identical to those for Fleshcraft, except that making a person look a certain way (a tall, light-skinned male, for example) is difficulty 9, while duplicating a specific person is difficulty 10 rather than 8. Appearance can still be increased through this power, though few Naglopers seem to want to do so. Increasing a character's dice pool is also possible, but doing so usually ends up disfiguring the subject in the process (unless an Orun roll is made at difficulty 9).

Few Naglopers possess the fine control of the Discipline necessary for either of the previous applications, preferring to use it instead to inflict pain and destroy. Rending flesh and muscle from bone is possible with three or more successes on a Wits + Torture roll (or Dexterity + Torture if the Nagloper is using the touch bonus) at difficulty 7. This act inflicts a number of dice of lethal damage equal to the number of initial successes minus two (so five successes on the Wits + Body Crafts roll would yield three dice of lethal damage). Because this usage of the power is exceedingly painful, however, victims suffer wound penalties as if one extra health level of damage were inflicted. These wound penalties are cumulative if the power is used more than once in a scene. Naglopers can also use the power on themselves to create a horrifying appearance, subtracting two from difficulties on all rolls to intimidate, but increasing it by two for all other Social rolls. This appearance is random in nature, just like all other uses of the power, but the user's Nature often manifests slightly in it, and particularly savvy characters might be able to pick up on this at Storyteller discretion.

••• Rend the Man-Frame

This power takes the body-warping abilities of Vicissitude to an even greater level, allowing bone to be affected along with flesh and muscle. It can also be used to affect bone alone, inflicting both crippling damage and terrible pain. Like the earlier powers, fine control is difficult, though it is still possible for skilled Naglopers to create claws or other custom appendages. Even when he is successful, though, the Nagloper cannot control the length, style or cosmetic features of such new appendages, so they can be expected to look animalistic or rather unnatural as a result.

System: In most cases, the mechanics for this power are identical to those for Bonecraft. Creating claws, other small appendages or bone armor is difficulty 10 (9 if touch is used), however, not 7. Difficulty for creating full-body spikes is 8 (7 if touch is used). Difficulty for simply breaking bone or warping both flesh and bone randomly is 7 (6 if touch is used).

•••• Asanbonsam

This power allows Naglopers to assume the terrifying form of the *asanbonsam*, the legendary flesh-eating creature from which the clan takes its nickname. The form varies from Nagloper to Nagloper — some prefer hairy, slavering forms, while others prefer them smaller and reptilian — but claws are common, as are sharp, pointed teeth. A Nagloper in this form gains considerable strength and speed, so it's no wonder the *asanbonsam* of legend were so feared. This power is yet another reason why most other Laibon try to avoid the Naglopers whenever possible.

System: Mechanics for this power are identical to those for Horrid Form.

••••• Inner Mastery

The pinnacle of Vicissitude (at least as far as most younger-generation Laibon are concerned) is the ability to affect the organs and fluids of the body in nearly any way imaginable. While fine control of this degree is impossible with less advanced Vicissitude powers, Inner Mastery allows the user to reshape or destroy internal organs, reroute or expel blood or other fluids from the body, and so on. One of the most feared uses of the power is the permanent infliction of madness upon an enemy. Any organic brain affliction is possible, from schizophrenia or epilepsy to chemical imbalances like depression, bipolar disorder or anxiety.

At least some degree of medical knowledge is necessary to employ this power to its fullest potential. Those without such knowledge can only make basic use of its abilities ("I want to cripple him" or "I want to turn him into a drooling vegetable" versus "I want to burst his pancreas" or "I want to give him catatonic schizophrenia").

System: A Nagloper with this ability can affect the internal processes of the body. Unlike other Vicissitude powers, touch *is* necessary for this power only. Difficulty depends upon the complexity of the organ to be affected. Simple organs (heart, liver, etc.) are difficulty 7, while rerouting body fluids is difficult 8, and affecting the brain is difficulty 9. Simple destruction is easier than subtle manipulation with most organs, and "fine work" increases difficulties by one. (Note: The brain may only be

altered, not destroyed, so difficulties to alter it are not increased by one.) Three successes are necessary to destroy an organ (and kill a mortal, if a vital organ is affected), while five or more successes destroy it beyond repair (making the damage aggravated). Destroying the heart of a vampire does not cause paralysis, but the vampire loses half of his blood points, as much of his blood sprays out of control when the heart is destroyed. Rolls for all uses of this power use Manipulation + Medicine.

When affecting bodily fluids, simply causing them to spray out of the body (through any available orifice — not a pleasant sight) is easiest, while rerouting them to a different part of the body (cutting off circulation to a particular body part, for example) increases difficulty by one. A botch on this roll inflicts the desired result on the Nagloper rather than the intended victim.

When affecting the brain, three successes are necessary to create a permanent new derangement, while five are sufficient to make sure either that the derangement can never be bought off, or alternatively that the brain is so badly damaged the subject becomes completely unresponsive (a "vegetable," as mentioned before). A botch on this roll permanently increases one of the target's mental Attributes by one, and likely inflicts the desired derangement upon the Nagloper as well.

The power may also be used by a Nagloper upon him- or herself, to alter or move organs within the body (including the heart) at difficulty 9. In conjunction with previous powers, some Naglopers are able to create bone shielding around their hearts, partially or fully protecting them from staking. Applications this complex are always difficulty 10, though, and a botch on such an attempt will likely result in the heart being pierced by a jagged bone or something similarly unpleasant and painful.

African Hedge Magic

Far from the Health and Medical Organizations, the Food and Drug Administration, pharmaceutical companies and their prescription drugs and Martha Stewart is a world of faith healing and alternative medicine, where the majority of the population turns to local healers and protectors of the mind, body and soul in order to keep itself happy and healthy. As far as healing and protection goes, many Africans seek out two types of people, who fall into the realm of the Inyanga and the Sangoma. No Inyanga prescribes an over-the-counter drug, to be taken twice and then informed the next morning. No Sangoma concludes that a man has love trouble because he retains intimate feelings for his mother. To the African people, Western medicine falls short of their needs, treating symptoms instead of attacking the malady itself. Where Western psychologists condemn mentally ill patients to asylums, a Sangoma can remove the evil spirit that torments her patient. Patients with cold or flu-like symptoms aren't given couch medicine and sent home, but rather are treated by an Inyanga for whatever originally invaded the ailing person's body.

The two types of healer and protector are distinctly different from each other. A Laibon is most likely to encounter, and probably has knowledge of at least Inyanga and Sangoma from his village before the Embrace. A Laibon of 50 years or older might lose contact with a Sangoma but not with an Inyanga. In rare instances, some "cross-training" occurs, and an Inyanga might grasp the rudimentary concepts of treating ailments on the psychic level just as a Sangoma can learn to treat the physical body.

The Inyanga and Sangoma are not "character types" necessarily available for players to portray. Any character can be an Inyanga or Sangoma, at the Storyteller's discretion, though they should be somewhat rare and reflect their cultural purpose. If the entire coterie is made up of these individuals, there's not much value to it.

The key to this distinction is the ability of these individuals to use rituals. We're not going to present a "Path of Inyanga" or any such. Simply know that the culture and environment are different in the Ebony Kingdom. These characters don't need any special classification other than the Storyteller's approval to be able to wield their healing magics, because they're not even necessarily magic, merely "medicine." You'll note that most Inyanga and Sangoma rituals call for secondary Abilities for their application, but such is the nature of the healer's calling, and it represents devotion to the individual's craft. The rituals don't even have levels grading their difficulty — that's because no overarching trait governs them. The Sangoma or Inyanga simply knows the ritual or he doesn't. Botches while invoking these rituals tend to anger the spirits they call upon. Most botches result in dramatic failures, but sometimes they leave the Inyanga or Sangoma stricken barren, magically speaking, unable thereafter to use the medicine.

In some very rare cases, the abilities of a Sangoma or Inyanga persist even into undeath. While the healing rituals don't work on the Kindred, they still remain as efficacious on the living as they ever were. Indeed, some Laibon create vast cults based around their powers or build herds of dependent mortals due to their gifts — and almost all of these are despised by Inyanga and Sangoma who deplore their exploitative ways.

Inyanga

An Inyanga is, for the most part, a local naturopath; he is the doctor-type person that unwell people visit first with a medical problem. Almost all Inyanga are a male, as the knowledge of the trade is passed from father to son:

a pseudo-primogeniture. An Inyanga has at his disposal a number of plants, both common and obscure, roots, herbs, animal products, amulets, even human bones — all *umuthi*, or medicine.

An Inyanga administers his *umuthi* in various ways, all personalized on a case-by-case basis. Depending on the ailment, an Inyanga might rub an *umuthi* poultice on the skin, concoct a potion for ingestion, craft an amulet to be worn around the neck or possibly crush a powder to be thrown in the fire at home or sprinkled around the bed.

Sangoma

Where the Inyanga cure and protect the physical body, a Sangoma heals and protects the psychic soul. Everything from love potions and spirit summoning to protection from wandering evil spirits and foretelling future events all fall under the auspice of a Sangoma. Not just anyone can become Sangoma, but they are rather born with a special animal spirit, which is tied to them through reincarnation. Most Sangoma are female, but before a woman can become a Sangoma, she must first suffer a terrible illness that cannot be remedied by modern Western medicine. This illness is thought to be the animal spirit making its presence known for other Sangoma to take notice of, so that a woman can then be diagnosed and apprenticed to a Sangoma. Even before this illness, Sangoma have ways of discerning if a woman has an animal spirit, and thus the potential to become a psychic healer, though the severe and incurable malady is a dead giveaway often enough. The one foolproof method is for the spirit to speak through the apprentice during a trance-like state, in which the woman speaks in tongues or other languages unknown to her, and will prophesy the future, familial lineage and even the lives of the individuals present for the ritual. A prospective Sangoma will find an *utisha*, or teacher, to accept her as *isitshudeni*, or student. Once accepted, the apprentice is proclaimed Utwaza, which is known to the African people as a student learning to be a Sangoma.

Sorcery

The following list is a compilation of some of the rituals that the Inyanga and Sangoma perform, some of which are routine to their daily lives while others are only cast as a service to patients. A few rituals might also be cast in extreme circumstances, black and dark magics, that have not been uttered since the early British occupation of Africa.

Amulet Warding Away Illness

This talisman is meant to bolster the resistance in an individual to mundane diseases, including poisons and other toxins. An Inyanga will generally give out these amulets as gifts to people embarking on long journeys or perilous tasks. The amulet is created by combining the fang of a snake with the bark of a tree, wrapping them in the skin of a frog and hanging it from twine around the neck. A wound is opened on the flesh were the amulet rests, which must be allowed to bleed freely on the amulet and heal normally. From then on the owner will be more resistant to mundane diseases.

Merits and Flaws

These traits are unique to the Sangoma, and although some appear similar to other traits found in other sources, these have varied effects.

Empathic Sense (1-pt. Supernatural Merit)

The Sangoma are often thought of as psychic, as they seem to possess instantaneous knowledge into the ailments of each of their patients. This, however, is not entirely correct. During their time as an Utwaza, the Sangoma learn to be sensitive to the spirits and the effects that they have on the mortal anatomy. As this sixth sense matures, an Utwaza suffers a sudden bout of phantom pains, which can range from crippling stomach cramps to headaches, dizziness, swelling and even morning sickness. This enables a Sangoma to properly prepare for her patient, who visits later that day. It is generally perceived that a Sangoma is psychic when the patient arrives and notices the remedies that are prepared yet having never revealed the source of ailment.

Mechanically, a character with Empathic Sense lowers the difficulties of any Medicine rolls for which she received advance notice by one. The Storyteller is the ultimate arbiter as to whether or not the Sangoma receives these prescient pains, but remember that it's a Merit, and the player paid to enjoy some benefit from it.

Crippling Spirit (4-pt. Physical Flaw)

Although a Sangoma lives through her serious malady and survives to move beyond her time as an Utwaza, her body is not spared the same fate. To the outside world it might seem as though the Sangoma suffered a stroke. A more psychic scrutiny reveals the presence of an animal spirit that is almost unbearable to the Sangoma, crippling her body physically. She can walk only with the aid of a crutch, and even then at an infant's pace — one-quarter that of an unhindered person, with running impossible. Additionally, the cause of the crippling spirit becomes obvious to anyone who scrutinizes the character's aura (as with Aura Perception or Sense Vibrations).

System: The Inyanga's player must succeed in an Intelligence + Occult roll (difficult 7), which must be followed by a Willpower expenditure to ensure the permanence of the talisman's potency. As long as the character wears this amulet, the player adds two dice to all dice pools regarding poison and disease — even supernatural forms (such as from Disciplines or thaumaturgic effects).

Bind the Night-Walker

Inyanga who are familiar with the less pleasant aspects of the supernatural world sometimes know enough to protect themselves from the perils it presents. Such is the case with this ritual, a protective ward that snares creatures of the night in hopes of allowing mortals to deal with them on their own terms. The key ingredient here is the kerrie throwing-stick. Should a Laibon try to enter and cross the threshold marked by the kerrie, it holds him fast until the sun rises the next morning. Traditionally, the first person to awake and see him there must be very careful, going to each of the other sleepers and waking them gently without calling their names.

System: The player spends a point of Willpower and makes a Manipulation + Enigmas roll (difficulty 8). If the roll succeeds and the kerrie is placed at some point of ingress to a dwelling, it will "catch" Laibon (and Kindred and Kuei-jin) who attempt to cross that threshold. The Laibon can take no action involving motion, though she may do things that she would normally be able to do while constrained, such as use certain Disciplines or speak freely. Should the Laibon be struck for any amount of damage, the binding immediately breaks.

An hour before sunrise, the Laibon's player makes a Wits + Occult roll (difficulty 8). If she achieves more successes than the Inyanga received while invoking the ritual, she can break free from the binding. Otherwise, the binding lasts until sunrise.

This power affects only vampires (Laibon, Kuei-jin and Kindred). Other supernatural creatures are unaffected.

Boon of Wellness

Whereas Westerners have yearly flu shots and expensive doctor visits, young African boys and girls (and sometimes even adults) take a trip to their Inyanga. He casts this common ritual that, for a lack of a better term, acts as the "aspirin" of rituals. The boon acts upon most mundane symptoms: fever, headaches, nausea, diarrhea, sore throat and even muscle aches. An Inyanga lays a target on the ground so that flesh touches soil, then he spits in the dirt. He scoops up the saliva and dirt into his hands and places it over the target's forehead, throat, heart, stomach and groin. The target must remain in this position for three hours, all the while concentrating on falling asleep. It is believed that the ailments are drawn away from the dirt consecrated by the Inyanga, fleeing deep into the earth below.

System: Each success on an Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 6) heals one health level of damage or restores one dot worth of Attribute loss caused by sickness.

Drive Off Evil Spirits

A Sangoma performs this ritual to ward away spirits from a home. First, she dons a ceremonial head mask carved from the remains of a thunderstruck tree, then she places splinters, stakes and tacks in the dirt surrounding a hut, which is believed to prick the feet of any spirit intent on entering the target's home.

System: For every success on a Charisma + Enigmas roll (difficulty 8), the debris littered around the location causes one die of aggravated damage to any supernatural creature who attempts to cross into the area.

Expeditious Healing

This is a power the Inyanga casts on a wounded individual, so that his wounds will heal faster than normal. The Inyanga must heat up the leaves of an isidletshene plant then place the warm leaves on the flesh around the wound. Even the most grievous of injuries heal at an accelerated rate when aided by this ritual.

System: A successful Manipulation + Intuition roll (difficulty 6) ensures that the ritual succeeds, and the expenditure of a Willpower point ensures that the wounds remain closed. Lethal damage heals at one health level per hour, and bashing damage heals at the rate of one health level per minute. Even aggravated damage heals at an accelerated rate, at one health level every 12th hour. Failure to spend a Willpower point reflects the insistence of the body to remain injured, and the wound reopens after one hour as the character loses one health level at the same rate he healed until returning to the state of body just before the Inyanga's ritual.

Frogskin Curse

This ritual was cast only as a last resort in desperate times by an Inyanga who felt that there was no other choice but to enlist the aid of curses to drive away the British. This particular curse alters the victim's skin to a greenish, warty, thin and slimy consistency.

System: A player must first succeed in a Charisma + Enigmas roll (difficulty 8) and spend one point of Willpower in order to complete the requirements of the ritual. Once activated, for the next 48 hours, the victim's skin changes into that of a frog, reducing all Social dice pools to zero and halving all Physical dice pools. Players of supernatural creatures may spend a point of Willpower to attempt a Stamina + Survival roll (difficulty 8), which, if successful, negates a curse placed upon the character.

Invocation of Vengeance

An elderly Sangoma is credited with the creation of this powerful ritual, which dates back to the height of the British occupation. In her desperation, she designed this ritual to compensate for the physical deficiencies that severely limited her ability to create offensive rituals that would have hopefully deterred the British from her village. In an act of ultimate sacrifice, she channeled her animal spirit to take over her physical form and lend her the strength she otherwise lacked to attack the British, and anyone else who aided in their occupation. As a result, she transformed herself into a giant lioness and terrorized her village.

The Sangoma could return to her normal form for one hour a day, which occurred exactly at midnight. She would take this time to heal her wounds, set up potions or other healing or protection items that she could muster together for future patients and then was forced back into her animal spirit form.

There is no known method of reversing the effects of this ritual once a Sangoma casts it. It is also exceedingly rare, and even those who know it would likely be loath to enact it, let alone pass on its secrets.

System: The player spends a Willpower point and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 9). It then takes one hour for the Sangoma to channel her animal spirit into her physical form, and then mere moments for the spirit to take physical shape. Any animal form requires the Storyteller's approval. Once each night, from midnight to 1:00 AM, the character will return to her original form.

While in the form of an animal spirit, the Sangoma cannot cast other rituals, and she is otherwise limited to the confines of the creature's body. This precludes her from using many Disciplines she might have (outside Potence, Fortitude and Celerity), and it certainly limits many other activities as well. Obviously, this power is better suited to Storyteller characters than players' characters.

Play the Heart Strings

People come from all over the world and pay hefty prices for a Sangoma to enchant an item with this ritual. It is easily one of the most dangerous rituals if one is not perfectly certain that his intended victim has feelings of reciprocated love, for anyone who falls victim to this ritual is a ticking time bomb of emotions. A Sangoma requires one drop of blood and an equal amount of saliva of an intended victim in order to complete the ritual. She then drips the bodily fluids over a dried cat heart and crushes them into a fine powder. This powder must be added to a liquid in order to take effect. Once ingested, a victim will become more accepting of a person's love and admiration. Unless the target once again drinks of this potion once every three days, however, all of the love and admiration will reverse into feelings of hate and loathing.

System: Once the Sangoma creates the potion, the player makes an Intelligence + Herbalism roll (difficulty 7). For every success he scores, the victim suffers that number as a difficulty penalty in any social situation that might occur within the next three days with regard to the individual benefited by the potion. The victim is overcome with passion or adoration for that individual. After the victim first imbibes the potion, the player must roll Intelligence + Herbalism at one level of difficulty higher than the time before for each day since. Hence, after three days, the difficulty is raised to 10. If the victim's potion is successful again within those three days, then the victim truly falls in love with him. If any roll fails, however, passionate love melts away into severe hate, as adoration changes to loathing and revulsion.

Untainted Eyes

An Inyanga can restore lost eyesight in many cases, and only people who have never had the power to see with their eyes gain no benefit of his aid. A mixture of herbs and dried animal parts are ground into a fine powder, then the Inyanga blows the product into the eyes of his target which causes them to bleed. After a few moments and many blood-filled tears, the target's eyesight is restored.

System: After the player spends a point of Willpower and succeeds in a Manipulation + Intuition roll (difficulty 6), the character casts this ritual, which causes a target's eyes to bleed as he suffers two health levels of lethal damage. A few moments later, however, the target's vision is repaired utterly.

Wait in Hiding

An Inyanga created this ritual after hearing that a creature of the night had invaded his village in search of blood and prey. It is said that he gathered his village people together and bid them to bleed into a communal cup and drink of the blood of a cow. They each in turn bled into the cup, and then drank of the cow's blood. At the end of the ritual, the Inyanga fed the blood from the cup to the cow that had given its blood to the villagers. Once the cow finished drinking the blood, it was released into the village. The Inyanga completed the ritual by chanting the name of the cow over and over, while the villagers huddled as close to him as possible. To the creature of the night, the cow would appear as an unaware villager, while the villagers in the vicinity of the Inyanga would appear as the cow. The creature usually attacked the cow believing it to be human, at which point the villagers turned upon the night-walker and sent it to its final reward.

System: The player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8). Each success "masks" five people, including the Inyanga, under the power of this ritual, and any supernatural creatures witnessing the cow and the mortals confuse one for the other. The effect lasts for one night, though any supernatural creatures hidden among the crowd will actually be affected by the ritual as opposed to protected by it.

Wake Out of Long Sleep

Over the course of three days, a Sangoma must cast this ritual over the body of a comatose victim. She first places an item of value to the victim around his body, then she lights the personal effect on fire. The flames must be allowed to die without interruption, and the smoke must wisp around the body. For three days, the Sangoma will first need to *phalaza*, or vomit out a special concoction designed to purify her body and attune herself to the spirit world. She then sits and watches the victim for the remainder of the three days, in wait for the wayward spirit to appear above its body. When the spirit does wander over its body, she will snatch the spirit in her hands and force it back into the victim.

System: The player makes a Charisma + Enigmas roll (difficulty 6), and with three successes, he can discern between the spirits enough to pinpoint which one she needs to snatch and thrust back into its body. A Willpower point must also be spent to grant the Sangoma power over the spirit, including the ability to make physical contact with spirits.

Weapon Blessings

When an African warrior chooses to start his rite of passage, to sufficiently defend his village from creatures of the night, it is mandatory that he visit both his Inyanga and Sangoma to bless his weapon and war shield of choice. This way, it can attack and defend against physical and spirit creatures equally. Both weapon and war shield will forever bear the blood of the Sangoma and Inyanga who originally enchant them, warm and wet even after years of use and through all types of weather.

System: The Sangoma and/or Inyanga's player must roll Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 7) and spend a Willpower point for each item that is to be enchanted. Once the ritual is completed, all combat-related difficulties incurred while the character is wielding the item decrease by two *or* all combat-related dice pools increase by three dice. This benefit takes effect only when both the Sangoma and Inyanga have consecrated the weapon and shield.

Artifacts

The factionalized kingdom of the Laibon has no unifying standard to its objects of art or its objects of magical power. Artifacts, therefore, are typically distinctive objects of strictly remembered provenance. It is unusual for any two artifacts to bear much resemblance in both artistic form and arcane potency. Some splintered bits of junk contain devastating power on the verge of being lost. Some objets d'art are secured in museum-quality exhibits within high-society vaults to protect a tiny cinder of magic. Very often, it is necessary to know the history and origin of an Artifact in order to recognize it. Sometimes, such information is necessary to unleash or contain its might.

Those stories that praise the ancient Laibon are full of occult props. In many of these tales, the objects forged or won at the end of a difficult quest are passed down, lost or otherwise sent into the modern nights, enduring beyond the Final Death of their most famous owners. Therefore, the most beloved artifacts are usually associated with a particular legacy or even a single Laibon. Since the stories of vampires are preserved in undeath and told for hundreds of years in a single voice, it is regarded that elder's tales have more truth than common folklore. So the origins of powerful artifacts are generally accepted as true, even when they are not believed to be factual. It is in the intervening years between a story and the modern nights that an artifact's ownership usually falls into question. No respectful Laibon would use an object of such importance within the legacy as collateral or currency. When an artifact changes hands, it usually involves spilled or consumed Laibon blood.

The items presented here are all of Laibon origin. Not all artifacts are old, though very few are new. While most Artifacts are associated with a parent legacy, some are too pedestrian to bother defending so strongly. A few objects of great value are claimed by several legacies, though, and just the mention of their existence can ignite debate. The Laibon who casually displays or discusses her magical artifact is inviting trouble.

Storytellers, use these Artifacts as examples upon which to build new Artifacts for players taking that Background (see p. 80). These Artifacts work well in any story involving the Ebony Kingdom, and with a little creativity, they can be the basis for other Artifacts and future stories of their own.

Vanishing Bead

Level One Artifact

These etched beads are said to have originated in the Congo, though little evidence exists to support that claim. Although they are sometimes associated with



Naglopers and Kinyonyi, most of the vanishing beads that are known to exist are in the possession of Guruhi-sanctioned Shango. The earthenware bead is meant to be held under the tongue, but some Laibon swallow them to keep them safe. When used, a vanishing bead causes the possessor to leave no earthly trace of his passing. Footsteps, smudges and fingerprints are simply not created, even if the possessor has been stomping through blood. No matter how fast the bead-bearer moves, grass is undisturbed and leaves lie unmolested. Smells, sounds and other non-tactile traces are not effected by the bead's magic. The difficulty increases by two for all efforts to track the user of a vanishing bead.

Skin of the King

Level Two Artifact

This misleading name describes any hide, skin, skull or hoof from a dead animal ghoul that has been enchanted in the old ways of the Nagloper. By somehow donning this object, the wearer appears to onlookers as an animal of the sort used to create the artifact. Gazelle and monkey skins were sometimes made for spying purposes, but lion, hyena and crocodile artifacts are more common. Animals of the artifact's origin regard the wearer as a specimen to be feared and followed — an alpha male, if you like. The wearer's Social Attributes may be used on fellow animals, though no Abilities may be.

Blood Shield

Level Three Artifact

Osebo warriors first used the small number of these flexible shields in the 18th century against invasive Kindred. Each shield consists of an oblong frame, sometimes of bone, covered in hide that some say comes from colonial ghouls. The shield adds two dice to soak attempts, has an Armor rating of 4 and imposes a -1 penalty. Further, when touched with vampiric blood, the shield becomes "thirsty" for more from that clan or legacy. The shield only has an appetite for one type of blood at any time, and the thirst lasts just one night at most. The player of any vampire from this legacy who is touching a blood shield (such as with an attack) must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 6) or have three points of blood bled out of the character on contact. Each success on this roll avoids one point of blood loss. Lost blood splashes out from the victim's pores. The shield soaks up most of this, leaving nothing for consumption.

Kduva's Mask

Level Four Artifact

Created by a Xi Dundu magaji as a means of passing his control on to his childer, this enormous woven mask inspires Laibon and terrifies mortals by design. The mask resembles a wide-mouthed screaming head with eyes as wide as hands and a spiny topknot of striped feathers. When worn, the mask affords two extra dice

for Intimidation and Leadership rolls. Use of the mask causes consumable materials within 10 feet of the wearer to combust into green flames. These flames burn only mortals, inflicting one die of lethal damage per Intimidation success. The mask also subtracts two successes from all attempts to scrutinize the wearer with supernatural sight of any kind (such as Auspex, or certain thaumaturgic effects).

Pledge-Sword

Level Five Artifact

Perhaps the artifacts that most Laibon believe they have seen in use, pledge-swords are instruments of loyalty used by some Guruhi and their enforcers. They are believed to be Laibon variations on similar devices used by West African rulers. By touching the pledge-sword, any being bearing Cagn's blood becomes reachable through contact with the earth or the sky. A ceremonial pledge is often made, but is not necessary. The pledge-sword's owner (and only its owner) may wield the sword *once* against anyone who has come into contact with it. The owner pronounces the name of his target, then either stabs the blade into the ground or jabs it toward the sky during rainfall. If the target is either touching the earth (that is, on any ground floor or lower) or beneath the same rainstorm, he is slashed as though cut by the blade. A pledge-sword deals Strength + 3 aggravated damage, ignoring any physical defenses of the target (though characters with Fortitude may attempt to soak as normal).

Pledge-swords may be owned by non-Guruhi, though no one but they know for sure what the swords recognize as ownership.





Chapter Five: Geography

Far is where there is nothing, where something is that you will struggle to the death to reach.
—Shona proverb

My mother was born on a Saturday in a small village. Like all girls born on a Saturday in this village, she was named Ama. She spent her childhood learning how to take care of the household, gathering herbs and vegetables, cooking sauces and taking care of her little brothers and sisters. Most men spent their days farming fields inherited from their fathers and grandfathers before them. The man who was to become my father was no exception. He grew yams, cassava and vegetables — enough to support one wife and as many children as she could produce but too little to accept the burden of a second wife. He courted my mother, his second cousin, and they were married when she was 15 and he was 25. My mother produced only one child for my father. She gave birth to me on a Saturday and called me Little Ama, or Amavi.

During the first four years of my life, my mother wrapped me in brightly colored pagnes and carried me on her back while she prepared our food, swept our house and fetched water from the river. When my legs were long enough to keep pace with her and my neck was strong enough to support baskets of food, barrels of water and bundles of firewood balanced on my head, I helped with the daily chores. Our house was simple, with mud brick walls and a thatched roof. We swept the packed-dirt floor of our compound clean every morning. We all slept in the same room that held little except for our sleeping maps and a small shrine to our ancestors. At the end of each day, my mother and I would make sure that enough water remained in our clay drinking pot to quench the thirst of our ancestors when they visited us during our sleep.

My mother and I spent many hours together, walking through dense forests to the markets located in neighboring villages. Often we walked in silence, the baskets atop our heads, heavy with yams and vegetables for sale. We laughed and gossiped if our loads were light, the temperature was mild or we had the good fortune to trade our products for fresh fish from the great lake to boil in our soups and sauces.

I remember little about the first and only day I accompanied my father to the farm. Unaware of the path down which my life would take me, I believed that this day spent working alongside my father in the fields would be the first of many. I had become strong enough, and I was the only child. On that day, when the work was complete, I watched the farmers fill hollowed out gourds with the wine made from palm trees. Before taking the first drink, they offered a libation to the ancestors by pouring a little wine into the earth.

We always offered our ancestors food and drink, often accompanied by stories of their lives and afterlives. My father was a great storyteller, and our relatives and neighbors would pack into our compound, sitting on our wood benches during the hot, sweaty evenings to listen to these ancestral stories. Small children, with even smaller children on their backs, would peer over the shoulders of their parents as my father or one of the elders of the community recounted stories passed down from generation to generation.

We also held many festivals to worship our ancestors. One of my most vivid memories was of the festival held in my village to worship our stool ancestors. A mixture of brilliant colors and sounds filled the village as we celebrated with food and drink. Talking drums called to the stool ancestors — our illustrious chiefs who, when alive, hand carved a stool to sit on with scenes from our village and animals that roamed nearby, such as antelopes, monkeys and elephants. During the chief's lifetime they would sit on their stools, solemnly presiding over judicial, financial and political matters in the village. When a chief died, the stool would be blackened with soot and enshrined in the stool house in our village, taken out only for this special occasion.

While this festival was one of many, I remember it so vividly because this was the day I was struck by an illness so severe my parents feared I would not survive. Their only hope was to walk me to the large shrine in our region so that the fetish priest could provide a cure. My aunts and uncles gave my parents meat to offer the priest who would cure me. The priest accepted their gift, and I was admitted into the shrine to be healed.

On the fifth day of my healing, as I neared full recovery, the spirit Akonnedi took possession of me. The head priestess informed my parents that I had received the calling and that I would remain at the shrine to train for priesthood once my illness subsided. My parents begged for my release from this service, yet their pleas went unheard. Instead of returning to my village to one day marry a farmer just as my mother had before me, I married Akonnedi. On the seventh day, the head priestess informed my parents that my health had improved and that I was strong enough to begin my training. Defeated, my parents left me at the shrine and returned to our village. I did not watch them walk away. I did not cry when they left me. I smiled and I was excited. I thought that I would return to them a respected priestess. How could I know that I would not see them again?

During my training, I learned to use herbs and poultices to summon my deity in my divining pot, specially crafted out of the red clay found in the termite mounds. Still, I feared that when the time came for me to diagnose an illness or prescribe a cure, I would be unable to receive the messages of the spirit. Therefore, I practiced every day by sitting at my divining pot, gazing inside. I discovered that Akonnedi responded to the sound of a small metal bell given to me by the head priestess. Sometimes, when I rang the bell, other spirits would appear in my divining pot for me to interpret their messages.

Three years of training culminated with a graduation ceremony. Four other priestesses participated in the ceremony with me. The preparation was extensive. The head priestess made small incisions on my right shoulder, back and fingers to show evidence of my power to divine messages. She then bathed me in the ritual well. I dressed in new white cloth with red sashes around my waist and breasts. The head priestess placed strings of brightly colored beads around my neck, ankles, waist, wrists and knees.

The village women prepared a meal to be consumed before the ceremony. For hours, they pounded yams until they were mashed into fufu for us to dip in peanut sauce.

They served us bananas, oranges and mangos. We devoured cooked plantains, cassava, vegetables and boiled yams, aware that we would not eat again until the ceremony was over.

We cut our hair very short, symbolizing our rebirth. One day, the way we styled our coiffure would be a declaration of our identity and status. As we grew older and gained ever more social status, we would fashion our hair into patterns, using combs, porcupine quills and shells to display our individual powers. However, on this day, we started new, with nearly shaved heads.

During the graduation ceremony, I covered my tattoos with white clay, and danced and sang to the repetitive drumming. My spirit possessed me and I spun around and around in circles, but I never felt dizzy. I shook my hands to the sky and continued dancing as the dry Harmattan winds created a chill in the evening air. I went down on my knees to offer thanks to the head priestess and our god. I continued dancing all night long, until I collapsed as the sun rose and once again began to warm us.

The chief attended the ceremony clothed in his brightly colored kente gown, worn only on festive occasions. The unique weave of the cloth was, as told by the elders, a deliberate attempt on behalf of the designer to please the ancestors. Every motif then known to kente weavers was incorporated into this one cloth. The patterns displayed the chief's status and represented the history, values and beliefs of our people.

When the ceremony ended after two days of dancing and singing, I traveled back to my village to visit my parents for the first time in three years. All the happiness and joy I experienced at becoming a priestess evaporated in an instant when I arrived at my village to find that my parents had been stolen from me. The isolation of training kept me insulated from the wars that broke out in our kingdom. The spoils of these wars were people like my parents: people who spent their days farming, cooking and worshipping their ancestors. When the people in my village were unable to defend themselves against the local rulers of a neighboring kingdom who attempted to dominate our land and control our trade routes, my parents, my neighbors and many of my relatives were marched to the coast. Sold into slavery by these local rulers, the people in my village were shackled and imprisoned on ships destined for the shores of the New World.

Just as the gold and ivory trades had before, the profitable trade of people brought new visitors to the shores of my land. These visitors had pale skin and colorless eyes. We called them yovos, or strangers. The fortified trading posts built for gold and ivory were turned into slave posts. Because the yovos profited from the wars waged between kingdoms, they fueled existing conflicts and then imposed their judicial system on us to solve the



unrest. I have heard this period called the end of isolation, as though this were progress for my people. It was also during this time that a new, evil spirit from Europe visited our lands.

Of course, I did not know then that these evil spirits were known as the Kindred, but I was about to find out about them very soon. I traveled back to the regional shrine and spent my waking moments learning new spells and chants to protect my people. The mix of new cultures and people also brought new medicines to heal the good and curse the evil. I studied the taboos and traditions of the neighboring kingdoms, and I studied the languages and customs of the yovos. I became a very potent sorceress, but I craved to learn more, to gain more power to avenge my people.

During this time of intensive study, I heard rumors of a tribe of powerful magicians called the Akunanse who roamed the night in the shape of animals and could overpower all men with their sorcery. I traveled around the region, searching at night for this mysterious group of beings, convinced that if I learned their ways, I could use their power for my own revenge.

I traveled for months, seeking an audience with their elders. After countless nights of searching, I found myself doubting their existence, until I stumbled onto a sacrifice one night. A human sacrifice. I had found the Akunanse, but I did not realize that by seeking them I would be putting my own life in danger. In all my studies, I had never experienced or heard of a sacrifice involving human blood, and I was horrified by the affront to our ancestors and our god.

I tried to retreat silently, but these supernatural beings heard me and brought me to their elders. I noticed that the elders had features resembling the same animals that my people worshiped. I had never experienced such fear. I did not realize that they, too, feared me, as rumors of my power reached even this secret tribe. I later found that I was Embraced because the Akunanse needed my sorcery as they and the other Laibon legacies fought the European "Kindred" for influence over our lands.

During this time, as I struggled with my transition into the Akunanse legacy, the mortals whom I had promised to protect fought the colonists for control over our lands. The Akunanse warred for many years, alongside these mortals to drive both the dead and the undead foreign influence from our soil. We were successful. The mortals were not.

The confusion I felt during this period over becoming an unliving, deathless being eventually led me back to my village. I decided to resume my duties as a priestess, isolating myself from both the Akunanse and the yovos. For the mortals in my village I already represented the power of the dead. They feared me and respected me. I sang to them,

The dead are not under the earth.
They are in the fire that is dying,
They are in the grasses that weep
They are in the whimpering rocks,
They are in the forest; they are in the house,
The dead are not dead.

It was an easy existence. I danced, I sang, I healed, I killed. The protection I provided my village for 400 years preserved village life and brought change very slowly. Families still lived in the village surrounded by their land as they had for hundreds of years. The wealthier farmers used animals to help till soil, using their manure to fertilize crops. Others farmed by hand.

Modern advances eventually filtered into the community. The mortals learned to harvest coffee and cocoa in addition to the traditional harvests of peanuts and palm oil. Markets flourished, making it possible to build new roads and schools, bringing more mortals to the region. The influx of new blood made my existence even easier.

During the centuries that passed, I was revered and feared. No one expected me, as head priestess, to come out during the day. The villagers provided me with clothing, cigarettes and food that I did not eat. I healed them and their sick children. I found their missing jewelry. I put hexes on lovers who have strayed. And yes, I killed them in order to survive. But what was one more death to them?

My Country

I should have killed the missionaries when they arrived in our village. They discarded our traditions and convinced the other mortals that their beliefs were the only true beliefs. They shunned me and my medicines and conspired to turn the mortals in my village against me.

Why didn't I kill the missionaries when they first arrived in my village? I guess it was because I, like the mortals, was intrigued by their stories of far-off lands and the fate of people like my parents. They spoke of political struggles, economic collapse and a health epidemic called HIV that killed millions. I learned that during the centuries of colonialism, the common people of our kingdoms had been denied even their most basic rights, while the chiefs were either killed or made very wealthy men, depending on how easily they turned over power. We were now considered a country defined by the yovos drawing borderlines on a map to divide the spoils between the English and French.

The citizens of the countries making up Africa tired of foreigners governing their lives and futures. Wars were waged, sometimes bloody, sometimes not, during the fight for independence.

AIDS

Someone had to say it. My sisters in Tanzania call it "Slims" because of how wasted one becomes when afflicted by it. But you know what I'm talking about – that word, acronym, euphemism, whatever grammatical descriptive you want to couch it as. No one wants to just come out and call it what it is. Perhaps this disease is actually more deadly to the king than we Gabon are. Philosophy was never my strong suit in life, and it has not improved since my death, so this is a question best left unanswered, I think.

Historians say the "Black Death," or bubonic plague, killed nearly 30 million people in Europe. Some statisticians project that by 2010, sub-Saharan Africa will have 91 million less people because of the disease. Perhaps statistics bore you or you believe that authority figures can easily doctor numbers so that they have no intrinsic value to anyone but them. Both can be true at times. But I was alive in 1959 in what was then called the Belgian Congo. The country has gone through a few transformations since then, first becoming Zaire under Mobutu and now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Who knows what men will name it tomorrow? Back then, however, scientists were able to recognize the disease and give it a name. Our government, like so many other neighboring ones, said it was all lies, propaganda that the West was trying to use to distract us. The party line back then was that we had other things to worry about and the West could deal with this so-called disease. I don't hear many say that tonight, though it's already too late for millions.

Here's a few more facts: About 4,000,000 Africans contract AIDS every year. Another 2,000,000 Africans die every year from it. The disease orphans 12,000,000 children each year, and their mothers infect about half a million of those babies, almost all the victims African. Are you yawning? You should be trembling.

And the terrifying thing is that, barring a real cure, there isn't much to be done about it. How do you teach several billion people to change their ways? Most of us come from polygamous societies, so monogamy is a foreign concept. If men's grandfathers and fathers lived this way, those men have no reason to change it. And most women don't have many options in this world of men. I was lucky, growing up to receive more opportunities than any of my siblings. My parents sent me to the only school within 100 kilometers of my village. I was so proud, at first, dressed in my blindingly white shirt and plaid skirt. I felt my uniform set me apart from the other girls and made me special. It carried a price, though. Since I couldn't be in the fields harvesting with my mother or spend the hours needed to pound the manioc into an edible paste for my family as my sisters did, I had to supplement the family income another way.

After class, I would head down to the main dirt road between school and my village and join some of the other girls by the wooden shack where the Muslim sold petrol. I would unbutton my crisp, white blouse to better show off the curves of my budding breasts and wait. Eventually, the large trucks that hauled away the giants of the forest, the ancient trees, would rumble past. If one of us caught their eye, they would stop for a while. I could always make a little money that way. And I could contract AIDS that way, too.

Which I ultimately did.

It's sort of funny how many theories have sprung up over the years. Mostly the men blame us for it but think that sleeping with a virgin will cure them of it. They say the numbers show that many more women have it compared to men. That is true, but only because most men don't or can't get tested. And it's not as though many of us have the ability to travel far. Women are not the ones running from village to village, spreading the sickness. The loggers and soldiers who are always passing through take this with them. There you have it – much of this boils down to ignorance with a little governmental misdirection on the side. The false radio reports heralding herbal cures and other lies makes people think they are safe. Take South Africa for example. One in 10 has AIDS, but Mbeki actively discourages his people from taking the only medication that slows the disease. I wonder if he is thrall to the Guruhi and this is their way of controlling the people (or what's left of them)? But none of this really matters. The disease is here and spreads unchecked. Even in death I still communicate it.

The Ishtarri who embraced me has it now. I gave it to him. When he stepped out of the bush taxi, I found him strangely exotic, and he found me irresistible all those years ago. We had other venereal diseases – though nothing I hadn't seen before – but he didn't have this. To be honest, I didn't know I was infected at the time, but that wouldn't have stopped me if I had. When he took my blood, he took the disease within it. We both spread this now as do many others, I'm sure. I can't stop – and I have tried – but I simply can't feed solely on animals. I need human contact.

The most frightening fact of all is that within the next 10 years, it is projected that 40 million AIDS orphans will grow up in Africa. Zimbabwe and Botswana already have zero population growth because one in four has the disease and it tends to be adults in the age range of 20–50. Their children grow up without parents and with little, if any, social structure at all. Businesses will collapse because there will be no adults to run them, and this will mean economic ruin for many countries.

As much as humanitarianism, it is this vision of lawlessness and chaos and their potential to destabilize the global economy that has fueled worldwide concern. The West sends money over here, earmarked for AIDS, but without direct, hands-on supervision, that money vanishes, sucked away by many governments for their own use. And the doctors and nurses are dying from AIDS, too. Who will administer the drugs when they are gone?

What will we do when only children are left? I know the War of Ages rages on, but I think the elders need to face this and face it now. I think that AIDS just might be the end of us all. What are we going to do?

At your service,

Honorine Atéba
Women's Cooperative of Atuae
Cameroon

Hundreds of years of isolation had kept me from learning about the world outside my village. The missionaries sparked my interest in travel so that I became desirous of exploring the lands around me. The missionaries also succeeded in corrupting my village with their Western religion, and I was afraid that the mortals would soon do more than just fear me and would try to harm me. Not that they could.

Time had increased my powers as a priestess, but my facial features were slowly changing. I was made aware of this by the increasing horror expressed on the faces of the mortals whom I allowed to gaze upon me. I could feel my eyes narrowing, my skin toughening and my tongue taking a forked shape. I had heard rumors of Akunanse that had all but become animals, becoming a hideous mixture of man, Laibon and animal, and I feared that the characteristics of my legacy were becoming more prevalent. I decided to travel to the capital city to seek out others like me and discover if there was something I could do to halt the advances of what I feared were serpentine characteristics.

I left my village on a hot, muggy night, walking several miles through the forest to the regional capital. It was here that I was able to hire a vehicle. These vehicles called bush taxis have made travel much easier for mortals, and their preference for traveling at night to escape the heat of the day allowed me to travel with them. The bush taxis I took were packed with mortals, luggage and animals. My status as a priestess gave me two advantages. I was given the front seat of these crowded vehicles, and I inspired just enough fear that the driver and the passengers averted their eyes from me.

The bush taxi traveled along dirt roads and then tar roads as we headed toward the coast. The dense jungle gave way to savanna woodland and then to grassland and coconut groves, ending at sandy beaches overlooking the sea. I had never seen such a large, vast body of water. I saw empty fishing nets, where men had hauled in the harvest for the day. The setting was idyllic... at first. Then I noticed the stained water, polluted from the local industries. The old road was a mile off the shore, displaced from erosion and removal of the sand. The slave castles that housed my people during the weeks and days before they were shipped to the New World remained intact, dotting the coastline like shattered, bleached bones. I learned that the small gleaming lights on the horizon were ships belonging to yovos. Some of these ships were used for pleasure, others transported our oil back to their lands. War ships also sailed out there. I could not identify the origin of these ships. Were they English, American or French? I never knew.

Life in the coastal villages was very different from life in my village. Replacing the traditional grass huts were "modern" cement houses. Handmade signs advertised local beer and foreign soft drinks. Trash and debris lined the narrow, pothole-scarred roadways. In between the villages lay small gardens, bare land with short grass and soccer goal posts, and fields growing mostly corn and cassava. Children with dirty feet, knees, hands and faces roamed alongside animals, dangerously close to the taxis, private vehicles and huge lorries that barreled down the roadway in the middle of the night.

After three nights of travel, I arrived at the capital. The bush taxi approached the city slowly as our driver navigated potholes in the road that were often larger than our vehicle. With no suspension in the vehicle, each bump became a major jolt. When we stopped at the taxi stand in the city center, I was assaulted by noises and smells. The number of mortals swarming around the food stands disoriented me, as did the abundance of food. Women stood at each of the stands with small candles lit next to the prepared sustenance to encourage a purchase. I took a seat at the nearest omelet stand and ordered a Nescafe and Milo. Even at night it was hot outside, just like most nights. Still, holding the warm drink in my hands calmed me. I drew the cup to my nose and inhaled deeply to drown out the smell of decay and feces.

I stumbled upon a small rooming house next to the ocean and decided to stay there. I spent several nights watching the government programs broadcast all night (and I assume day) on the small black-and-white television in my room. These shows promoted our current president as a kind, benevolent man who implemented many social initiatives for the people. Yet, the many conversations I had overheard about this president in my village and during the time I had spent traveling to the capital told a different story. The years of being driven around in an air-conditioned car, holding office in one of the city's few skyscrapers and keeping his money in Swiss bank accounts has made him lose touch with the people of his country. His democratic ideals have gotten lost during the 20 years he has been in power. Although he dresses like the people and boasts a traditional name, he speaks to his constituents in the language of the colonists. I guess it would be difficult for any man to learn the 40 different languages spoken in this country.

When I was on my way out the door, finally ready and hungry enough to explore the capital, the rooming house manager proudly informed me that the city had all the advantages of a modern society anywhere, including Europe. He offered to assist me with finding anything I was looking for, and spoke fervently of the city's vibrant nightlife. With his advice, I frequented several clubs and bars that were established to cater to the yovos and were now an accepted part of life here. Mortals seemed to be uninhibited at these clubs, especially the yovos who proved to be the easiest victims. However, I learned the best feeding places were the

beaches at night. No respectable person would venture to the beach after dark. My confidence in feeding undetected grew rapidly as I soon discovered that those crazed mortals wandering the beaches at night would have no one searching for them the next day.

I soon realized that money, something I never had much need for in my village, was very important here. Not only did things cost a lot more in the city, but bribes were also expected for even the smallest services or favors. Irritating, to say the least, but one look from me and the mortals seemed to overlook their "dash" as they called the bribes, with a wink. I saw many beggars as well. Every street corner held a man or woman, most with deformed, withered limbs, begging for money.

It quickly became apparent that the so-called modern technology of the past century was still a thin mask over the cultural realities, including what was now considered "traditional" religion. Since the time when most counties gained independence, now over 50 years ago, the Akunanse have prospered here, exerting their influence over the city through the largest fetish market in West Africa. The mortals still practiced their traditional religions, perhaps only slightly more secretly and furtively than when I was a child. The marketplace prospered despite the presence of Muslim and Christian faiths.

I soon discovered the answers to the Akunanse legacy. As our unlives develop, our essence transforms from the bodies inhabited during our lives, to new shapes, taking on the features of snakes, monkeys, antelope and other local animals. The mortals accepted us as a link to their origins and their past and have created fetishes to resemble and worship the Akunanse. Priests and priestesses from around the region come here now to buy their food, clothing, beads and other supplies.

The woodcarvings, sold in the front of the market, sometimes reach up to four feet high and represent both our spirits and the Akunanse elders. The sculpted wood, mostly teak, resembles our legacy in various stages as the elders acquired their animalistic features. The Akunanse also sell sculptures resembling human features some with long tongues sticking out, others with startled expressions, and many with disproportionately large penises to symbolize fertility. The nail fetish was the most popular figurine, and customers would commission craftspeople to create a figure of a particular man or women. The buyer would then drive nails into the torso, arms and head to cleanse his or her soul of the negative feelings felt toward that person.

The back of the store contained the most important items. There the Akunanse sell dried human, animal and reptile skins, skulls and teeth, as well as horns, porcupine quills, roots, bark, herbs, and other powdered substances to make gris-gris. We fashioned jewelry and leather bags to wear the powerful gris-gris, whether it was to cure illness or to bring luck in love. Cowry shells, used as currency when I was a small child, were now used in many of our rituals and were fashioned into jewelry. Our elders held consultations in the back, in unlit rooms, throwing loose cowry shells onto the dirt floor to divine the future of both Laibon and mortals.

It seemed there was no end to what the yovos would do to fascinate themselves with local culture. Yovos actually paid the Akunanse money to observe our rituals and dances. They would buy gris-gris to help them in love or finance, and then we would take them to the beach to watch traditional performances. I will not say they were true believers, but they definitely walked away with a sense of the unexplained… that is, if they walked away.

The drumming especially entranced foreigners. The Djembe drum was critical to entering trances and possession by the spirits. The drummer would coax the spirit with a wide range of tones, produced by the thin goatskin covering the hand-carved wood base. The drums were individualized with scenes of villages, animals and our spiritual symbols. The drummers used their open hands to slap the skin, varying where they hit to produce the deep and high-pitched notes, and we danced rhythmically to invoke the spirits.

The Akunanse held power through traditional religion, or more accurately, the fear that traditional religion held over the mortals. We rarely bothered with politics and the corruption surrounding all things political. However, as the mortals clashed increasingly, so did the legacies of the Laibon. A mere whisper was enough to set off a coup or at least an attempt at one.

I do not think anyone, mortal or Laibon, is shocked anymore by seeing a corpse by the side of the road. As the mortals waged war and went hungry, as diseases ravaged through their numbers, our feeding became easier and easier, yet the Laibon grew more and more restless. Maybe the lessening challenge caused us to divert our attentions to one another.

During the latest coup, an opposition force to the dictatorship in the country next door attempted to take power, simply replacing one dictator with another. The bloodshed was minor, with only 1,000 or so killed, but we were able to display our power to the other Laibon. On the other hand, maybe I am giving us too much credit. It probably would have happened anyway.

My Journey

I left soon after along the coconut palmed tar roadway adjacent to the beach. I was ready to explore new and different languages, societies and religions. I traveled west spending one night in the midst of a bloody coup and the next night dancing in the moonlight at a rooftop club overlooking white, glowing beaches. I stayed in tourist hotels, with pools, hotel bars and private beaches, and I

stayed in one-room dives, filled with roaches, mice and the smell of the mortals before me. I had become accustomed to air conditioning, so much that the humid nights caused me to glisten with a thin blood-sweat at times.

Both mortals and the Laibon turned to the urban areas, leaving, as I did, the rural areas for excitement and opportunity. I heard both optimism and pessimism about the future of these countries and of the continent. Foreign governments still have a strong hold on their former colonies, encouraging debts that can never be paid through foreign "aid" programs and low-interest loans.

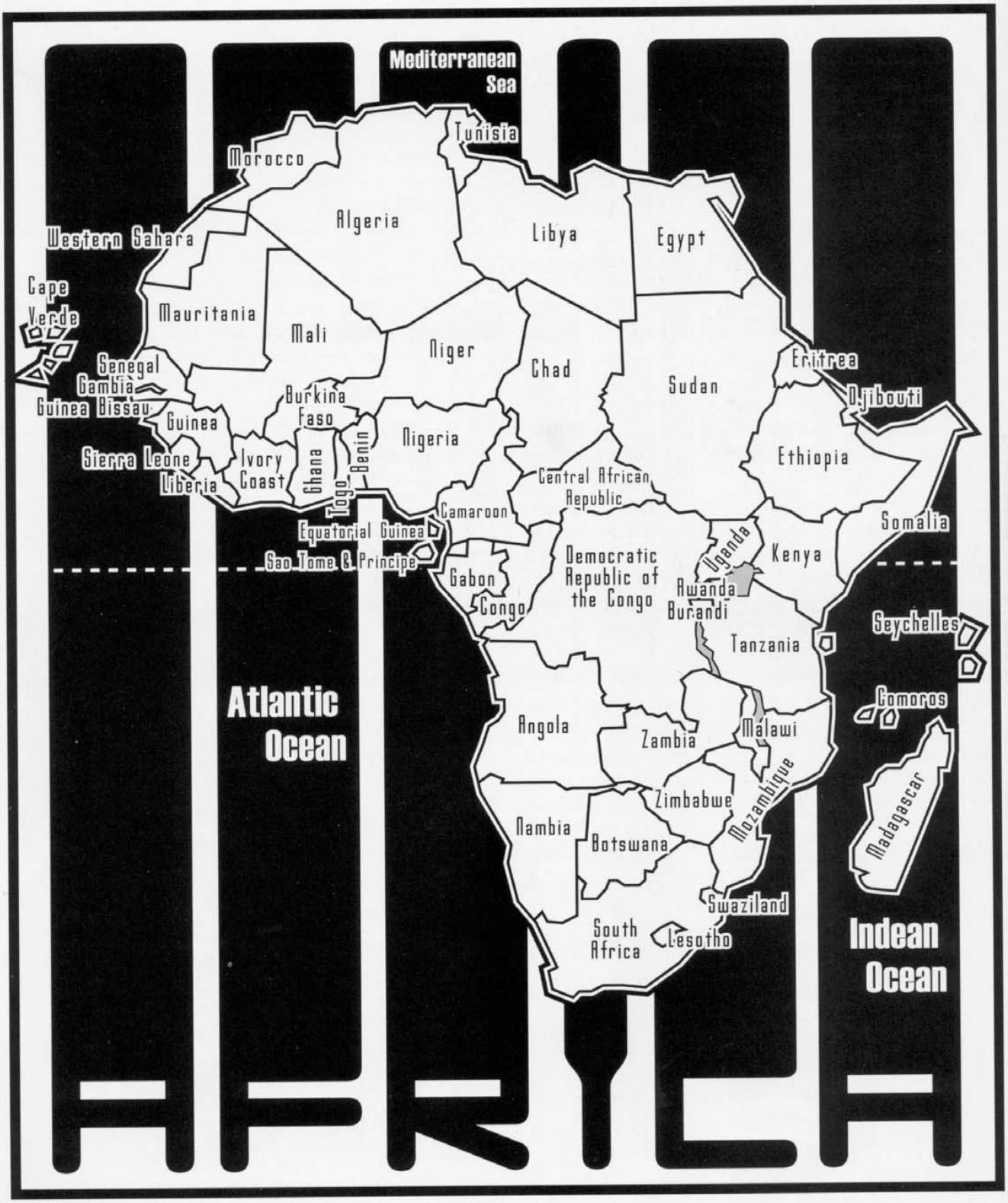
In each city I visited, I walked down similar winding dirt paths to the slums. Those who have experienced rural poverty cannot even comprehend the destitution in the urban areas. The open sewers running along rutted paths and lack of toilets create an unbearable stench. Mortals gather water for drinking and bathe in the same meager streams running through the city. They possess no mechanical skills, nor can they read. Disease and malnutrition ravage young and old alike. Family structures have broken down in these areas, and people are not missed, including the children. In other words, it was a perfect place to feed.

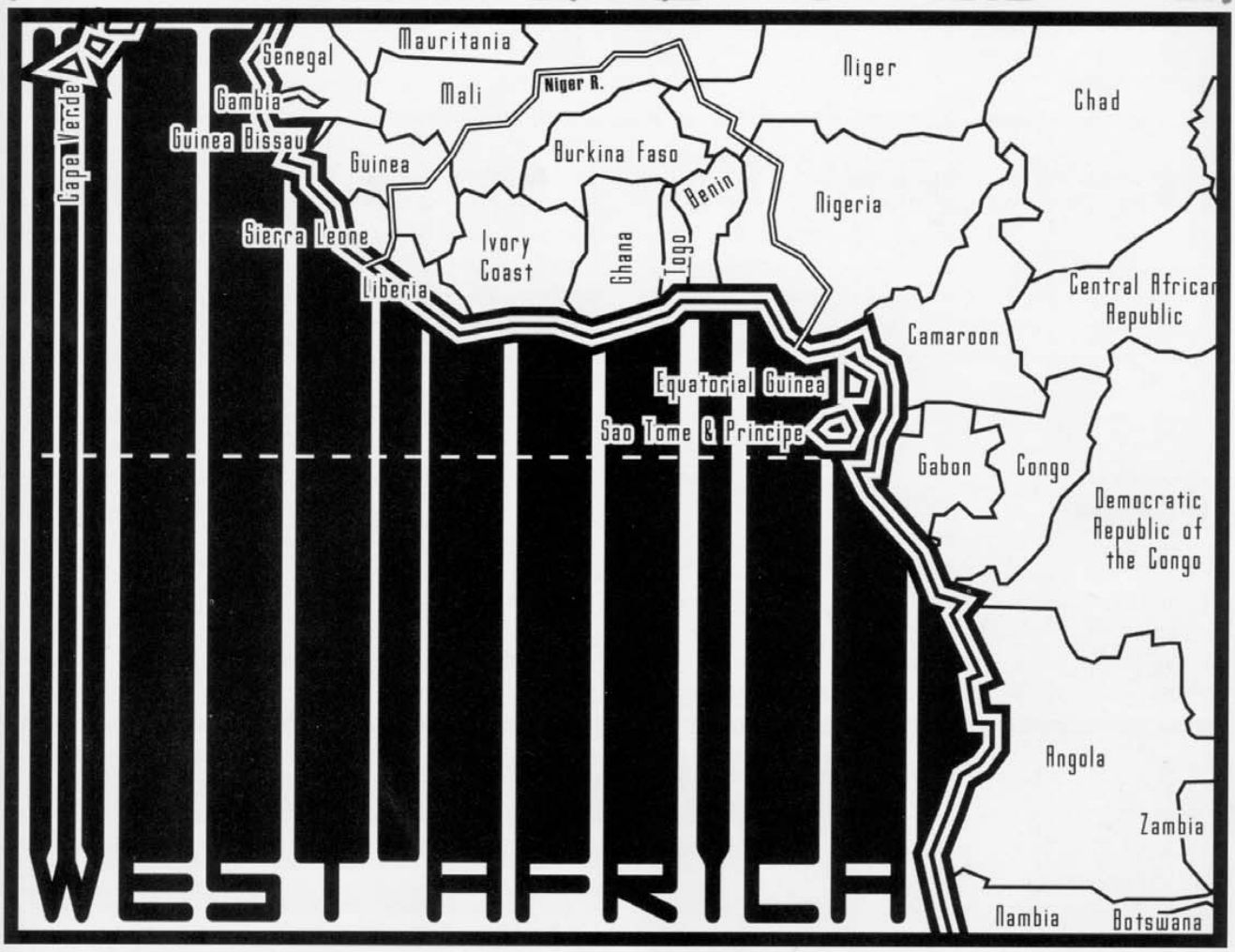
The poor, whose struggle is for the next meal, are easily manipulated as pawns in the rivalries between the legacies over the redistribution of wealth and power. Entire populations have been displaced and their meager infrastructure destroyed. Little distinguishes civilians from military targets in the clashes. Soldiers arbitrarily gun down civilians inside their own homes or round them up and massacre them in the streets. They are burned alive in cars and houses. They have had their limbs hacked off with machetes, eyes gouged out with knives, hands smashed with hammers and bodies burned with boiling water. War tactics include systematically sexually abusing women and girls. Governments and opposition forces use children to fight the wars — forced to kill, maim and rape their fellow countrymen. The children are the most discrete soldiers, and they know how to follow orders without question. I watched them kill and smear blood on their faces and arms to prove that they are fierce warriors.

I understand that outside this continent it is not so easy to destroy economies, squander natural wealth and create famine. Does this occur because of the power that the Laibon hold over these mortals, or is it simply that those outside our continent do not care about the black mortal's struggle? Most blame the Westerners.

The shadows of civil war waged in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, their neighbors to the west and where I was heading, have spread into the primarily peaceful country of Cote d'Ivoire. The bush taxi stopped at the border between Ghana and Sierra Leone and warned the driver of the instability waiting for us in the capital, Abidjan. As we drove through a series of mangrove swamps to the




Mediterranean Sea
Tunisia
Morocco
Algeria
Libya
Egypt
Western Sahara
Cape Verde
Mauritania
Mali
Niger
Chad
Sudan
Eritrea
Djibouti
Senegal
Gambia
Guinea Bissau
Guinea
Burkina Faso
Nigeria
Ethiopia
Sierra Leone
Liberia
Ivory Coast
Ghana
Togo
Benin
Central African Republic
Somalia
Camaroon
Equatorial Guinea
Sao Tome & Principe
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Uganda
Kenya
Gabon
Congo
Rwanda
Burandi
Seychelles
Tanzania
Atlantic Ocean
Comoros
Angola
Zambia
Malawi
Zimbabwe
Mozambique
Madagascar
Nambia
Botswana
Swaziland
South Africa
Lesotho
Indean Ocean
AFRICA



city, refugees were camped along the roadside. The passengers were extremely critical of the refugees and their lack of knowledge of the local languages or the traditional (or official) rules of the area. I didn't know either, but I felt confident that my informal education and years of experience would allow me to accustom rapidly to the changing languages and cultures. I was right, and my largest fear — feeding — was never an issue. The number of displaced people and warring factions made choosing a vessel simple.

The dark tree-lined highway opened up to a large lagoon, introducing both the port and capital of Cote d'Ivoire, Abidjan. Abidjan was a beautiful city, and much more sophisticated than any I had been in before. I stayed quite poshly at a modern resort hotel, surrounded by wide, shady boulevards and gardened squares. Several cultural buildings were also in the area. I'm sure that before there were dead bodies lying by the side of the road, there were plentiful European visitors.

I found that traditional religion was prevalent, though the country has two of the largest Catholic cathedrals in the world. I can only wonder about the missionaries and what they hope to accomplish in Africa. There are more Muslims here than Christians, and even so, the majority worships ancestors above any god.

However, it soon became obvious that this city was run by the French. Considered the financial center of French-speaking West Africa, France seemed to take this small country seriously and stationed its own troops in the city to keep order. The modern city still had several "European style" nightclubs, populated by the French soldiers, and this kept me occupied, and well fed, for several weeks. I left at the same time the French and other foreigners were evacuated due to the unrest.

As the border between Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia was often closed along the coast, I decided to follow the violence due north, to the regional capital of Bouake, then continuing through the forests in Cote d'Ivoire. The forests were still untouched by modernization, protected from logging, slash-and-burn farming practices and poachers. I saw chimpanzees, forest elephants, pygmy hippos and other types of monkeys for the first time.

I was tempted to travel directly to Guinea, only a couple miles away, now that I was north, but I was curious

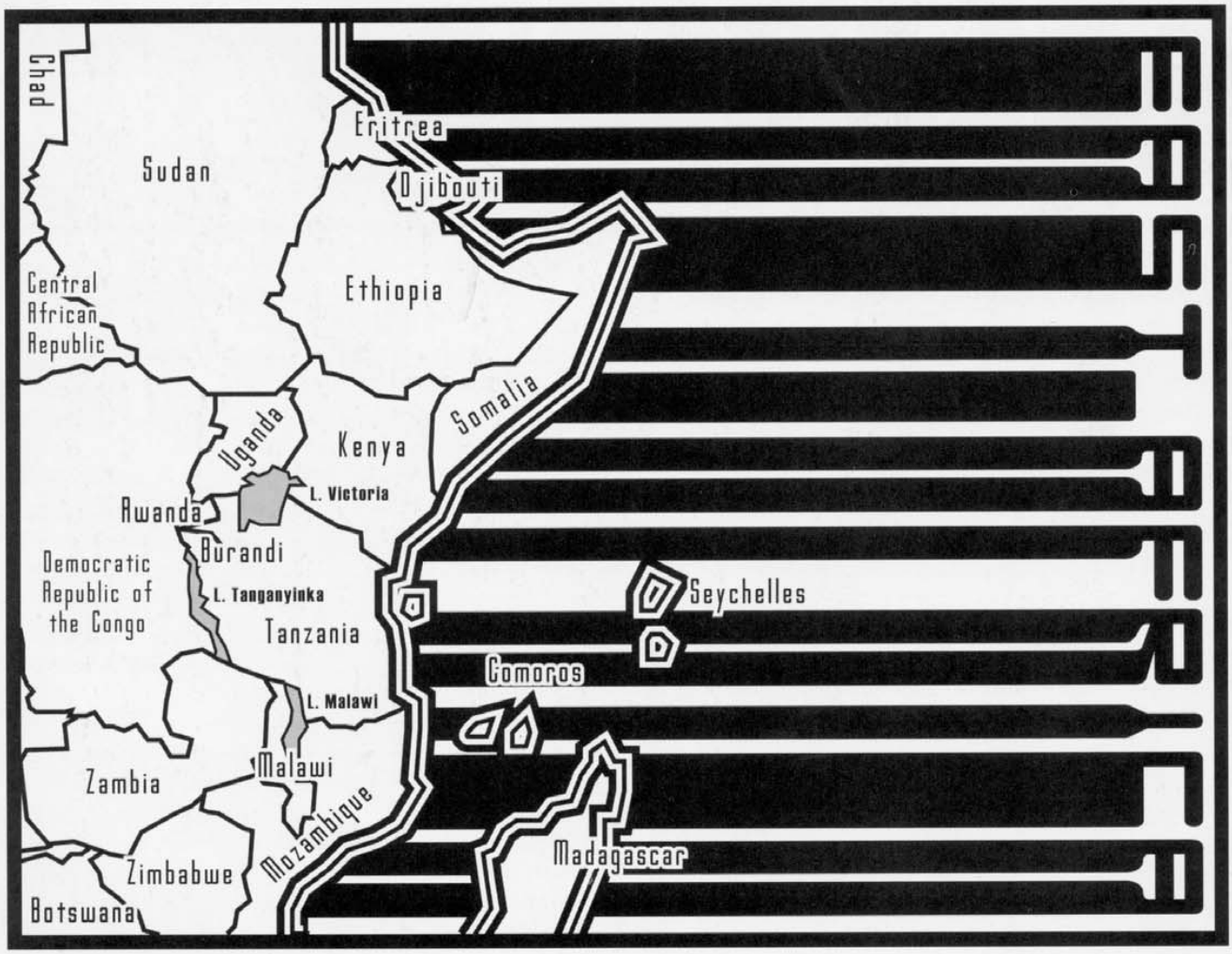
to see the effects of years of civil war on both Liberia and Sierra Leone. So after crossing the border, I again headed toward the coast.

Although experiencing unrest, Cote d'Ivoire was still in good condition compared to Liberia, still recovering from the seven-year civil war that ended in the late 1990s. In direct contract to Abidjan, Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, had very few tourism facilities. The crime rate in the city is high, and I bore witness to theft and assault each night while feeding. Traveling through Liberia by car was even more hazardous than my own country, whose road system seemed pristine in comparison. The entire infrastructure of the country was gone. The people had little or no regard for one another, which was ironic since the country was founded by freed slaves from America, the capital named after president James Monroe.

The people here are numb, and it makes unlife for the Laibon easy. The city is overrun by red ants, said to be so plentiful because of the plentiful mortal flesh for them to feed upon. Even tonight, young children play with human skulls. I slept in an abandoned church with bloodstains on the altar and bullet holes in the walls. However, the whitewashed church offered me a haven compared to the dense slums outside its walls.

Sierra Leone was more of the same. Freetown, as the capital is inappropriately named, was a nice city at one time, but now it has fallen into disrepair, with the amputees begging on the sides of the road. Having enough of the war-torn countries of Liberia and Sierra Leone, I entered Guinea. Large numbers of refugees camped along the border. It was obvious that the effects of the war had spilled over to this country and relations were strained. Recent fighting at the junction of Guinea's border with Sierra Leone and Liberia made crossing difficult. Already burdened by an inadequate infrastructure and a weak economy, thousands of refugees from the civil war in Sierra Leone have overwhelmed Guinea.

I continued a short distance, one night's travel by lorry to Conakry, the capital of Guinea. It seemed very rich compared to the cities I had just visited. After viewing endless green plains, I could now see the dark shapes of mountains in the distance and hillsides even closer. I expected the Laibon to be more powerful, but they seemed closed off from the world around them and lacking in drive to attain power. Finding victims who



Malaria

Malaria is a disease of the blood that has had (and continues to have) a devastating effect on the population of sub-Saharan Africa. It is important to understand the disease as nearly one in four Africans has it. In fact, malaria is responsible for one in every four childhood deaths in Africa. Eventually, a Laibon will probably be exposed to the illness and suffer from it.

Plasmodium is a group of single-cell animal parasites that feed on the red blood cells of many mammals, birds and reptiles. There are four human malarial species — *P. falciparum*, *P. ovale*, *P. malariae* and *P. vivax*. *Falciparum* is by far the most dangerous and the most common in Africa. Certain *Anopheles* mosquitoes transmit malaria, as the parasite needs to undergo a crucial development within the female before it is able to affect another host. Malaria can also be transmitted via any other type of blood transferal between an infected host and a non-infected host, however (such as blood transfusion, Embrace).

When a mortal is infected with malaria, the parasites head straight to her liver. There, depending on the species of *Plasmodium*, the parasite remains dormant for a week to nearly two years or longer. When the parasite finally comes out of its resting phase, it reproduces 10,000 to 30,000 merozoites, which invade the blood stream. In the blood stream, these parasites invade the red blood cells, feeding on them as they continue to grow and divide (each merozoite produces an additional 10-30 parasites), finally bursting out and destroying the red blood cell. Malarial parasites are able to affect approximately 40 percent of all red blood cells before their death.

The mortal host suffers from a multitude of symptoms. The classic cycle is very simple. First, the host succumbs to severe chills that can last for several hours. As the chills finally diminish, the victim is wracked with a fever that can reach as high as 104 degrees. This fever lasts anywhere from a few hours to a day. When the fever finally breaks, the mortal feels more or less well. The cycle can repeat itself every other day for a period of a few weeks, finally diminishing in severity if the host survives the initial onslaught. The fever is a direct result of the rupturing of her red blood cells and waste material from the parasite entering her blood stream. There is the chance that capillaries to the brain can clot during this process, leading to coma and death.

While no cure for malaria exists, the parasite can be somewhat controlled with medication. This protocol varies from country to country, as many strains of *Falciparum* are now resistant to some of the anti-malarial drugs. The most common way mortals in the area deal with the disease is by developing a limited immunity. Infected mothers can pass this on to their children, but for the most part, it's a Nietzschean thing. By continuing to expose herself to the parasite, the mortal does not avoid infection, but decreases the rate and severity of the "attacks" and speeds up her recovery time. This is a limited type of immunity that usually abates when the mortal leaves the malarial area.

What does this mean for the Laibon? Just as the female mosquito transfers the parasite when she bites an infected mortal and then bites a non-infected mortal, the Laibon can do the same if he feeds from or Embraces a mortal or places one under his influence. He can also succumb to the symptoms of malaria if he drains an infected mortal's blood. The symptoms he would suffer from would mimic those of a mortal, and his Physical and Mental Attributes would greatly diminish for the period of the fever, usually 24-48 hours. If the Laibon fed enough times on infected mortals, he could potentially fall dormant and slumber for an indeterminate amount of time, as he is obtaining a compromised source of diminished and damaged vitae. At the very least, he faces the very real threat of unconsciousness and, depending where that "attack" occurred, the Laibon could be exposed to the rays of the rising sun.

would not be missed was not as easy, but the mortals were trusting and more innocent. The coast leading up to Guinea-Bissau was primarily swamps, rain forest and mangrove-covered wetlands. Islands dotted the view from Guinea-Bissau. I spent several nights on the islands, untouched by foreigners discovering both ancient mortal and animal influences. I learned that the Laibon traveled here every year to attend the Bissau carnival, dressing in masks and colored costumes ranging from small sharks to large hippo masks that require carved legs to hold them up. I had just missed it by two months.

However, I couldn't spend long in these countries if I was to take advantage of the recently opened boarder to Senegal, formerly closed due to disputes over offshore oil, fishing rights and separatists from Senegal's Casamance region operating from bases within Guinea-Bissau. I was anxious to reach the Sahel, a part of Africa I have imagined for centuries. The missionaries had told my village of the vast Sahara Desert, covering most of North Africa, the largest desert in the world and the defining line for sub-Saharan Africa. My entire life and unlife has been surrounded by lush verdure, and I hungered for the offerings of the desert and the wisdom I hoped to find with the Laibon there.

I reached Dakar, Africa's most western point, in the middle of the night. The air of the city was stifling, heavy with the diesel fumes of the lorries and taxis. Despite the pollution, the Mediterranean climate attracted more foreigners to this city than I had ever seen before. The city was a mixture of European sophistication and local squalor. Like many of the countries in the Sahel, the region now called Senegal was once part of great kingdoms. Europeans reached Senegal during their explorations, and some of the greatest wars between the Kindred and the Laibon were fought here. Dakar was the capital city for all of West Africa at the time that I lived in my village, and I heard many stories about the wars in this region.

Although Senegal is neither a large nor a strategically located country, it has nonetheless played a prominent role in both Laibon and African politics since its independence from colonial rule. The dominance of Muslim and close economic, political and cultural ties to France create a unique situation. Tonight, Muhammad's faith dominates the country, but as with most countries, the mortals have tied local traditions to foreign religions. The local marabouts (healers and holy men) hold considerable social and political power and are believed to have a link directly to their god, Allah.

It was here that I refined and practiced my healing powers through the use of herbs and powders, something I had grown out of touch with on my recent travels. As religion touches every facet of life here and helps the mortals cope with their meager lives, including sickness, I was able to gather great wealth by consulting on matters pertaining to health. I provided mortals with herbs and roots to cleanse their souls, as well as their bodies. Some were so ravaged with disease that I ended their sad lives right then.

The foreigners in Dakar were mostly expatriates: American, German, English, Lebanese and French who have given up their citizenship in their own countries and now reside here, either because of their fascination with the country, or in most cases to escape something or someone back home. They taught at schools, worked in hospitals and exported our art and jewelry. They also ran restaurants, bars and "cyber cafés." I once visited one of these cafés, where one can access the Internet while listening to blasting pop music. It was there that I overheard a French mortal, running the hot café with its meager air conditioning, trying to convince patrons to sign up on a tour to the national park. I laughed at the thought of paying a white man to take me to see lions, elephants, crocodiles and hippopotami. Most governments, no doubt under foreign influence, regulate the hunting of large animals and have instead created parks to protect these indigenous animals. As the governments pocket the money from the tourists, they also profit from the government-regulated export of ivory and skins out of our country by the truckload, typical of the corruption and illegal practices that are more often the norm than the exception in our political system.

After I had enough of the coast and the expatriates living like small gods in their enclaves, insulated from the world around them with high walls and guards protecting their compounds, I decided to head into the interior of Africa.

The tall, slender Senegalese, different from those of the southwest coast, merged into the majestic Malians. As I traveled I watched the slow, subtle change of both people and the landscape from the edge of the rain forest, across the savanna and into the arid Sahel and the country of Mali.

Most of Mali, in West Africa, lies landlocked in the Sahara. Caravan routes have passed through Mali for over 2,000 years, and the remnants of the countries' magnificent empires are still visible tonight.

I traveled by rail from Dakar to Bamako, the small but bustling capital city of Mali. As with most transport, the railroad was in very poor condition, but I was able to secure a rail car all to myself for a relatively small price. The rail, more than the river upon the banks of which the city was founded, brought growth to Bamako. I then continued by a small passenger boat on the River Niger to Mopti. The boat ran only at certain times of the year, and then only depending on the amount of rain received each year. As the boat departed at dusk, I went upstairs to the deck and watched as the market stalls on the edge of the river became smaller and the advancing Sahara desert grew larger.

The Niger is one of the world's great rivers. It winds through the Sahara and Mali until it meets the Republic of Niger and then Benin before flowing through Nigeria to the Atlantic Ocean. The only green in the Sahara, and therefore the only food, is adjacent to the river. Historically, the flow caused the success and failure of entire villages. It is host to farmers in dire need of the water, fishermen who live on the river and nomads who bring their animals to drink.

Several yovos were on the boat, as Timbuktu held mystery and excitement not understood by my fellow Africans. Timbuktu was once rumored to have houses covered in gold, but tonight the architecture features mud brick buildings, city walls and dwindling markets. The young yovos, looking for adventure, or just the ability to say they have visited Timbuktu, were fascinated by the desert, but then so was I.

The desert was unlike anything I had experienced before. It was cool at night and the boat drifted lazily along the river. I was not the only being to emerge at night. The boats teemed with both the living and the undead. We watched the passing shoreline silently,



where small mud mosques dotted the landscape, as did herds of cattle and the Tuareg nomads who wandered with them, their faces lit by small fires along the riverbanks. The nomadic Tuaregs are thought to be the first inhabitants in the Sahara region, and the founders of Timbuktu, which began as a small Tuareg village over 3,000 years ago.

The Tuaregs sold their metal and leather goods at each port. They are believed to be the original Canaanites from the Christians' Bible. The markings and geometrical design of the Tuareg crosses and jewelry symbolize good luck and protect them from evil or harm. Their faith was so strong that rumors among the Laibon state that the Tuareg people cannot be touched. In some domains, this has even become custom or tradition. I did not test this theory during my time, as I was entranced by their traditional hold on life and had my choice of mortals to feed upon on the boat.

As the boat continued to drift slowly down the river, we passed canoes, barges and other small boats. Several transported large plastic containers filled with water. The polluted water fetches a high price at several of the interior markets and is a valuable commodity. Empty villages and, inexplicably, dead animals lay scattered along the shoreline as erosion along the banks combined with the encroaching desert has caused whole communities to pack up and move.

I disembarked at a port in Dogon County. The (yovos planned a day trip to the famed circumcision cave located high above the Dogon settlements, and it saddened me to think that the Dogon allowed the yovos to view this sacred place and the wall paintings created by the newly circumcised men.

I was planning a night trip to visit an ancient legacy dwelling in caves alongside the Dogon mortals. The sparse, rocky plateau had been isolated topographically and culturally from the outside world. Much still remains unknown of the ancient ones, believed to be of Egyptian descent. While there, I found that the Laibon elders danced amid the mortals with their ornate carved and painted masks placed securely on their faces. One of the ancient ones had literally taken on the form of an immense serpent and is revered by the Dogon as the "Great Mask." The mortals believe the Laibon are evidence of the appearance of death on Earth. I learned a great deal from these ancient walkers of the night.

I continued my travels to Gao before heading east to the country of Niger by taxi. There I sought out a griot in order to more fully understand what I had learned from the Dogon. Griots, thought of as "containers of words," possess the art of speaking and listening. They tell oral histories, passed down for generations. They are responsible for the African peoples' great remembering of things that would otherwise have fallen into oblivion, and

through speech the griots recount history, provide advice, serve as spokespeople, interpret the words of others into different languages, play music and compose songs and tunes, report news and witness important life ceremonies. The local griot told me the stories of the Dogon, their history and their ties to the beginning of my legacy. The griot knew what I was and what I was to become, yet he never feared for his life or well being. He warned me that my unlife of moving among the living was not long and that my features would soon repel those I allowed to gaze upon me. My sense of urgency increased, yet I was not sure what I was looking for — only that I still had much to learn.

When I arrived in the outskirts of the capital of Niger, Niamey seemed like an old village with clusters of huts, each with tightly bound straw roofs and mud-brick walls. Thin dust permeated the air while mosque turrets, with their competing loud speakers to call the Muslims to prayer, dotted the horizon. Camels and donkeys trotted lazily along the dark paths. A large market, lit by candles, dominated the center of town, and I went there to replenish my supply of herbs and medicines. I wandered through the narrow aisles smelling familiar powders and strange spices. Vegetables lay stacked in small piles, as did dried fish and small bowls of insects. The market was crowded and noisy with the sound of people haggling over price or inspecting the goods. While there, I visited with the local sorcerers, who were also Laibon. They told me this story:

In ancient times, when the rain would stop suddenly in the middle of the storm season, the people would worry, for without rain we would suffer. The goats would die, the fruit would wither, and new children would not be born.

In such situations, the gods need blood, for it is commonly believed that if the gods drink blood, then they will provide rain. It was during one of these times that the local priest killed a goat on the grave of a powerful ancestor.

No rain came for many days. The priests prayed under the great baobab for rain, but again none came. The priests decided to make another sacrifice on the grave of the ancestor, this time offering human blood. They sacrificed a small boy for the sake of future generations. Surprisingly, it rained before the ceremony was over.

It is because of this story, I believe, that the Laibon are accepted into the Niger way of life.

I found few luxuries in Niamey, with most of these reserved for the yovos. I went to a local "movie house," which was just a mortal with a TV and VCR playing movies, but my French was as bad as the film. There I ran into a fou, or crazy person, who had no fear of me and threatened my unlife with his machete. He spoke in his own language and had the remains of a shackle on his wrist.

I was restless in this hot, dry city. I heard music playing in the distance and went to investigate and came across a large funeral. The mortals do not sleep for days and nights during an important funeral. The deceased was wealthy, judging from the quality of the wax-print material used to create the canopy, sheltering the attendees from the hot sun during the day and scarce possibility of rain during the night. The family members of the dead man also provided an abundance of food and drink. Drunken mortals spilled out from under the shelter. Music blared from a cassette player competing with the live musicians who sang and pounded on the drums. The deceased was laid out to rest in the front of the festivities. I joined in the dancing for a while, starting slowly, gradually mounting my dance in intensity. I felt refreshed.

I did not stay in Niamey long, and I traveled south to Lagos, arriving during a downpour after two nights' travel. Contemporary Nigeria is a state of nations and nationalities. The wide diversity of religions, political groups and cultures has had a huge impact on society tonight. Some call Lagos the New York City of West Africa. I can only assume that New York City has mortals everywhere, and where people aren't, cars are. In the remaining space, vendors hawk their goods. I also wondered if people were stoned to death in New York. The Nigerian government, supporting Islamic law, sentenced a Nigerian woman to be stoned to death for having sex outside of marriage.

It is commonly known that the Laibon flourish and clash in Nigeria. They have influence over the country through crime, drug trafficking, prostitution and, of course, witchcraft. The mortal news channels on television were dominated with the results of their depredations. Stories included two young girls making a confession that they turn into rats every midnight, turning back to normal before daybreak. They disclosed that they were asked to kill their guardian by bringing ill health to his household. Elsewhere it was rumored that a group of youths formed a "witchcraft gang," unleashing sorrow on the inhabitants of their area. The gang specialized in killing people, including its members' own parents. The gang also engaged in extortion and other acts of terrorism.

Prostitution thrives in Nigeria and every night, young girls who were once poor now wear expensive dresses and lead affluent lifestyles. These girls start out young and fresh, but within months, they contract HIV, a mortal disease. As with most African countries, AIDS is the fastest-growing problem in Nigeria, reaching nearly epidemic proportions.

Restaurants, bars and nightclubs do booming business in this country. While I was there, many Laibon frequented an underground nightclub inside

the basement of one of the high-rise hotels. While Nigeria had moved its capital from Lagos to Abuja, Lagos was still the primary city in the country and it was here that I enjoyed some of the finer things. I stayed at one of the tourist hotels on the coast, amid the skyscrapers housing the country's commercial, financial and educational institutions.

The rains had already made the exterior of my hotel a bit shabby, but the inside was decorated exotically, down to the stuffed antelope, lion and elephant. I often frequented the hotel bar, where crime and politics dominated the conversation — themes I heard repeatedly during my travels.

Part of the reason for the density of Laibon in Nigeria was the crude oil wealth in the Niger Delta. Power struggles between the legacies play out nightly through puppet politicians, environmentalists and human-rights activists. The large oil corporations are infested with modern Laibon investors, providing a method to hide their increasing wealth. Somehow, the oil money keeps "getting lost" into foreign bank accounts. Oil, which could potentially have allowed Nigeria to be one of the wealthiest countries in Africa, has instead led it to become one of the poorest.

Nigeria's stability has been repeatedly threatened by fighting between fundamentalist Muslims and Christians over the spread of Islamic law (*Shari'a*) across the heavily Muslim north. More than 10,000 people have died in religious clashes since military rule ended in 1999. In February of 2002, about 100 people were killed in Lagos during battles between the Islamic Hausas from the north and Yorubas from the Christian-dominated southwest. Christian and Muslim leaders in Kaduna state signed a peace accord in August, promising to crack down on violence.

The rivalries among the Laibon in the city are intense, and my unlife was in danger without protection from fellows of my legacy. As I left the city, I noticed that, ironically, long lines of cars and lorries wound around each of the gas stations. While oil is exported by the thousands of gallons, the nation has too few refineries to process the fuel for the Nigerian people, or any other people in West Africa for that matter. After spending several hours searching Lagos for a car that would have enough fuel, I was finally successful and drove southeast. Along the way, we passed more than a dozen military roadblocks manned by drunken soldiers holding semi-automatic weapons. At some of these roadblocks along the way, soldiers demanded money from our driver in order to continue. Most drivers pay, considering it a toll, and they pass the costs along to the passengers.

Some checkpoints are more threatening than others, depending on the type of government agency manning them. Military was the most common, but I also saw police, security and customs agents. Our taxi was forced to remain at one of the checkpoints for several hours for no apparent reason before being allowed to move on. Frustrated, I left the taxi behind and continued on foot.

I headed toward one of the primary Yoruba villages. I wanted to visit the Yoruba because I suspect many of our Laibon legacies originated from the Yoruba culture. The Yoruba are powerful, and span several countries, not just Nigeria. They are one of Africa's largest ethnic groups, with more than 10 million mortals. The Yoruba believe that the dead continue to "live" in much the same way they lived in the mortal world, and their deities (evil and good) have a large influence on everyday life.

I was primarily interested in their belief of the deity, Eshu, a divine trickster. When I arrived, I sought out the head priest. The priest, a beautiful Guruhi, greeted me wearing a crown made of old and new cloth, thousands of tiny beads and eight bird carcasses, said to assist him with divining the messages from his god.

He explained that Eshu is the messenger of the gods and is able to manipulate the destiny of mortals. He is the youngest, most agile and quick-witted deity, and he causes trouble for those who neglect the other gods. Eshu is both kind and cruel. I sought the advice of this god, as he is said to assist both mortals and Laibon through their lives and unlives.

I wanted guidance from Eshu for the direction that I needed to take next. The Guruhi priest offered me the use of his divining tray to assist in understanding the messages, brought to me by a spiritual guide. He placed 16 palm nuts on the tray and manipulated them in such as way that I was able to discover the course of my fate. Through the advice of Eshu, the path of my unlife became more definitive.

I left the Yoruba reluctantly, but my future was not in this country.

My New Village

I left Nigeria for Cameroon, only to find that new disputes over the oil-rich, mosquito-infested Bakassi Peninsula had closed the bridge over the border. I did not feel comfortable traveling among the mortals any longer, so I traveled by foot instead. Insects plagued me until the heavy rain fell in torrents. I could no longer see the pathway in front of me due to the downpour, and debris floated rapidly past me, but the rain stopped within minutes. My clothes were dry soon, and it was only minutes before the insects returned. I began to wonder if I would like this country.

Cameroon is a Central African nation on the Gulf of Guinea. France set up Cameroon and with the recent expansion of oil, timber and coffee exports, the economy is stable, though as with all of the countries I visited, official corruption is prevalent and environmental

degradation runs rampant. As I continued through the dense forests, I decided to head for Yaounde, the country's capital.

I arrived in Yaounde after several nights travel. I found that it had a mixture of the modern and the traditional, as did most African capitals, but in much larger scale. I searched for something new, something different. Colorful dresses hung next to fruit and vegetables on street corners. Goats and sheep grazed on vacant pieces of land. I walked up and down the numerous hills in the city, along the twisting and turning streets, viewing the mix of futuristic buildings adjacent to shanties with corrugated iron roofs. Music blared out of from the clubs and discos, and the mortals lined up outside were already dancing.

I walked over to the food stalls next to the taxi stands to search for differences in the mortal's faces, in the foods they ate, the languages they spoke. I can no longer distinguish one culture from another. They have all become mortals to me. Mortals who have lost their traditional ways and traditional tongues. They fight here because one part of the country speaks English and the other part French. This is further complicated by the array of ethnic groups.

My travels have made me weary and I would like to find a small village where I can practice my sorcery in isolation from others like me. I continued north, where in stark contrast to the barren Sahara and the pasturelands of Nigeria, the terrain turned to the dense jungle of my youth. My journey led me past elephants, lions, giant eland, bongos, chimpanzees, crocodiles and birds.

I passed through many small villages until I found one that reminded me of the village of my childhood. It seems so very long ago, but I remember it fondly. The sorcerer in this small village died recently. I will take over his duties, spreading word of my power. I will not let them see me, except for in the dimly lit shadow of the night, as my serpentine features have become more prevalent. Some may die, especially those who threaten my existence, but with my help many more will live.

Hopefully this is where my story ends.

Sarah has tried to teach me the importance of writing in both English and French, but I think I am keeping this journal mostly to please her. I am not sure if what I feel for her is the same as what she says she feels for me, but that is unimportant in the end. So, while she goes off and visits with someone she should stay away from, I will try and write down all that has happened in the last two months. When she returns, I know she will be happy to see that I've done this, though I suspect I won't show her this opening paragraph.

Let's start at the beginning. After Sarah had her vacation approved by her Peace Corps supervisor, she came back to post with two tickets on Cameroon Airlines for Nairobi, Kenya. I was surprised that she still wanted me to go, and I think she was disappointed that I did not seem more excited. It is hard for me to admit that I am afraid to travel so far from home. I have never known anyone from this village or the next who has gone beyond Yaounde, our capital, 50 kilometers away. Being from America, Sarah doesn't realize the difficulties we have moving around, with all the military checkpoints and papers we must carry. And even if we do have the correct paperwork, many officials find "errors" that require money to correct. However, I put aside my concerns and finally smiled at her. We packed quickly and took a bush taxi all the way to the airport. I have to admit, traveling with her is comfortable because she can afford to buy out the whole car for the journey. So nice to travel without livestock in my lap, for a change.

I suppose I have to believe her when Sarah tells me she wants me for my company and not as some kind of bodyguard or translator. When we arrived at Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, (I can't even begin to describe what flying is like... my words aren't that good) she expertly weaved past the horde of men thrusting necklaces and the like in her face without a backward glance at me. Even though I am not Kenyan, the sellers recognized I was not the one with the money to spend on frivolous goods, and so they focused their attention on her and the others from the plane with white skin. I was, however, not familiar with this city and let Sarah take the lead, happy enough to follow. She immediately headed to the Peace Corps office in Nairobi for a few recommendations of cheap places for us to stay, and we found what we were looking for down on Latema Road at the Iqbal Hotel readily enough. Right next to the hotel was the aptly named Supreme Restaurant (I must admit that most places here either have an outlandish name, or a very basic one) and after consuming a huge, "all-you-can-eat" Indian buffet lunch at the place, Sarah arranged to take us on a cheap safari. Then we did a little sightseeing downtown. I am a little uncomfortable with her paying for everything, though. My family tells me I should enjoy it and let her do everything because she will return soon enough to her home and forget all about me.

What I haven't told them is that Sarah has promised to take me back with her.

I guess I would describe Nairobi as an almost cosmopolitan city in the European sense as Sarah has explained it to me, encompassed by the savanna and two mountains in the background: Mt. Kenya and Kilimanjaro. Despite Sarah's white skin, we certainly didn't stand out there like we do back here in my small village. Nairobi is obviously a hub for all sorts of international travelers, too. Most, I am told, come to see the animals, but a fair number of tour companies (mostly British) conduct months-long overland tours in big, Bedford trucks. The people camp across the continent of Africa that way. Nairobi, Sarah explained, is sometimes the origin point or the end point for these trips, depending on if they're going east to West Africa or vice versa, and it's fairly easy to spot both types of travelers. Those starting out on their adventures tend to be pink and just a little bit plump, while those at the end are leaner, dustier and almost weathered, I suppose. I've seen a few of those trucks rumble past my mud house in Awae, coating the sides of the road with thick, orange dust in the dry season or becoming mired in the mud during the wet season. Sarah draws a little more attention than I do when these trucks pass through town. It seems that whenever they see a white face, they assume that person owes them some sort of hospitality and they always came to her for aid. They don't understand that the volunteers are here to help us... make a difference somehow for us and not sit in a big truck just passing through the country and waving.

We deftly avoided the tourists and moved deeper into the city. It was very interesting to see that Nairobi, like so many of the worldwide cities I have managed to read about, had very different flavors to its various quarters. As I wrote before, I could find a wonderful Indian section, eat until I was ready to burst, and then duck down another street where Sarah could have her hands and feet dyed with henna in the Hausa style. And, of course, the keen-eyed Pakistani shopkeeper near our "hotel," noting Sarah's camera bag, assured her of his one-hour photo processing for her post-safari pictures, even though the city was so primitive that an ebony-skinned Masai woman herded her gaunt cattle past his door. She flashed me a brief smile, and I was momentarily startled by how white her teeth were. I smiled back at



her and then at the shopkeeper as Sarah promised to bring her film only to him. He nodded and pointed at the Kodak sticker in the window sagely.

By the time Sarah had bought the few supplies she thought we still needed for our excursion, with me dutifully carrying the various plastic sacks, evening had come. Sarah looked at me and I knew exactly what she wanted to do. Since I first met her, I was stunned by her love of the night. I don't know if it is indicative of all Americans, but Sarah shows no fear of the darkness. And, while I would never say it to her directly (and I should probably not even write this down), she foolishly goes where she shouldn't in the darkness and asks questions better left unspoken. So when I looked into her green eyes, I knew she wanted to find some secluded spot, perch like a large bird and watch the evening unfold. I finally agreed, as I am less fearful of the dark when I am in a city with all of its bright lights and noise. Sarah has told me that in so many of the countries she has traveled through, nighttime is like a different world. As many of these cities depend on the tourist trade for their money, there is always a constant hawking of goods. But the night is their own. Most tourists scurry back to their hotels, hostel or sleeping bags, having taken to heart all the stories of robberies at knifepoint or worse. Sarah has done enough traveling that she feels comfortable moving about at night and can recognize a potentially dangerous situation. Once again, I am reminded that she brought me here because she likes my company and doesn't need my protection. I wish I felt as certain as she does, though we Africans have always known that the night is a different and strange place. Soon enough, I found a small, rooftop café, ordered two beers for us and let her watch the night happen around her.

Many of the stalls that had been selling carved ebony statues, malachite chess sets and woven bags during the day were boarded over until the following morning, but others remained open for business. "New York isn't the only city that never sleeps," Sarah laughed, and I smiled and nodded, not really understanding her joke. Well-dressed men promised those who walked past that the liquid in the tiny bottles they had would cure anything and everything from boils to AIDS. And these "snake-oil salesmen," as Sarah called them, commanded a crowd. Still more sold bootleg cassettes with their horrible, tinny quality (I am now spoiled listening to music on Sarah's radio, even though we do have to run it off her motorcycle's battery most nights), but now they directed their sales pitch to other Kenyans. Or perhaps it is better to call them Nairobians. It sounds cliché, but Nairobi is a melting pot of ethnicities. Many of the groups in this city must have migrated here from other countries at some point, because more than one ethnicity characterized the local people.

I was startled by the striking beauty of a group of men who laughed their way past the cassette salesman. They were all about the same age, and I wondered if they were brothers because of their too-similar features. While they moved through the streets with the ease of those who have lived there all their lives, I noted that their features were not typically African. They must have descended from Arabic lines as their skin was the color of coffee with cream and their glossy, black hair hung down in loose waves to nearly their shoulders. One of them stopped to inspect the seller's wares, and I watched, fascinated, as the cassette man shrank from his approach. One of the exotic-looking men talked to him for a bit, and the cassette man never looked him in the eye. In fact, no one who passed by them looked directly at them. Sarah noticed the exchange as well and asked if perhaps these men were a part of a Kenyan Mafia. After explaining the term to me, I thought it would make sense that there would be some sort of dominant family or group that had sway in the city, given the fact that the official government is so corrupt, though not as bad as some central African nations or those further south. I just didn't know for certain.

While I contemplated the nature of corruption on both the grand and small scales, one of the exotic men looked up at Sarah. He must have felt her staring, so he shot her a glance that made the color rise in her face. I sensed that she wanted to look away in embarrassment, but he was so compelling she just couldn't. Jealously, part of me thought her blush must have been like a beacon in the night and everyone must have been watching, but another part of me suspected that they thought they were the only two people in the world. I honestly don't know what might have happened if their wordless exchange had continued any longer, because in the next moment a sullen-faced waitress shuffled over to ask if I wanted

another beer, and she broke Sarah's line of sight. I angrily told her to go away and looked back at the man, but he was gone. I scanned the whole street of stalls but I couldn't see either him or his brothers. I noticed the cassette man was gone as well. Sarah refused to meet my questioning glance and toyed with her beer bottle. Feeling both an indefinable sense of disappointment and relief, I decided that we needed to go back to the hotel and pack our bags for the safari Sarah had scheduled on the following day. I startled Sarah by taking charge momentarily, but she quietly agreed. The streets were full of odd shadows, and the nightly prayer call from the Arabic quarter echoed down the alleys.

The safari Sarah booked lasted only a week and now I admit that I wish I could've stayed longer. We spent the whole time in the Masai-Mara game reserve and I think I could spend my whole life there. I was afraid to tell Sarah that I am much happier away from the confines of city life. After a bit, I start to feel stifled by all the stone and metal buildings, and choked out by all the filthy exhaust from the cars and buses. That is where she lives in her country, though, and I suppose that is where I will have to live if she keeps her word and brings me with her. So it is best to keep quiet about those things.

"The only difference between this reserve and the Serengeti is an invisible line known as the Kenya-Tanzania border," she explained to me. Neither name meant much, but Sarah said most people know the area by the second name. We saw all the Big Five (that is how tourists refer to the lion, elephant, rhino, Cape buffalo and the leopard) in the first day. It was toward the end of the rainy season in East Africa and everything was so green, like it is at home after the rains. The veldt, or savanna, was like an emerald carpet spreading out toward the horizon, and it's hard to believe that the sun will bake the land to a withered gold in only a few short months and animals will have to huddle around tiny breaks in the parched earth to lap up a little moisture. That's months from now and part of nature's cycle. I understand and accept the cycles, but I am not sure if Sarah does.

As an example of the fierce reality that is the bush, our guide, Moboya, found an intense sight for us on our first day out. We had been bumping along a dirt track for a few hours, something I am very used to but, as I could see by their pained expressions, many of the tourists were not. It had warmed up enough that most of us had already removed the sweaters and long pants necessary to stave off the perpetually overcast morning chill and were now wearing only shorts and T-shirts. The guide's keen eyes caught two vultures circling some brush and we tore over in our Land Cruiser, as though the big cats themselves were after us. As we slowed up, the six anonymous tourists traveling with us employed their cameras with their zoom lenses, but there was no need for any telephoto enhancement. Our guide had brought us face to face with the site of a fresh kill. A lioness (they are the ones who do most of the hunting in the pride) had killed a Thompson's gazelle (Sarah identified the

Bilharziasis (or Schistosomiasis)

Another blood disease that poses a threat within the African continent is bilharziasis, also referred to as schistosomiasis. This disease is predominantly most severe around areas of large bodies of fresh water (Lake Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Lake Tanganyika which is surrounded by the former Zaire; Burundi Tanzania and Zambia, Lake Victoria which is bordered by Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda; etc.). The parasite that causes the disease has to live part of its life-cycle in a specific species of freshwater snail.

The adult worm, or schistosome, can reach a size of nearly two centimeters and live in the mesenteric veins (the small vessels that carry blood from the intestine to the liver). The worms live primarily on red blood cells but also dissolved sugars and amino acids. The worms live in pairs with the male hanging onto and guarding the female. They remain in constant copulation, releasing a stream of hundreds of eggs a day. Eventually, some of these eggs escape through the urine. In many African countries, sanitation is at a minimum and these eggs find their way into streams and other bodies of water. The larvae infect the snails, which infect another mortal host. This disease is so common in parts of Nigeria that some tribes see bloody urine in a boy as a coming of age.

The victim of bilharziasis suffers from anemia and has a general, weakened resistance. Also, the eggs of the adult blood fluke can collect in the liver, causing enlargement of that organ and its malfunction. They can also collect in the kidneys, damaging them and causing bloody urine.

species to me), and she and her three cubs were dinning on the animal. Sarah took a few pictures of the carnage. Those three fuzzy little kittens, as she referred to the cubs, have their faces entirely covered in blood. In fact, one of them has only his eyes showing above the body of the Tomi, as if he is trying his best to look ferocious. He is a killer, albeit a young one, but the reason the carnage doesn't disturb me is because I understand it. He didn't kill the gazelle out of anger or some other base, human emotion. He killed the animal and ate it to live. That is the way of things.

Actually, most of her photos of the animals and the landscape turned out beautifully, and I can see Sarah has already pulled several out to send to her parents. They are mostly a nice mix of spidery acacia trees silhouetted against molten sunsets, animals running gracefully (without gore) and a few of the Masai herdsmen. I think only the Somali have darker skin than they do. The Masai people look as though they've been hewn from obsidian, they are so black. Not many of the photos of them turned out, however. Sarah suspected that she must have had her camera aimed at the setting sun somewhat because many of the warriors are surrounded by a sort of haze in her pictures. And she didn't take too many because they wanted to be paid to have their picture taken.

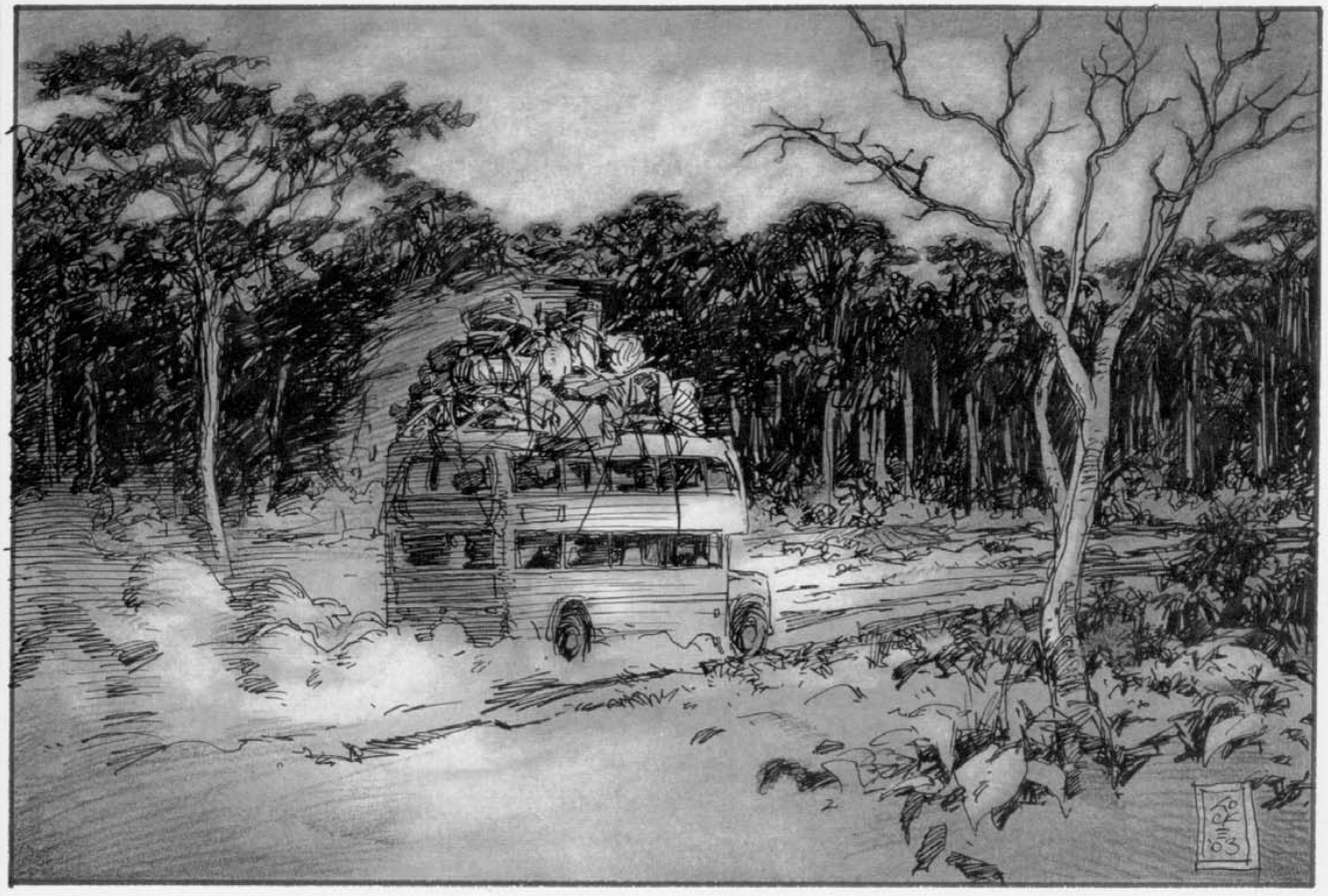
I heard a few of the tourists complain that they thought the Masai to be terribly vain to charge for their image, and I bit my tongue before I responded. I tried to point out that there aren't many people who like to have their pictures taken by strangers and more often than not, when their pictures are taken, they end up in magazines and such. Some feel that if the photographer is going to make something off the photo, then they, as the subject, deserve their cut, too. Therefore, these men obviously put on a bit of a show for us. They even cut one of their cows a little near its neck to add its blood to a skin of milk they had and drank this to most everyone's squeamish delight. But I noticed that Sarah, without paying, surreptitiously snapped off a few photos as they drove on with their cattle after they had been paid. I was struck by how well they worked together and was reminded of the earlier image of the lioness and how she shared her kill with her cubs. That's one of the many things that has surprised Sarah the more she see of this continent: Most Africans don't work together. "Many factions compete for things and would accomplish so much more if only they would unite," she commented to me. The Masai I saw definitely had figured out the benefits of family cooperation.

We didn't travel at night, but set up camp right after sunset. Some of the tourists commented on what they noticed as a universal concept among Africans: a dislike of the night. I pointed out that it is a natural response, though. "So many of the roads are in such hazardous condition that it is extremely dangerous to travel at night," I explained to them. I saw Sarah smile as I spoke up. She always encourages me to say my mind around strangers, and she was pleased that I held my own with this group. However, there is another factor to our dislike, which I did not share with these strangers. Most of us know that ghosts and other creatures travel by night, and none of us want to take our chances meeting up with one of them. I am always hesitant to mention this around Sarah as she is too fascinated by the subject. Back in the village, she asks the wrong questions at times, and I know that one day her curiosity will get her into trouble that I won't be around to help with. But she is the first white person I've ever met who does believe in this and respects our beliefs, to an extent. "If any place is going to have spirits, it really should be the land many people call the cradle of humanity," she has said to me more than once.

I stayed up late a few times with Moboya and Sarah, partly because I wasn't tired and partly because I was a little jealous. I know Sarah was not attracted to him but was determined to make a better impression on our guide than the rest of the group had. But that didn't change the fact that the Kenyan almost never looked me in the eye, as though I somehow didn't count. Perhaps he knew it would be Sarah who tipped him at the end of the journey, so I wasn't someone worth wasting small talk with. The three of us shared a few beers, talked about mostly safe subjects and tried our best to avoid politics and such. Every night I tried to teach him the handshake that is so common in Cameroon where we sort of slap our hands together, briefly shake and pull our fingers away from one another so that we snap each other's fingers in parting. No luck, though. Sarah, having mastered the shake, was surprised that Moboya could not, as if everything must somehow be universal here. She knows many things from books, but she does not know everything.

I don't know if it was because of the beer, but one night, Moboya made an interesting comment to us. We were sort of enjoying the night sounds and the occasional flash of nocturnal eyes when there was a grunting in the distance. I looked at him a trifle fearfully for an explanation, but he didn't answer until Sarah asked what the sound was. He told her it was a male lion vocalizing to a female. Moboya stoked the fire higher and said that it wouldn't be a good idea to stray far from the tent. I told him that it was not likely. Just as my heart was slowing down, an awful screaming commenced. The closest way I can describe it is to say that it sounded like when two cats get into a struggle. Only magnify it a hundred times to get an idea of what I heard. Moboya practically shoved Sarah and myself into our tent, his ebony face suddenly ashen. I tried to ask him what was wrong, but, in his fear, he slipped back and forth between English and Swahili. Most of what he said was lost on me, and the only words I could make out were what sounded like "initiation" and what must have been Swahili, "Zee Dundoo," or something like that. He ran, gibbering, back to the four-wheel drive, and for one terrifying moment, I thought he was going to drive off. But he emerged with a rifle (something tour guides are not supposed to possess, so I suspect Moboya does a little poaching on the side to help his income and feed his family) and went back to the fire. I zipped up our tent and huddled deep in my sleeping bag, wondering how the rough canvas and feathers were going to stop anything that could scream like that. Later on during the night, I thought I heard Moboya's low voice, almost as though he were talking to someone, but figured he must have been praying aloud. I can't imagine anyone else would be moving about in the game park at night. I admit I was doing a little praying myself. As I'm sure you've already guessed by reading this, I survived the night.

The next morning, I cautiously opened my tent when I heard the now familiar clink of metal pots, the sound of breakfast being prepared. Moboya looked calm and collected as he heated up our porridge and sliced fresh fruit for a salad. He even smiled at me, and I had to wonder for a moment if the night before had really happened. I tried to ask him what he was



talking about last night when we were so frightened, but he gently rebuffed me and made light of everything. I let it go, as I suspect he was embarrassed by his reactions to what must have been lions fighting. Our ego is such a fragile thing, especially around women. I mostly forgot about the incident, however, as it turned out one of the other tourists had fallen ill. This banker from Boston, red-faced and stout, looked all washed out when he stumbled from his tent that morning. He probably contracted malaria, I thought, and was starting to suffer from its effects. "Welcome to Africa," I was tempted to tell him, but I kept my tongue. He swore up and down that he had taken his chloroquine faithfully, but Sarah told him many strains of the disease have become resistant to that drug, and even if he was good about his regimen, he might still have caught it. We all agreed to pack up and get him to a doctor in Nairobi. How lucky for him, I thought grudgingly, that he had the means to go to a doctor. That is an option most of us can't afford. I could almost swear I saw Moboya smile at the man's predicament. Probably glad some know-it-all tourist got his comeuppance, I suppose. On the other hand, maybe he was glad for the excuse to get out of the bush. I never found out which one it was.

After Sarah had her film developed at the little shop by our hotel (she does try to keep her promises), I cleaned and repacked our gear, and we made our way to the taxi-park, ready to be off on the next leg of our travels. Sarah always chides me when I use certain phrases for things that are distinctly African in my writing without elaborating. So perhaps I should describe what a taxi-park is for those who don't know the phrase. (I have also asked Sarah who the "you" is when I write a private journal, but she has yet to give me a satisfactory answer to that.)

"You" must remember two facts to understanding how a taxi-park runs. First off, you have to accept that you are on "Africa time," so things will happen when they do, not when you want them to. You might as well throw your watch away, if you are lucky enough to own one. The other thing to understand is that there is actually order to the frenzied chaos of our countries; it just takes a while to be able to see it. The taxi-park is a great example of that chaos. Consisting of a dirt patch about the size of two soccer fields, the park is crammed with vehicles of all sizes and shapes, from cars that almost resemble Western taxis to large trucks that are more suitable for hauling livestock than people but usually transport both. Everyone screams at you to choose their vehicle. The reason behind that is that the buses and taxis don't leave on a set time. They leave when the drivers fill them up. Normally, this happens within a few hours and the vehicles usually leave during daylight. Although crowded with both people and animals such as chicken and goats, the bush taxis or matatus, as they are referred to in this region, are a nicer way to travel than the trains if you want to see the countryside. Kenyan trains are faster and more comfortable, without question, but they travel only at night. The downside to that form of transport besides the lack of a view is that the conductors often fall asleep and the trains derail.

Sarah gently rebuffed the offers to destinations like Mombassa, which is one of the most beautiful beaches in Kenya right up there with Malindi and Lamu, and a great opportunity to swim in the Indian Ocean. Considering my fear of the water, though, there was really no point to us going there. She also decided to skip going through Tanzania, passing because so much of the geography is similar to parts of Kenya with the valleys and green veldts. The game parks are equally amazing, and with the black market, her dollar does go a long way. Of course, the chance to climb Kilimanjaro would've been special, but she wasn't quite up to that challenge. Sarah talked to a few people who had climbed Kili, and even though they described it as more of a strenuous hike than a true climb and the ascent occurs over the course of several days, she didn't want to chance finding out that either of us is prone to altitude sickness. One or both of us would be stuck breathing oxygen out of a cylinder at the third hut and not see the spectacular sunrise from the top of the continent. In addition, the climb would burn up at least a week, if not longer, of her official vacation time. Sarah mentioned that she might try it when we're on our way back stateside at the end of her service, but she wanted to save the rest of her time off for some areas we've never seen before.

It didn't take too long for me to find a "bus" that was going into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly known as Zaire and as the Belgian Congo before that) via Uganda. I was glad I was able to find one that was not planning on passing through Burundi or Rwanda. Those

tiny little countries are a constant battleground between the Hutu and the Tutsi and no place for an ignorant foreigner, which included both of us. Sarah told me many in the US have probably heard of those tribes on the news. What many Westerners don't realize is that those tribes have been at each other's throats for hundreds of years, from when the Tutsi immigrated there from Uganda and Ethiopia (the 16th and 17th centuries, Sarah tells me). The Tutsi subjugated the Hutu in a feudal system similar to what existed in medieval Europe. Of course, the Hutu were from Bantu stock that migrated into the country and replaced the original Twa Pygmies, so it is hard for me to sympathize with either of those groups, as they are both invaders. So rather than get caught up in that, even though it meant missing the beautiful, mountainous countryside and the spectacular views of Lake Tanganyika, not to mention the mountain gorillas that the white woman, Dian Fosse, studied, Sarah paid our fare and we climbed in.

The bus was as tall as a British double-decker but had only one level. On the top of it was a mountain of bags that varied from the striped, plastic shopping totes that are so prevalent here, crammed with miscellaneous goods to sacks of flour to huge stalks of bananas. All of it was tied down precariously with strips of what's called goat rubber, which is just old inner tubes sliced into one, continuous strip. Inside, there were rows of benches orientated lengthwise so that the passengers faced one another and more luggage lay piled in the center. I pushed in between a very large, very gassy mammy holding a scrawny chicken and a young girl obviously going off to school. Her close-shorn head and uniform gave her away. I stuffed my pack under my feet and settled in, with Sarah a few feet away. The taxi was only two-thirds full, so I knew it would still be an hour or so before we would fill up and leave. But with all the hustle and bustle of the park, it was hard to get bored.

Turning around as much as I could, trapped though I was like some human sardine, I stared at the near comical franticness that is the taxi-park. All around, drivers called out to prospective fares, and a few of the more aggressive agents that they had working for them would grab people's bags and goods and drag them over to the car they were assigned to. Most weren't going in that direction and angrily seized their possessions back and stormed off. Weaving deftly through the throng of humanity, women balanced large pots on their heads. The pots contained an amazing variety of goods, and the women sold everything from beignets to toothpaste for the benefit of the travelers. They marched methodically from one vehicle to another and paused in front of the passengers long enough to let them inspect their merchandise. When I saw a woman who had corn, I hissed to get her attention. I saw Sarah instinctively flinch at the sound. That's something that she is still not used to. Most people over here do not call out to someone else who is some distance away — we hiss. I tried to teach Sarah that and the other thing to watch out for, which is waving someone over. If you wave "come here" with your palm facing up, that is actually a sexual invitation, at least in Cameroon. If you simply want someone to approach with no strings attached, you have to gesture with your palm facing downward. That's definitely something I didn't want her to confuse.

As I happily munched away on an ear of corn that had been roasted over an open fire, I watched another perfect sunset. The views really are like the postcards Sarah bought in the city, with the veldt stretching out before us. The sun reflected off the dust particles in the air, turning everything a rosy hue and gave the area a surreal feel to it. I don't know what it is about sunset that brings out the "odd folk," though, as I like to call them. This mixture of people sort of slink out after dark, and that Nairobi taxi park was no exception. Not exactly beggars, these men in their tattered clothes stumble about, demanding to some of the people they bump into, pleading to others, and downright fearful of some they see, but they definitely want something indefinable. And the albinos tend to come out, as well.

Now that's something that is unusual to look at and yet, albinism isn't all that uncommon here due to the large population. Their skin is about as pink as Sarah's, and their hair is an odd type of blond. Their irises are almost devoid of color and are framed with delicate, paper-thin eyelids and nearly invisible eyelashes. During the day, the few I have seen cover themselves almost completely and carry umbrellas to protect skin that is just not capable of withstanding the sun's rays. How amazing it is to me that these people are barely able to stand the light of the sun in this place of extremes and yet have to somehow live and function mostly

in the darkness, a time we shun here. What an unfortunate existence. At dusk and through the night, they have more freedom and can move about comfortably, although other folks still call them hurtful names. In fact, the most insulting thing they do is to call them by the slang word for a white person, something normally reserved for foreigners regardless of skin color. So the albinos tend to avoid Sarah's people like the plague.

Sunset also brought out the final travelers, and from their numbers our driver and his assistant corralled the remaining few they needed to overstuff the bus and fulfill their exaggerated quota. They lashed down the last of the baggage, and the bus rumbled and coughed to life. I was pleased to see that the chauffeur (Sarah loves so many of the French words, though she demands that I continue to practice my English) stopped at the petrol shack and filled up his tank. While we watched the man of Muslim descent raise up a clear jug of amber liquid that looked like it should hold palm wine instead of gas, Sarah wondered once again just how they could tell the difference between "regular" and "super." Once again, the joke was lost on me, and I wondered how I would ever function in her world.

Fully loaded, the driver started down the road to Uganda. I know that sounded funny, but throughout the continent, there aren't that many main roads, and people tend to use specific roads to get to other countries. Therefore, a traveler could stand at a crossroad and say that one was the road to Uganda; one was the road to Tanzania, etc. At least through Kenya, many of the roads were even roads by Sarah's standards. And my temptation to fall asleep on the beginning of the ride was great. However, we had started late in the day, and that meant the majority of our travel would occur at night. Train conductors aren't the only ones reputed to fall asleep at the controls. I thought I might just keep an eye on our chauffeur for our safety's sake.

Traveling the roads at night is a strange thing. Once we left the outskirts of Nairobi, there were no longer any lights to color the night sky and everything was pitch black. There wasn't much to see except for the occasional pair of headlights that came blazing out of the darkness in the opposite direction. Once or twice, our chauffer had to swerve to miss them, so I think he fell asleep only once on the trip. Everyone else, including Sarah, slept as well except for an old man toward the back door of the bus. I noticed he watched the rest of the passengers furtively. Thievery is very common here, so I could sympathize with what I thought was his concern, but his behavior bordered on paranoia. And he would look at me at times with the coldest eyes.

We made only one stop that night in Malaba, a town I am still not sure is Kenyan or Ugandan. It is the main border post and, of course, a place where we all have to disembark. Depending on which border crossing you are at and the mood of the border guards, passing through from one country to another can range from a few hours to an all day affair. I could see some of my fellow passengers cast surreptitious glances at Sarah. Sometimes her white skin worked in their favor, and we would pass easily through a patrol, and sometimes it meant that every piece of baggage had to be removed and thoroughly searched. At Malaba, her skin was a bonus. The guards made a cursory search through our packs and then waved us over to the small hut where our passports were checked for the proper visas, etc. We were out of Kenya and officially in Uganda in only an hour. Unbelievably, that is close to being a "record time."

We also stopped in the capital, Kampala, to stretch our legs. In the half-light of false dawn, Sarah and I munched on some fruit while our companions looked around for facilities or, barring that, discreet corners to urinate in. It was somewhat unsettling in a city that still bears the scars of the six years of civil war that started with Idi Amin's defeat by the Tanzanian army. Kampala also bears the wounds of the aftermath of the enforced departure by Amin of its 70,000-strong Asian population and the years and years of looting since. Some 300,000 Ugandans were killed under Amin's regime. The buildings the bus parked near, coincidentally enough, were the Nile Mansions, next to the Conference Center. Amin and his cronies were fond of torturing people round the clock here, and the screams echoed out at any hour. People were bludgeoned to death with sledgehammers or iron bars. And that wasn't the end of it. I was glad when we packed up and moved on, saddened by the heavy weight of lost souls in the capital. It felt like leaving a graveyard.

As the sun rose further in the sky, I took off my sweater and let Sarah use it as a pillow. Nights are always cool, and it is a good idea to

dress in layers to accommodate the sometimes-wild differences in temperature between day and night. The closer we got to Zaire (I don't think I'll ever get used to its new name of the moment, which is the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I think), the more the geography started to change. Off to the south, I could see the Ruwenzori mountain range. These mountains are almost as popular as Kilimanjaro for climbing, but Sarah did not intend to try her hand at these, either. The non-volcanic range is usually shrouded in mist, like large spirits guarding their secrets, and almost always wet. Sarah didn't have the proper gear or the ability to climb these snow covered peaks. But they and Lake Mobutu just north of them were markers to us that this leg of our journey was almost over.

Crossing over into Zaire was not as quick as entering Uganda. Even though Mobutu is no longer president, it doesn't mean the corruption is gone. After the guards near Kasindi picked through Sarah's belongings for over an hour, she finally caved in and gave them the bribe they were looking for. I know she objects to the principle, but Sarah didn't want to hold up the others any longer. When we cleared the border, everyone's mood lifted. No one enjoyed the fear that the African man in a uniform always instills.

Beni was our next departure point. I grabbed my pack and left with Sarah and the other passengers when we pulled into the market. Our chauffeur was eager to have some Primus beer and a few hours' rest before he made the return trip to Nairobi. We were only about 1,000 miles away from our village, and I have to admit that I was looking forward to the next stage of the journey home. Sarah wanted to reach Kisangani by the following week to catch a very special ferry she had been talking about for months. Since it was the tail end of the rainy season, we were looking at about six or seven days of travel if we were lucky. As it turned out, we were very lucky.

In the market area, amid the women selling fresh peanut butter and manioc, lost among men strolling around with rainbow-colored umbrellas, was a small group of British travelers. One was standing near a muddy, but dependable Land Rover, and I could see two others wandering around. They were all male, and I could see by the way she fluffed up her hair that Sarah was preparing to flirt with them. A few hours later, all five of us were on the road to Kisangani. It was a decadent way for us to travel, but I know how badly Sarah wanted to make the ferry, and we both had much more confidence in the British-made Land Rover's ability to escape a mud pit than we did some of the taxis. It is a vehicle that comes with a winch as a hood ornament!

Over the next few days, as Sarah chatted amiably with our hosts, I managed to ignore my companions and admire the changing scenery. The area we were passing through was what Joseph Conrad wrote about in Heart of Darkness, a book Sarah let me read a year ago. The jungle completely lined the dirt, now mud, road and all I saw for days was the gray sky, green foliage and the blood-red road. The colors were amazing in their intensity. All the bouncing around hurt my back, I must say, but it was a much more pleasurable way to travel than by truck. In fact, we were mired in only once the whole way. And since the puddles were on average 15 feet long, as wide as the road and usually three feet deep, that was admirable. When we arrived in Kisangani, I watched Sarah bid adieu to her "Limey friends," as she called them. They had plans to continue on by road, and though they tried their best to talk her into staying, I knew she was determined to catch the Onatra ferry. And when that vessel came down the river, everyone, including me, stopped to stare.

Let me give you a better idea of what I mean by a ferry, though. I've been told that the Onatra is rather legendary around these parts and really the only way to travel the Congo River. However, even though the vessels are referred to as single ships, they are actually comprised of five and sometimes even six barges lashed together. This flotilla is like a city unto itself, and it holds about a thousand people at any one time. When it arrived, a rush of humanity moved off and on the boat at the same time. More of that organized chaos I mentioned earlier.

Since we had traveled so luxuriously from the Zairian border, Sarah opted once more to travel as most do — third class. What that translates to is that we had tickets to get on, and once there, we were on our own. The first and second classes were better, but it was not the way to see the country, Sarah pointed out. So I scouted out a spot under a tarp large enough for us and, in French, I struck a deal with the five

who were already sleeping there. For the mere cost of a beer apiece for each of them each night, they would save us a spot. But even though they were agreeable enough, I warned Sarah to keep the small pack containing our funds and papers with her at all times. Trust only so far, I have told her more than once. As soon as we had a physical place to sleep, I followed Sarah as she wandered through the hustle and bustle that is the Onatra.

As I said, the ferry is comprised of six barges lashed together, with a power unit at the front of each barge. First-class cabins have their own showers and toilets and second class is similar but holds more people per cabin. Third is, well, the boat itself. While both first and second class have their own dining areas, the rest of the boat makes do with what's available. And everything is available. As we marched from stall to stall, I had to keep glancing over my shoulder to see the Congo River and remind myself I was on a boat and not in some village very like my own.

Every barge had multiple stalls that sold produce of all kinds, so eating was not a problem. In fact, I don't think I ever saw such a variety of foods before. One person had stalks and stalks of bananas, one had mangoes and papayas, one had tomatoes, onions and garlic, and then there was the bush meat. Fried bats were very common, as was gazelle. As we turned a corner, a woman thrust a large monkey at me. I was so startled I nearly slipped off the edge of the barge. These vessels don't have any railings of any kind. Lucky for me, another man grabbed my arm.

"Be careful," he warned me in French. "This boat don't stop for no one."

I thanked him and then glanced back at the woman and her monkey. I could blame the poor, evening light for my near plunge into the muddy Congo, but that wasn't true. As I looked more closely at the woman, her hair tied into spindly strands that were, in turn, woven into an intricate basket design, I could see she was pleased at frightening me. Her impossibly white teeth were shocking against her dark skin. She swung the monkey toward my face for a closer look. Rather than give her any more satisfaction, I pretended to be interested in purchasing it.

The poor animal was about 30 pounds or so, and a mottled silver color. The woman had taken his tail and tied the end of it around its neck and she carried it like some evil bag. Its tongue hung out and, for a moment, I thought maybe she had strangled it to death with its tail. An involuntary shudder escaped me, and the woman smiled broadly.

"We're all meat sooner or later," she whispered, and a chill went down my spine. I turned and lost myself in the throng of people that were listening to a soccer match broadcast over a crackling radio. I don't really follow any teams, even my own of Cameroon, but I would've done anything to break her gaze, even played a game of soccer if it that would have done it. I still see that monkey, though, when I close my eyes.

I decided to find a bar and get our "rent" taken care of for the evening. I had lost track of Sarah, but that was nothing new. I wasn't worried, as she couldn't have gone far. Even though the sun had set, the boat was brightly lit so I was certain she would be safe. Several stalls and all the bars on the barges had lights strung around. Everything was bathed in a dull, yellow glow, like some poor imitation of the sun. And music played everywhere as well. I wondered how we were going to sleep and briefly berated myself for not asking Sarah to acquire a cabin for us. But then, I didn't have any money to speak of, so I knew I had to remain silent as always.

With the beers tucked into my sack, I made my way back to our "room," and I surprised myself by finding it, too. Between the monkey and the music, I was feeling nauseous, and the thought of climbing into the covered area that was ours just seemed like a bad idea. And Sarah was nowhere to be seen. I briefly wondered if she was feeling queasy, too, or if she had struck up a conversation with someone of the same skin as her. I shook my head. One of the women, noticing my discomfort, suggested I head to the barge roof, where it was a little quieter and get some air. That sounded like a good idea. I carefully stepped around the crocodile that was tethered next to me (his mouth was wired shut) and looked for a way to get to the roof. I almost stopped into a small bar near where a crewman had told me was a ladder up, but changed my mind after I peered in.

It seemed innocuous enough and was even somewhat quiet. The few men and women inside didn't even have the radio on, and that alone made the place appealing. But the group of five men and two women were involved in a heated discussion that I couldn't quite hear.

When one of them noticed me on the threshold of the bar, she shot me an icy, almost predatory glance. At the same moment, my nausea caught up with me, and I turned just in time to vomit over the side. I decided to keep heading for the roof.

When I climbed the rusted ladder, I was surprised that no one else was there. But, remembering that most of us have a fear of the dark and being alone, it did make sense. Most people were either settled in for the night or dancing in the bars. Perhaps that's where Sarah was at the moment. Either way, people probably weren't going to change locations for the next several hours. I had an unobstructed view of everything.

The Congo, written and filmed and so much a part of the mystique that is Africa, was so very similar to the roads I had just been on. In places, the river was just wide enough to allow the barge to pass through, lined on both sides by the impenetrable jungle. And it is a muddy river, almost red in some places, in just the right light. Tonight, however, the skies had cleared somewhat, and a bloated moon hung over the trees. The reflection in the water was lovely, creating a romantic feel to the night, and I suddenly wished Sarah were here with me. Of course, the distant sound of the tinny radios and the muffled shouts of people rather put a damper on that illusion. And the tortured squeal of a pig ruined it all.

"Don't be startled," a voice behind me said, and that was more frightening than the animal's scream.

"I didn't hear you," I explained to her.

"I think you were thinking of something else," she offered.

I told her I was just taking in the view and I wondered to myself why I didn't hear her come up the ladder, as it was rusted and rickety. I was glad, though, for the company after hearing that shriek. On closer examination, I realized it was one of the women from the bar, but not the one who had given me the evil eye. This woman was completely bald, as so many men are here, and she had intricate scars all over her face and scalp. They were very beautiful, and I wondered what rite of passage they signified but I also knew I couldn't ask a stranger that.

She explained to me that she had come up here to apologize for her companion's rude behavior. I told her it was fine and that I was sorry if anyone thought I was eavesdropping. She assured me no one thought that, and then she proceeded to tell me that the first-class diner had run out of meat so they were slaughtering a pig for a late night meal and that was the sound I heard. She was even gracious enough to invite me to dinner with her companions and part of me wanted to accept. At that moment, an annoying mosquito hummed by my ear, and I reflexively waved it away. That reminded me that I still needed to make sure Sarah took her malaria prophylaxis, so I turned her down.

She looked a little disappointed but told me I should be careful around insects. That's actually not quite how she put it. My French, though it is not my first language, is fairly good, so I know she meant insects, but I thought she used an odd turn of phrase, calling them bloodsuckers. I slipped by her, and she told me in passing that we might meet again. I agreed, but a part of me was glad to be leaving. The idea of being in a cabin with her and her companions, as she called them, made me a little nervous. I found my "berth" and slid into my sleeping bag, glad to see Sarah tucked in already. Surprisingly enough, I had no trouble falling asleep. I woke up only once that night, when another scream ripped through the air. I vaguely thought that it must have been a big dinner, to slaughter two animals in a night.

The next morning I woke up to the sounds of wailing. I reached over to check on Sarah, and she grabbed my hand tightly. One of the women in our little nook was rocking back and forth, crying about her sister. All we were able to get out of the hysterical woman was that her sister was gone. In the gray light, several of the crewmen started a search through the barges. Although they found a few stowaways, the sailors had no luck finding the missing woman. Her sister was inconsolable, and the crewman could only guess that the woman probably stumbled overboard. It was not unheard of, and with all the drinking, a more than likely explanation. After all, I had been sober and nearly tumbled in the day before.

Between that incident and the woman I met the night before, I decided to ask Sarah if she could check with a crewman if there was a first-class cabin still available. There was, and he was happy to upgrade our tickets for a hefty price. Sarah, also unnerved by the unpleasant incident, decided it was worth it, and we spent the next few days uneventfully watching the dugout canoes dock up with the ferry everyday

to sell their produce to the crew and passengers. And it was enjoyable to watch the gangly little boys jump from the bow of the barge to drift back in the river to the stern, haul themselves out with a rope and run to the bow to do it again. I chose to leave the nightlife to those better suited for it and caught up on my reading, as did Sarah. I never saw the scarred woman again or the woman who had lost her sister.

When the ship docked in Lisala, I couldn't believe our good fortune. A distant cousin of mine who drives one of the large logging trucks so common a sight on our roads was nearby, and he had just delivered a load of timber. He was going straight through to Cameroon and was happy to take us part of the way. In fact, he wasn't even going to pass through Central African Republic. I was glad, because CAR is so dusty and the soldiers have a reputation for their cruelty there. Bangui, the capitol has an unbelievably high murder rate, so Sarah and I were very fortunate.

Although he did demand a little money for his gas and none of my family has ever been very receptive to Sarah, my cousin was very friendly and courteous the whole ride back. It turned out he had family in Bertua now, which is in the eastern province of Cameroon, and he was going to stop there for a visit. That worked out well for us, because I knew it would be very simple to catch a bush taxi the rest of the way back to our province. I was surprised how excited I became when the dense jungle finally started to give way a few days later to more savanna-type vegetation, a sure sign that we were approaching eastern Cameroon, and I could see that Sarah was also affected. I tried not to think of what my cousin was taking, however, to keep driving day and night. Better to just admire the view.

Entering the border was easy enough for us as Sarah had special papers since she is a legal resident of the country. That also meant my cousin got in easily, and I suspect he was smuggling something in. That was probably the real reason he had wanted us for passengers and had been so polite to Sarah. I couldn't hold that against him. Everyone is just trying to make a living here, however they can, and I am sure many think I am using her, too. Maybe I am somewhat. We soon parted company quickly enough, and three hours later and one last taxi later, we were back in the rainforest where we lived.

The neighbor children ran to see what presents Sarah brought them, and as they proceeded to tear into their gifts, I inventoried what the rats stole from our house while we were gone. Not much to be done about it when you live in a mud hut. Security does not exist. Sarah heated up some water for a bucket bath, and I caught up with our landlady to find out what happened in the weeks since we left.

The house I share with Sarah (though the Peace Corps does not allow this, which is why they don't know about it and why I also keep a small hut with my relatives) is nestled in a family compound and is the best of the lot. Our landlady used to live in it with her husband. She moved out when he died. He is still here, though, and buried in the front yard. One night, when our landlady was very drunk, she told us her husband had been a sorcerer who had been murdered by a rival. I don't know if Sarah believed it or not, but she does understand that sorcery is very important here and that voodoo originated here in West Africa.

I know that her Peace Corps frowns on volunteers asking about secret societies and what not. However, Sarah still pokes her nose where it doesn't belong and bends the rules to suit her purposes. That is how I manage to reside here, so I shouldn't judge her too harshly. She tells me that if someone volunteers any information to her, then it is not solicited and she has not broken her organization's tenets. "And," she has mentioned more than once, "all this does help me with my cultural sensitivity."

Poisoning is very common here. In fact, when you walk into any place that serves drinks, they will open the bottle only after they've brought it out to you so that you know that no one has tampered with it. And having an understanding of medicinal plants is considered sorcerous knowledge. Therefore, there is a lot of very real sorcery in the air.

How easily I digress. Sarah joined us as our landlady told me who was sick and who was pregnant and all the usual gossip. As I slowly relaxed in her cookhouse, leaning against a log, glad to be back home, she grew quiet. When I said nothing, Sarah asked her what was wrong, and it took a little while before she answered. She took a big swig of her Guinness beer and then whispered that someone new had come to the village. People always came and went, and since we have so many extended family members, I wondered why she was so serious about the newcomer. I didn't have to wonder long.

Dramatically, she announced that the new person was a sorcerer. I asked her what made her so certain this person was one. She told me that several people had fallen ill in the last month and her best friend had seen a black panther wandering the quarter. And she wasn't the only one who had seen it, either.

Now, some believe that sorcerers have familiars that work with and for them. If she had said some other kind of animal, I might have just dismissed it. We are in the middle of a rainforest and there is a varied wildlife, but there are no big cats here. So I admit she caught my interest, but not nearly as much as she had captured Sarah's. However, she did not have much more to offer. I finished my beer with her and told her I would see her in the morning, pulling Sarah along with me.

So that brings me to the present. When I came in, I planned to just unpack and go to bed. But Sarah had something else in mind. With a glint in her green eyes, she told me that she was going to go out just for a little while and catch up with Hubert, one of her farmers who maintained a bar in the village. She told me that, as this was the wet season, it would be a very opportune time to remove some stumps from some diversion ponds she was constructing with him and she wanted to go over their "game plan," as she referred to it, with him today.

"I'll only be gone a short time," she told me, and then she left.

I knew her story was a little too contrived, a little too quick. She could have just as easily caught up with Hubert tomorrow. In my heart, I know Madame Giselle's story of the newcomer intrigued her and she was curious. But what could I say to stop her? Sarah always does what she wishes and, as I am hers, there was nothing for me to do but nod my head in agreement. I had a second wind after she left, so I took out Sarah's typewriter and added these few pages to my journal. My fingers are tired now.

* * *

Darkness fell a few hours ago, and Sarah has not returned. She never stays out after sunset without me, and I begin to wonder what is keeping her. I can only guess at what she has gotten herself entwined in this time, and I begin to fear for her.



Chapter Six: Storytelling

A story, a story. Let it go. Let it come.

—from *Hausa Folk-lore* by Maalam Shaihua, translated by R. Sutherland Rattray

Telling a **Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom** story presents the Storyteller with a particular challenge. It's not really any more difficult than presenting any other **Vampire** tale, but it requires something of a different touch.

Unless you're unusually well informed about the regions we've covered so far, a huge amount of the information presented is new to you and might take a while to sink in. That's fine. Let it. You don't have to know the nuance of every African culture by heart or be able to say off the top of your head what the largest city in Kenya is. (It's Nairobi, the capital.)

As with any other **Vampire** chronicle, it's all about telling a good story with the tools you have available. This book offers you the tools. This chapter tells you how best to use them.

Mood and Feel

You've no doubt noticed that most **Vampire** books suggest a tone and a mood in their introductory chapters. This isn't just intended to fill space; rather, it's a chance to define the sort of ambiance that will work best with the material to create the most fun and dramatic stories.

With **Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom**, however, you must go beyond the mood presented in Chapter One. It's not enough that the players feel the conflict between the ancient and the modern, or between their old mortality and their new undying natures. It's absolutely vital that the characters, the environment and the story itself actually *feel* African.

And Speaking of Names...

Nothing ruins a player's suspension of disbelief faster than running into a witchdoctor named Frank or a cab driver in Kinshasa named Kate.

Let's be honest, though — most of us probably can't just generate all that many authentic African names off the top of our heads. In a Western **Vampire: The Masquerade** game, if the players decide to go have a chat with that shopkeeper who you'd only intended as background, you can decide on the spur of the moment that his name's Sam. Now, come up with three or four authentic (or even authentic-sounding) African names. *Right now!*

No big deal. We can't either.

One of the easiest things you can do, but also one of the most fundamental to maintaining the African feel, is to have a list of six or a dozen African names, male and female, written out in advance. Don't attach these names to specific characters in your mind; just hold them in reserve, for that inevitable moment when you need to name a Storyteller character immediately.

Finding good sources of African names isn't terribly hard. Your local library certainly has plenty of books on the subject, but you need not even leave the house. If you own an encyclopedia, steal some names from the history sections of African countries. Look for articles related to Africa in the newspaper and borrow names from those. If you're online, www.swagga.com/mname.htm and www.20000-names.com/male_african_names.htm are both excellent places to begin your search.

It's really not all that much work, and it's worth it to keep your players from rolling their eyes and wandering off to the kitchen every time they run into Bob the bushman.

It would certainly be possible, perhaps even easier, to run an **Ebony Kingdom** chronicle just like any other **Vampire** story, but with African names. You might even very much enjoy such a game, but it really fails to take advantage of (and does a disservice to) the source material.

This is a different part of the world — in many ways, a different world altogether. The cultures are different, the people are different, the environment is different, and the Kindred — the Laibon — are different.

So while it's not vital that you memorize every little detail of the setting, it *is* important that you fully understand the nature of those differences.

The Third World

Most African countries are considered Third-World nations for a reason. Much of the continent is gripped by poverty the likes of which most Americans and Europeans can't comprehend. Towns exist in which clean water, let alone running water, is a luxury. Many Africans cannot count regularly on a single meal a day. Politicians and businessmen live in homes and work in offices that are quite modern, while around them the "little people" trudge down dirt roads, till their hot and dusty fields and basically continue a way of life that hasn't changed drastically in hundreds of years.

Outside these towns and cities, some African tribes still lead a nomadic lifestyle, living in kraals and herding cattle, either ignorant of or uninterested in the creeping modernization taking place just miles away.

No, not all of Africa is like this. Cities do exist, where most if not all of the trappings of "civilization" provide a thin veneer of modernization. Still, it's vital for the Storyteller to remember and to account for the poverty and the hunger when running her games. You cannot simply take a story set in New York or London, scratch out the name and stamp "Cape Town" on it, and expect to be playing in the African idiom.

This crushing poverty impacts the Laibon just as much as it does the kine. Despite what some people seem to believe, the Embrace does not bring automatic wealth. Like most of the mortals of Africa, most Laibon survive well below what Americans and Europeans consider the poverty line. It can be a struggle just to survive, to find sufficient shelter to hide from the sun, to find prey strong enough to provide sufficient blood to last another night.

Of course, you also have your Guruhi, Shango and Xi Dundu sitting at the top, luxuriating in excesses that their poorer brethren cannot even imagine. Young Laibon have even less to gain from rebellion than their Western counterparts, since the Laibon tradition of the primacy of the eldest is, if anything, even more strongly entrenched than that of the Kindred. Still, envy and jealousy are sufficient to cause more than a little conflict. The citizens

of many African nations are unhappy, restless, rebellious. Why should the Laibon be any different? Keep this substantial gulf of power and wealth in mind when deciding upon the motivations of your Storyteller characters. Many Laibon leaders are arrogant, even spoiled, assuming that anything they desire is theirs by right. Many of the young and powerless are angry all the time, forced to subsist in squalor.

Africa's relatively high death rate and low life expectancy, as compared to First-World nations, has a strange psychological impact on many Laibon. In American culture, for instance, a portion of the population — particularly teenagers and young adults, from which demographic many neonates are Embraced — don't have much of a sense of their own mortality. They tend not to think about death, so the notion of deathlessness, while requiring a drastic shift in thinking and perception, isn't a complete shock to the system. In Africa, however, the people live with death every day, particularly in the poor rural or disease-inflicted regions. A much stronger sense of mortality exists, as well as a stoic acceptance of its inevitability — among many people, though certainly not all.

The Laibon are above all that. Some struggle to meet their nightly requirements of healthy blood and shelter from the sun, but they are still functionally beyond death. Most of the dangers threatening the kine no longer impact them, except for their effect on the food supply.

The switch to undeath is a much greater change of mind for many Africans, who must now adjust to the idea that they *won't* be dead in the near future as they had assumed they would be. This change can translate itself into either a heady euphoria in which the Laibon deliberately exposes himself to danger in order to laugh at death or to prove to himself that he's truly cheated it, or else into the arrogant assumption that mortals are truly worthless and inferior beings. Sometimes a Laibon becomes both in the same package.

The risk-taking tends to fade after a few years, and it is normally seen only in neonates who either grow out of it or get themselves killed. The arrogance, however, is often permanent. In either case, your Storyteller characters could well exhibit either or both of these attitudes as primary aspects of their personalities.

Technology

It seems almost like it should go without saying, but let's make it clear. The technological advances that most of us think of as simple parts of life are far less common (or even completely unavailable) in portions of Africa. Sure, a Setite in Addis Ababa might have access to a computer or even a cell phone, but not the Akunanse living in a tiny village in the wilds of Angola. The cars on the streets of larger African cities are often relatively old, and many



towns and cities still lack paved roads, let alone motor vehicles to drive on them.

Modern technology is, in fact, a primary source of conflict between younger and elder Laibon, simply due to its very existence. See later text for more on this and other conflicts between the generations.

Disease

As a matter of course, the specter of disease and sickness comes hand-in-hand with crushing poverty. The health conditions in much of Africa are truly appalling, and the Laibon — at least the poor Laibon — suffer for it nearly as much as the kine. Influenza and cholera epidemics are common enough to be simple facts of life to many of Africa's poor. Ebola, though quite rare, is a terrifying sight to behold. Even the Laibon shiver a bit to see the ravages of this horrific killer, if only because all the spilled blood has an unfortunate tendency to arouse the Beast.

The single largest threat to the health of the African people and the Laibon both, however, is AIDS. In regions of Africa, such as many of the southern countries, over a quarter of the adult population is infected with HIV. In some cities and towns, the rates of infection are close to 50 percent.

The Laibon in these regions are in the midst of their own crisis, even though some refuse to recognize it. Vampires can transmit the AIDS virus, of course, and some urban myths among Kindred and Laibon both suggest that strains of the disease exist which can even effect the undead. Fear and superstition regarding HIV and AIDS runs rampant throughout Africa, no less so among the Laibon than among the kine.

A Touchy Subject

We in no way intend to make light of the situation on the African continent. We're not presenting the HIV epidemic gratuitously. Nor is it presented as a problem for the players or Storyteller characters to solve.

Rather, it's presented as a horrible but inescapable fact of the setting. You probably won't be doing your chronicle or your players any favors by focusing on it or playing it up, but neither should you simply ignore its presence. Use it to add an element of verisimilitude to your stories and the behavior of your characters, but don't go so far as to make your players uncomfortable. Even when dealing with so hideous and widespread an epidemic, remember that the point of this game is to have fun.

Competition for territory is fierce among the Laibon of these regions, since areas where the infection rates are lower are hotly contested. Many local Laibon are desperate to leave, but they either have no idea where else to go, no means of travel or are held in place by familial obligations. New arrivals meet with hatred and even violence, as even a single vampire is yet another competitor for what little healthy blood remains in the region. Players' characters are unlikely to find any allies in such a location, and they might find themselves making enemies with their mere presence.

Laibon Motivation and Outlook

As previous chapters have made abundantly clear, the Laibon do not share many of the same motives and attitudes as their Western counterparts. Certainly, when you strip away all the masks and layers, they feel the same thirst for blood as the Kindred — but those masks and layers are important, influencing the behavior of the Laibon. In this case, your players have it easy. They only have to keep one set of these new motivations in mind. *You* get to juggle one for each Storyteller character involved in your plot. Aren't you lucky?

Some of what follows might seem like a reiteration of previous chapters' key points, but it's important to take at least a brief look at the Laibon psyche and motivations through the lens, not of constructing in-depth characters for the players, but merely creating convincing behaviors for your Storyteller characters.

Family Ties

As discussed in detail in Chapter One, the Laibon acknowledge and respect familial relationships that are far tighter and more binding than most of the Kindred. All the Guruhi or Osebo in a domain don't just share some distant ancestor, they're a family, with all the duty to one another that that implies. They might squabble, fight, compete and even — on occasion — kill one another, but that's a family affair. And they do *not* let outsiders mess with them.

The Laibon tribes, or extended coteries, are even tighter. If the legacy is an extended family, the tribe is very much a nuclear family. This isn't to say that no competition exists between tribemates — these are still vampires, after all. That said, it tends to be far less extreme than much intra-coterie conflict among the Kindred, and the tribes can come together in an instant to face a threat posed by a stranger. The old axiom, "Me and my brother against my cousin; me and my cousin against the world," very strongly applies to the Laibon.

What, then, does this mean for your Storyteller characters?

Well, if the players are outsiders, you should feel no qualms about having your supporting characters really close ranks against them and make things exceptionally difficult. Exceptions will always exist, of course, as the Laibon are no less anxious for an advantage over their brethren than are the Kindred, but by and large, they're able and willing to stand together to a degree that might surprise players of **Vampire**.

If, on the other hand, your players are portraying locals, they might well find doors open to them that they otherwise wouldn't have. This doesn't mean you should portray the Storyteller characters as friendly or anxious to help. They are, however, far less likely to stand idly by while your players confront a foreign threat.

Your players' and Storyteller characters should probably know each other fairly well. If all the Laibon in a given area are family, even in only the loosest sense of the term, it's probable that they would meet one another on a regular basis. In the West, the average Kindred might very well not know who shares her city with her, but such ignorance is far less common among the communities and domains of the Ebony Kingdom.

Finally, because of the familial nature of the Laibon communities, you'll find that the plots and schemes of the local vampires often take on an odd dichotomy. That is, they are both more and less open about their own machinations than the Kindred are about theirs.

Like all competing siblings, many of the Laibon constantly struggle with one another to look good in the eyes of their magaji. If your Storyteller characters are trying to appear superior to the players (or other Storyteller characters), they're not going to want to be subtle about it. They want to draw the attention of the magaji, the kholo and any other Laibon of note, to show how they outfoxed, outsmarted or simply overpowered their weaker, less competent adversaries.

On the other hand, because of the various ties linking the Laibon to one another, there comes a point beyond which it is socially unacceptable to harm each other. This shouldn't be taken to mean that the Laibon don't scheme to destroy their rivals utterly, ruin them or even kill them. Doing so openly, however, draws the unhappy attention of the magaji and others who dislike the idea that you've put personal objectives over the good of the family as a whole.

Of course, once it's all over with, nobody cares as long as the boat doesn't rock too hard and the status quo remains unshaken. The crime, really, isn't plotting to break the rules, but being caught doing so. Therefore, open and overt rivalries can suddenly become very quiet, very covert wars of attrition between two (or more) Laibon and their pawns. It's expected that your brothers and sisters plot against you; it's when things seem absolutely quiet that you know they've become very, very bad.

You might even portray some of your Storyteller characters as particularly paranoid in this regard. Some of them might actually be more willing to cooperate with the players' characters if they've butted heads previously, since each party knows where the other stands and what it's up to.

The Lack of Sects

The absence of the Western sects — the Camarilla and the Sabbat — has far more of an impact on visiting Kindred than it does on the Laibon. After all, the Laibon don't miss what they've never had and don't really want. It's important for Storytellers to recognize the fact that this lack of "sides" in the Ebony Kingdom is going to have a drastic impact on the way certain stories are put together.

Sects provide a set of general guidelines, rules of thumb that might not be true all or even most of the time, but at least give you a starting point in your analysis of other characters, both player and Storyteller. Camarilla? Probably concerned with trying to act at least vaguely mortal and either wants to keep to himself and address his own affairs, or is playing the political game trying to move ahead. Sabbat? More likely violent, indulging his inhuman nature and not nearly so concerned with politics or appearances. Not necessarily accurate, as we said, but a baseline from which to start.

The Laibon have no such easy distinctions. Yes, the Guruhi are usually in charge, governing tradition-bound domains. The Xi Dundu are usually ruthless, exploitative, working to unseat the Guruhi and take their place. But even if these are lines of demarcation almost as heavy as those between the Western sects, what of the other legacies? Most of them have no hard-and-fast tendencies regarding which side they're likely to ally with. It would be easy to assign them a "side" and call it a day, but that's sloppy thinking.

Players who are accustomed to basing most of their impressions of, and interactions with, other vampires solely on the Camarilla-Sabbat axis are going to be surprised and somewhat dismayed when they truly realize that no such easy pigeonholing is possible here. On the other hand, Storytellers who are accustomed to basing their own characters' personas and goals on that same division have to be very careful when telling a story set in the Ebony Kingdom. You need to guard against the tendency to think of the Laibon in Kindred terms. The Guruhi are not the Camarilla, with their Osebo enforcers and their Ishtarri and Akunanse advisors. The Xi Dundu are not the Sabbat, using the Naglopers and hired Kinyonyi as their attack dogs. This isn't to say that these alliances and positions are impossible or even uncommon, but you're just as likely to see any other combination of alliances and enmities. It's an easy trap to fall into,

particularly for experienced **Vampire** Storytellers, but if you do so, you're back to the "playing regular **Vampire** with funky names" situation again.

Faith and Belief

Particularly in the wilds and smaller villages, but even in the modern cities, Africa is still a land of deep religious beliefs and superstition. A large portion of the population is Christian, yes, but far from an overwhelming majority. Many Africans practice Islam, and while most Muslims are concentrated in northern Africa, quite a few of them live in the sub-Saharan regions, particularly along the east coast. The majority of Africans, of course, practice traditional religions, such as Yoruba and many others, that acknowledge the existence of both a supreme deity and multiple lesser spirits.

You should always determine which system of belief any given Storyteller character follows if you intend for him to play more than a bit part in your chronicle, since religious belief can drastically alter the behavior of the individual. Do all Laibon who come from a traditional background consider vampirism to be a curse? Perhaps some simply believe that they have been chosen by the spirits of the region for greatness. Others might believe that they are irrevocably and irredeemably evil, their souls already lost.

Caine might have been a prideful farmer cursed by God, but Cagn *was* a god. The notion that the Laibon are all demigods is not uncommon, and it can lead to an overweening hubris that makes the Kindred look downright modest. Combined with the pride many Laibon have already developed due to the heady notions of "immortality," and you find the occasional African vampire who truly considers himself nothing less than a god and attempts to rule his domain accordingly. Those with sufficient power and restraint might be able to force their fellow Laibon to treat them with proper respect and deference, and to terrify the kine into obedience or at least tractability. Those who overestimate their own power wind up either deposed by another of the kholo or slain by hunters from among the local mortal population.

Many Laibon are also susceptible to superstition. The Xi Dundu lack of shadow might be the source of the Bavili belief that when a man dies, he loses his shadow. On the other hand, they might be victims of that superstition, having done something to draw that same fate down upon them. Similarly, many vampires subscribe to the Khoikhoin belief that you should never stand in another's shadow, in case he has dangerous magic or medicine that might harm you. Some Laibon find themselves trapped when they entered a hut, only to discover that someone has placed a kerrie in the doorway. The Khoikhoins believed that such an act would hold the "night-walker" in the hut until sunrise. Is it the belief of the mortal who places it that makes it work (when it does work), or is it the Laibon's own superstition that keeps her from stepping over the stick and vanishing into the night?

As with religion, you should decide how superstitious any primary Storyteller character is before a situation arises in which it might prove important. The temptation, at least to the Western mind, might well be to declare that the major characters are "too sophisticated" to believe in any of this "nonsense." Don't fall into that trap. Such judgments are a cultural issue that simply isn't the same in Africa. Most of the population believes in spirits of some sort, and a belief in spirits almost by definition entails a belief in methods or charms for controlling, gaining the favor of or warding off those spirits. The most "sophisticated" Laibon are no less likely to maintain such beliefs than anyone else — and in the World of Darkness, who's to say what's superstition and what's actual magic?

A Quick Note

Spirituality, religion and superstition might be more common or at least more openly prevalent here than in other cultures, but that doesn't mean that True Faith is any more frequent. Just as you should resist the temptation to downplay the spiritual in an Ebony Kingdom chronicle, you should also make a point not to go too far in the other direction. The shaman, priest or simple farmer who actually has power over the Laibon because of the intensity of her faith is a lot more impressive if she's a rare thing. True Faith, like anything else, loses its power — over your players, if not their characters — if it becomes commonplace.

The Masquerade

One of the greatest points of difference between the Ebony Kingdom and the Western Kindred is the degree of secrecy. Obviously the Laibon don't parade about in busy thoroughfares, announcing that they're vampires to all and sundry. The truth is, however, that the Masquerade is far looser in Africa than just about anywhere else in the world.

No single reason for this exists. In part, it's simply cultural. Africa never experienced the Inquisition, the Laibon never had the dubious honor of seeing an entire religion rise up in an attempt to strike them down. The Laibon understand the need for subtlety, but they haven't seen the alternative firsthand the way the Kindred have.

A substantial portion of the kine of Africa follow faiths that allow for the existence of creatures like vampires far more than the Abrahamic traditions do. To the Yoruba or the Kongo, the Laibon is just another of many dark spirits that roam the night and must be either warded off, appeased or simply avoided. They are to be feared, yes, but their mere existence is not sufficient to shake the mortals' world view, or to incite the masses to rise up in arms.

Finally, the Laibon simply don't have to worry about word spreading the same way the Kindred do. Even the industrial parts of Africa lack some of America's and Europe's ubiquitous media and means of instant communication. Not everyone has a cell phone or a video camera, and not everything that happens makes the 10 o'clock news. For the two-thirds of Africa's population that still lives in rural villages and farmsteads, instant communication isn't even a concept they're familiar with. News spreads only as fast as a man can walk (or run) to the next village. In an environment where information is so difficult to come by, the need for secrecy is practically nonexistent.

For most Laibon — and therefore most Storyteller characters — this translates into a sense of entitlement and power found only in the eldest of Western Kindred. The Laibon are far more likely to use their supernatural powers and abilities to terrify or cow the kine around them. Many of them still believe, consciously or unconsciously, that they are the true lords of humanity, and they lord over their domains accordingly. They hunt more openly, act more openly, and in essence feel the need to hide themselves from the outside world, but not so much from their own people.

The fear of breaching the Masquerade — and the consequences of such a breach, be it from kine or angry sect officials — is a leash on the behavior of most wise Kindred, and therefore most players. The Laibon can't afford to be too blatant, but they lack the same degree of concern. Your Storyteller characters should act accordingly, without fear of using their Disciplines and other abilities in some situations where the Kindred would be unwilling to do so.

That said, don't let your players or your Storyteller characters get away with *too* much. Africa's distant, but it's not entirely isolated. Excessive violence or unexplained phenomena will draw attention even here, and the Laibon most assuredly do not want the rest of the world peeking in on them. The restrictions are looser here, but they're not absent.

Of course, this utterly alien philosophy completely throws off those few Kindred who find their way to the Ebony Kingdom, and those Laibon who visit the world beyond.

Conflict and Drama

The next step, as with any chronicle of any game, is to decide what sort of stories you want to tell. All the classical conflicts, both in literary and in **Vampire** terms, are available in an Ebony Kingdom story. Internal and external conflicts, man vs. man, man vs. self, man vs. nature and all that — or, in their Vampire-centric incarnations, Virtues vs. the Beast, Laibon vs. Laibon, Laibon vs. mortals, Laibon vs. the natural order of things.

Still, even if the archetypes are the same, Storytellers might have difficulty translating them into the medium of a new setting like **Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom**. Presented here, then, are numerous plot, conflict and story suggestions for your own chronicles. As always, they can be used as is, or altered, tweaked and twisted into whatever shapes you desire.

Internal Conflict

Inner turmoil and personal conflict are absolutely integral to any **Vampire** game, be it set in the Ebony Kingdom or the West. Unfortunately, it's also the hardest sort to portray and to make. It involves truly getting into character, often to a point that some players aren't comfortable with.

Guess what? You shouldn't force them. The Virtues of Aye and Orun are vital to defining **Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom**, no less so than Humanity is to a traditional **Vampire** game. Without them, much of the horror of the setting, the true impact of portraying a blood-stealing walking corpse, is lost. But no single aspect of the game, however vital, is more important than the enjoyment of the players. It might seem unsatisfying to leave Aye and Orun entirely in the realm of the mechanical, decided almost entirely by the dice, but better that than making your players uncomfortable.

If you are fortunate enough to have players who are willing to explore their characters to this depth, however, and if you yourself are willing to do the same, we can provide some starting points for creating stories that take full advantage of the built-in struggles inherent to unlife.

Moral Quandaries

Perhaps the simplest option for internal conflict, at least in terms of Storyteller planning, is simply to confront the players with frequent moral choices. This is easiest not only because the Storyteller has control over which events occur, but because it's the only such conflict addressed mechanically, in the form of Virtues.

At its core, the very nature of the Laibon should present your players with a moral quandary. They are, after all, surviving by stealing blood from the living, something that should at least moderately repulse most people. Particularly in-depth roleplayers will succeed in portraying their character's revulsion at what they're forced to do.

But let's be realistic. Feeding is something the Laibon have to do pretty regularly, which means it's also a frequent part of the story. If every successful hunt is cause for agonized soul-searching, with no other moral ambiguities or challenges interspersed with it, it quickly loses its impact — for the players, if not for the characters.

What else can you try, then, to really drive home to your players the idea that they have difficult, perhaps even impossible, choices to make?

Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom provides a very useful tool in the form of the familial links shared by the Laibon in a given region. It's natural for an individual to want to take sides when members of his family are arguing or competing with one another. Suppose the primary conflict in the region is between a Laibon on one side who has been an ally, maybe even a friend (insofar as vampires have those) to the players' characters, and the Guruhi magaji on the other. Are your players willing to risk themselves to stand by their companion, or are they prepared to sacrifice their compatriot in the name of advancement and self-preservation? How does the circumstance change further if one side or the other is clearly in the right? What if the side in the right is clearly the least beneficial to the players' characters? Which is a greater calling, duty or friendship, loyalty or convenience? Yes, we know which way most Laibon would probably choose, but your players don't represent most Laibon.

What about the kine? Most of Africa's population lives in devastating poverty. By working to advance and enrich themselves through the use of supernatural abilities and mortal cat's-paws, aren't the Laibon, in effect, cheating some of the people around them of similar opportunities? Doesn't every villager who is unable to work because he's weakened from loss of blood mean that the remainder have to work that much harder to grow enough food to survive? Isn't every politician who is serving the interests of a Laibon master consequently ignoring the needs of her mortal constituents? How many foreign organizations or technological advances that the elder Laibon schemed and pulled strings to bar from Africa for fear of change could have truly improved the lives of those who suffer here?

It's easy, in the intrigue- and struggle-filled arena of an Ebony Kingdom story, for players to forget that the kine are part of the setting. A tendency exists to focus solely on the Laibon and think of the mortals only when a character grows a bit thirsty or when she has to decide if too many kine are watching for her to justify turning into a lion. It's also true that many Laibon have sufficiently low Aye that they really *don't* care about the suffering of the people around them. Nevertheless, playing up the misery of the people, particularly the suffering that can at least partially be traced back to the Laibon themselves, is a good way to get your players thinking, and their characters agonizing over their choices. The swift accidental death of a kine while feeding can be dismissed and forgotten, but it's difficult for even the most jaded Laibon (or player) to ignore prolonged human misery when it's thrown in his face on a regular basis.

Religious Challenges

A close relative of the moral quandary, a challenge to a character's religious beliefs can create just as much internal conflict. It's somewhat more difficult to orchestrate, since not all characters share the same religious background or degree of belief, but it's still quite effective when done properly. You might wish to ask your players about their character's particular religious beliefs — not just which faith they follow, but to what degree — when the characters are first created. This gives you a better idea of what sort of religious conflicts will be most effective in the course of the chronicle.

Although each individually accounts for a minority of the population, the combined worshippers of Christianity and Islam form the greater portion of Africa's faithful (albeit just barely). Christian and Muslim Laibon face the same crises of faith that Kindred do in the West or Middle East. Vampires are hideous, unnatural, possibly soulless creatures that should not exist by any traditional understanding of God's laws. Have they any hope at all for redemption, or are they damned to Hell through no sin worse than being dragged into the fold by yet another damned soul?

For those who believe that they're beyond all hope, it can be a terrible internal struggle not to simply succumb to despair and depression. If God Himself has rejected you, can you possibly be worth anything? Is there a point in doing anything at all when your eventual fate is predestined? Many of these Laibon grow angry, lashing out at those who believe as they do (or did), furious that others still have the chance for paradise that's been cruelly stripped from them.

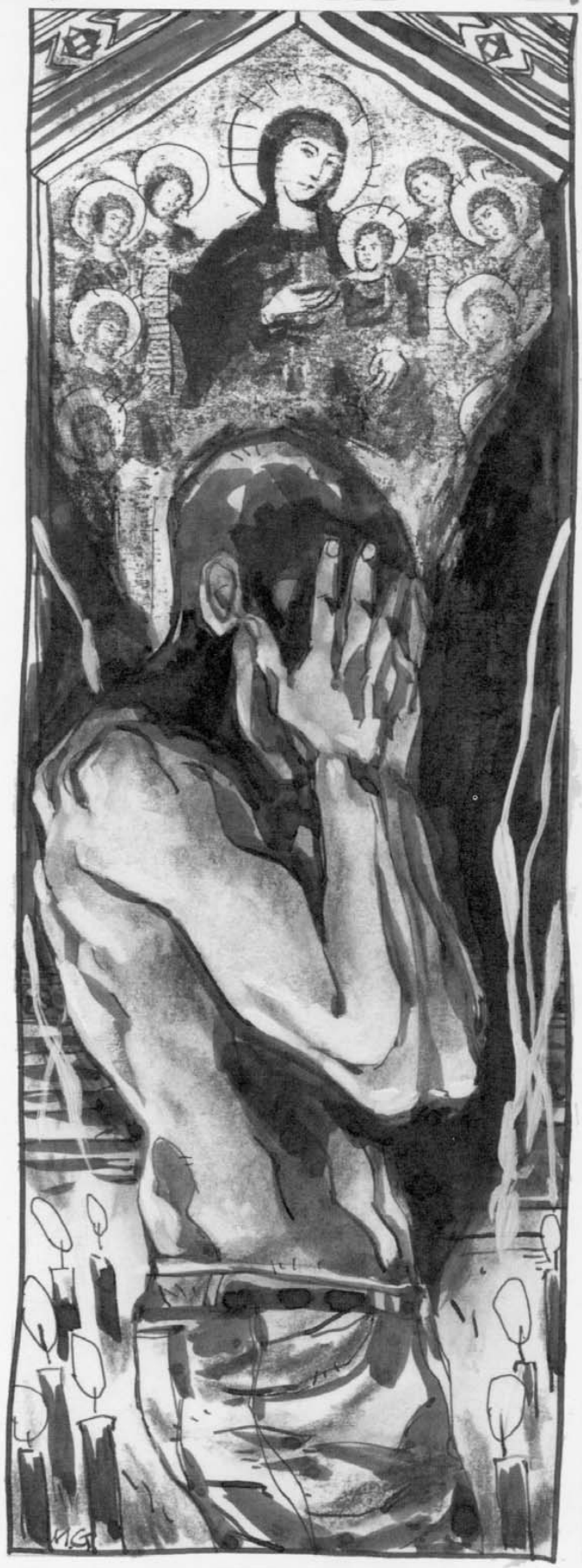
Christian and Muslim Laibon who still believe they can prove themselves in God's eyes face a different inner struggle. All their instincts as a vampire scream out against the faith and moderation that they must maintain if they're to have their chance at redemption. How does one of these faithful reconcile God's laws with their need to drink blood or their sometimes-lethal tempers? How can you prove yourself worthy when your very physical nature demands that you commit crimes that sully your soul? Despair and anger are no less common among these Laibon than their brethren who believe in their inevitable damnation. In fact, it's often worse, as some Laibon feel that they are being deliberately taunted, shown opportunities for redemption with one hand, only to have them snatched away by the other.

Therefore, three common types of Christian and Muslim Laibon exist. Many simply allow their devotion to wane, losing any degree of belief they possessed as mortals. These characters hardly think about religion and rarely allow the teachings of their faith (or former faith) to influence their actions. This doesn't generate much internal conflict, except maybe when the character thinks over what she's lost.

More promising, at least in terms of the drama they engender, are those who still cling to their faith. Some Laibon still strive for redemption, or at least acknowledge their damned state as part of God's plan. Such characters can be severely challenged by events that force them to confront the injustices of that "plan." When they see those who they believe to be less deserving reaping rewards that should be theirs, it can shake the entire foundation of their faith. Evil men have riches, power, family and friends who love them, yet the character herself — who might well have been a much better person when mortal — is forced to lurk in the shadows, stealing life from others, and denied or at least forced to desperately struggle for paradise. Roleplayers and Storytellers both can create some truly fascinating tales in the examination of such crises of faith.

Those Laibon who still believe themselves to be irrevocably and unfairly damned, who shake their fists at God and acknowledge no greater plan, can be equally conflicted when faced with the proper stimuli. They often react with anger when confronted by those who still have a chance for redemption. Particularly religious kine are quick to trigger feelings of envy and rage, and a Storyteller who tempts or taunts such characters with the chance to harm those who still enjoy what they have lost create an internal conflict for players to really sink their teeth into. Even better, however, is to show a glimmer of hope to a character that has, to that point, been portrayed as particularly hostile toward religion and the faithful. If a vampire who believes himself truly damned receives even the smallest hint that redemption is not beyond him — perhaps in the form of another Laibon who once felt as he did, hints of a means of regaining mortality, even signs and portents and dreams — the character and the player are then faced with a difficult choice. If he acknowledges that hope still exists, he must struggle to change his ways and to atone for all he's done in the past. If he does not, however, he condemns himself once more to an unlife without meaning and an afterlife of eternal torment.

What of those Laibon who follow more traditional African religions? The Yoruba and Kongo peoples believe devoutly in an enormous number of spirits, both malign and benevolent, who move about the world and either guide or oppose the natural order. They believe in



a supreme deity but believe that He has precious little interaction with the mortal world, and that these spirits serve as His intermediaries and agents.

This sort of belief system allows for the Laibon existence much more easily than do Christianity or Islam. If the vampire is simply some form of entity that has merged with a human corpse, or even the spirit of the dead man who has been unable to depart for some reason, then he might not be damned to any form of divine retribution in the afterlife. For that matter, the Laibon, or whatever spirits create them, might well be a divinely mandated part of the natural order.

For this reason, devout Laibon of African faiths tend to be less conflicted by their unnatural desires and abilities than are their Christian or Muslim cousins. This doesn't mean that their religious leanings don't provide substantial inner conflict material for the Storyteller, merely that she must approach them from a different angle.

Yoruba and the other spirit-oriented religions include procedures, charms and ceremonies intended to honor, ward off or beseech aid from those spirits. They aren't precisely compulsions — that is, in the strictest sense, the spirits are not forced to obey. If the rites and sacrifices are performed correctly, however, the spirits are bound by the laws of nature to heed them. They may not respond entirely as anticipated or desired, but they will respond.

How then should a Yoruban Laibon respond if he is subjected to such a ritual? Even True Faith is insufficient to compel a vampire to any but the simplest of actions, and True Faith is rare even in this spiritual land. It's unlikely, then, that the rites would have any affect on the Laibon. He might, of course, choose to acknowledge the practitioners in respect for the laws of his faith, but he might choose not to. If he chooses not to, though, has he violated the basic tenets of his faith? If he is now as much a spirit as a man, is he not bound to follow the laws of the spirits? If he doesn't, has he betrayed his faith — or, even worse, disproved them?

Many of these religions also maintain that any shaman who uses his power over the spirits to harm another person has perverted the intent of the rites and the religion. He has become evil, a force to be stopped or destroyed, and will almost certainly face eventual punishment for his wrongs. But do the Laibon qualify as spirits? They've something of the spiritual in them, of course, but while their powers, their Disciplines, are certainly supernatural, they could be interpreted as simply the same sorts of magics that mortals invoke. Is a Laibon who harms one of the kine simply following his own nature, or is he condemning himself to a horrific end?

Guilt

Assuming your players are willing to deal with it in character, guilt is the easiest internal turmoil to orchestrate, but it's also the easiest to overdo.

In essence, all you have to do is put the character in a situation where she must take an action that will harm others or otherwise violate her code of ethics, or you might twist an action she's taken in the past so that it has repercussions she couldn't foresee. The nature of the Laibon is inherently violent, so an alert Storyteller has plenty of opportunity to put the player in a difficult situation. She might recover from frenzy amid the slaughtered remnants of a family of seven, discover that the money she's embezzled via her thralls in civil government was going to aid the starvation-wracked village in which she was born, learn that the man she pulled strings to help usher into political office is an iron-fisted sadistic dictator, or even learn that she's the carrier of some hideous disease that she's been passing on to the kine.

Of course, if your players are of the sort who play vampires to avoid having to care about others, none of this is going to work. Even with the mechanics of Aye and Orun, you can't force your players to portray guilt any more than you can the other internal conflicts, so choose your stories carefully.

In order to heighten the impact a character (and player) feels in these circumstances, the Storyteller might want to consider delaying Virtue rolls. After all, no reason exists for a character to feel bad about something she didn't know was harmful. Upon discovery of the damage she's caused, however, a Virtue roll might be called for, no matter how long after the fact it may be.

Loss of Loved Ones

We're not talking about the death of the character's friends or family through violence here. That's certainly a viable story concept, albeit a relatively common one, but it hardly qualifies as an internal conflict.

No, instead we're referring to the forced separation of the character from his mortal life brought about by his undead condition. It's a facet of the character and the game that's often ignored in the rush to "get to the good stuff," but it shouldn't be. It's a powerful, even devastating realization in any character's development that he truly can't go home again.

It's all but impossible to hide what one has become from those who know one well. How does a newly Embraced Laibon explain why he never eats? Why he's so cold? And of course there's that daylight issue. It's remotely possible that a Laibon in one of Africa's larger, more industrialized cities might be able to pass himself off as simply having a preference for nocturnal life or perhaps a night job, but this sort of excuse rarely holds up for long. Too many social events require him to be out during the

day. If your story is set in a rural part of Africa, no possible excuse exists. As they've done for hundreds of years, these people rise with the sun, for most of their day consists of tending animals and the crops of the field.

If you cannot hide, is it possible the family might accept you? It's uncommon, certainly. Most people are terrified — and rightly so — of the Laibon, if they learn of their existence. Their loved one has become an unnatural, soulless thing. He drinks blood. He's *dead*. This cannot be an intended part of God's world.

Followers of African faiths such as Yoruba are a little bit more likely to try to accept the presence of a Laibon in the family, simply because they already acknowledge the presence of local or family spirits. They're certainly not going to treat the character the same way they used to, however. If he's truly lucky, they might simply wall themselves off from him with an unbreakable layer of veneration and respect, unwilling to think of him as just one of the family. More frequently, they pretend to accept him, but cannot prevent their fear of him from emerging and showing itself on a regular basis. In the end, many Laibon who have attempted to stay with their families leave of their own volition, unable to bear the change in their loved ones' attitudes. Most vampires discover that solitude when one is truly by oneself is far easier than solitude in the midst of a crowd.

Another aspect to be considered is that, even if you're the one-in-a-million Laibon whose family somehow manages to accept you unconditionally, you're no doubt putting them in danger by remaining with them. All it takes is one whiff of blood, one uncontrolled frenzy, to stain your hands with blood that never washes off. And even if you don't harm them, the vampire hasn't yet walked the earth who managed to avoid making enemies either among his own kind or among the kine. The family surrounding a Laibon become nothing but targets of opportunity for those who would harm the Laibon himself.

The decision to leave family and friends after the Embrace is not an easy one. Many Laibon attempt to stay, usually with the negative consequences enumerated thus far. Once they leave, many are struck with a horrible sense of loneliness. The local Laibon might think of you as part of their family, but it takes time to develop reciprocal attitudes. Young Laibon are often easily taken in by anyone who professes to be sympathetic, simply because they're desperate for an end to the loneliness.

Others grow resentful, angry at their families for turning them out, even if that's not really the way it happened. A burning anger at their former loved ones can lead to all sorts of other interesting moral and emotional quandaries for the player if the Storyteller allows them to run their course.



Some Laibon actually find it in them to understand why their families couldn't allow them to stay. These Laibon sometimes make a practice of hanging around, trying to serve as some sort of familial guardian angel. Their desire to protect those they loved wars constantly with the knowledge that the Laibon's mere presence poses a constant risk to the very mortals he hopes to protect.

Don't ignore this aspect of your players' characters' development. The way a Laibon reacts to his forced separation from the life he knew can set the tone for the rest of the character's eternal existence. Clever Storytellers can keep aspects and consequences of this single choice returning to haunt the characters again and again throughout the length of an entire chronicle.

External Conflict

All right, let's be honest. Internal conflict makes for wonderful drama, but it's the external conflict, competition and enmity with outside forces that forms the heart of most stories. This isn't because it's a superior form of storytelling, but rather because it's both easier for all concerned and it provides many more options and permutations.

"Easier" is not the same as "easy," of course. Like everything else, it's vital you give your plots and conflicts a special twist or perspective to ensure that you've taken full advantage of the setting and other tools provided by **Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom**. Suggestions for stories that do just that follow, but again, don't feel constrained to the ideas we've presented. If they inspire you to create your own stories and concepts, so much the better.

Progress and Outside Influence vs. Stasis and Cultural Integrity

Over two-thirds of Africa's population lives in rural villages or tribal lands largely unchanged by the last several centuries' worth of technological progress. Much of the reason for this has to do with the simple poverty of the people and even, in some cases, the individual national governments. If no profit is to be had making power, easy communications or modern medicine available to the poor villagers of the so-called "Dark Continent," why should any First-World entities or international corporations bother? Why should the governments, many of which only barely keep themselves afloat, and many others of which are far too concerned with maintaining their own power and enriching their own politicians, foot the bill?

Before we get too caught up in placing all the blame on the evils of capitalism, however, it must be pointed out that some in Africa, both among the poor and the powerful, have reasons other than greed for blocking rural Africa's entry into the 21st century. Many of Africa's traditionally minded religious and secular leaders fear the corruption or destruction of native culture that would inevitably (at least in their minds) follow a massive influx of modern notions — notions that must, by definition, come alongside the modern technology that sprang from them. They fear a loss of spirituality, of history, of purity.

Nor has the Western world, the source of much of the technology and foreign culture in question, given Africa much reason to trust it. Africa has been exploited, its lands and people taken for Western use, throughout much of its history. Even tonight, when colonization and slavery are largely things of the past, many African governments cannot squirm their way out from beneath the thumb of the United States and Europe. Some African nations owe other countries so much in the way of debt that it would take them years to pay it off even without interest. Not that it matters, however, since interest rates on these loans are so high that these nations will literally never free themselves. To many Africans, modern technology and convenience are nothing more than tools of their foreign oppressors, and they want nothing at all to do with them, even if they could ostensibly make life easier.

The Laibon are split on this issue, and they often come into substantial conflict with one another over it. This division largely, but not entirely, occurs across the generation gap. Many young Laibon see only the wonders that are denied them by ancient and — to their eyes — outmoded traditions. Some merely want the wealth and luxury for themselves, while others are still near enough to their mortal lives to want to help all of Africa's poor, but both resent those in power for keeping such opportunities from them, and equally resent nations and corporations of the West for not pushing to make them easily and cheaply available. Young Laibon have less to gain through rebellion than their Western brethren, but the cultural and technological stasis of Africa is one of the issues capable of provoking open conflict.

On the other side of the issue are many of the elder Laibon, as well as those raised with or taught a deep reverence for the old ways and traditions. Many of these vampires actually remember the periods of colonization and Western slavery. Others simply believe that the old beliefs will die out, smothered beneath a tide of Western ideas, and some simply do not wish to see these strange technologies that they cannot understand in the hands of neonates who might use that advantage to steal away some of the elders' authority.

Most of the time, these disagreements result in heated arguments and competitive rivalries, but they can escalate to open war and bloodshed between Laibon with differing viewpoints, especially if one side feels that the other is aiding and abetting the local kine in one way or another. Although this is far from a hard-and-fast rule, the Xi Dundu often side with those Laibon who wish to

see new technologies and new ideas allowed to flourish. They don't do so because they particularly care for the progress of the people of Africa, but because their rivals, the Guruhi, cling to the old ways and gain much of their power from allies who still follow the old traditions.

Elder vs. Neonate

The preceding conflict is one of the greatest points of contention between elder and young Laibon, but it's not the only one. Laibon neonates feel the same frustrations as their Western counterparts. Held down by a system that rewards age above all other considerations, they are left largely without power or representation in a society they cannot escape. Resentment simmers and occasionally boils over as those neonates strive for — and usually fail to acquire — a larger piece of the pie.

That said, this conflict is rarely as open in the Ebony Kingdom as it is in the West. Only very occasionally do neonates actively oppose their elders. The reason for this is simple. Among the Western Kindred, at least a small chance exists that if an elder is removed from power, her replacement might be more sympathetic to the neonates' cause — on rare occasions, such as in New York, perhaps even come from the younger ranks himself. After all, even elder Kindred sometimes prove wise enough not to accept a truly incompetent elder in a position of power.

In the Ebony Kingdom, where age is often the only criteria for authority, the neonates have less to gain by removing an intractable elder from her position. In many cases, no doubt exists as to who her replacement will be, and with no choice available, a coup only makes sense if that replacement happens to be one who will support the neonates. This, as might be imagined, is not a common occurrence.

Rebelling against the elders, therefore, tends to take more subtle forms. Rather than rising up, neonates make a point of sabotaging the elders' efforts, sidetracking or eliminating agents or using information gained by expensive (and in many cases forbidden) technologies to force concessions. Only if pushed beyond the point of frustration do these efforts erupt into open conflict.

Entire chronicles can be based around a band of neonates attempting to find a covert means of forcing their local elders to cooperate with their agendas, from blackmail to the loss of supporters, pawns and sources of income. Of course, all of this must be done without the elders discovering who is responsible, or else the characters might find themselves staked in the savanna, waiting to see whether the beasts or the sunlight finds them first.

One interesting twist you might wish to add to your stories is to make the players' primary rival or enemy among the elders incompetent, rather than actively malicious. Because the Laibon reward age regardless of accomplishment or ability, it's entirely possible for an elder in a position of authority or respect to have absolutely no idea how to handle it. If the players' characters seek to curtail the power of an elder or remove him completely because his incompetence is damaging the domain or the local legacy, they'll find themselves with very different sorts of allies and enemies than if the elder simply happens to hate them or seeks opposing goals. Don't turn such opponents into complete jokes, though. Being incompetent in one's position doesn't make one entirely helpless — and even if it did, the elder no doubt has servants and allies who wish to see him maintain his post for their own ends.

Familial Obligation vs. Personal Ambition

The Laibon expect conflict within and among the various legacies, tribes and "families." These are vampires, after all. It's bad form, however, to openly act against another in your family without very good reason, especially if the result will be a weakening of the family's power in the region.

If an open conflict does erupt between tribemates or other "related" Laibon, the reactions of the Laibon around them depend greatly on the size of the conflict. If it's a small confrontation, perhaps between two groups of relatively weak neonates, the odds are that most of the Laibon will remain uninvolved (unless they see an opportunity to advance their own position, of course). This means that the players' characters won't likely face excessive opposition, but it also means that they cannot count on the aid of allies. If, on the other hand, the conflict grows to unmanageable sizes, or threatens a Laibon in a position of authority, the entire domain might well polarize into camps. Again, those with something to gain might well choose to assist the troublemakers, but the majority of Laibon, particularly the elders, will side with tradition, the "proper" authorities and, above all, whichever side seems most likely to quickly return to the status quo.

Characters who make a practice of stirring up this sort of trouble could find their alliances and connections disappearing entirely, and most magaji are more than willing to banish young and troublesome Laibon from the family domain if they become too difficult to handle.

Players need not act against others in their tribe or legacy to find themselves torn between their own goals and family obligations, however. The Laibon are no less a spiritual, tradition-oriented people than the kine from which they're drawn. The players' characters might be required to attend a ceremonial or religious rite on the same night they're supposed to meet their Kinyonyi contact. The Guruhi magaji might demand a service of them that takes time away from their own agendas. They might realize after careful examination of a situation that yes, they can usurp influence over the new

industrial plant in South Africa from the elder who currently pulls the strings. That might mean weakening the family's power in the region, however, since the elder has connections and resources that the players' characters lack.

Of course, players who are truly getting into the spirit of the Laibon should be hesitant to scheme against the family simply because they are family — but what a Laibon "should" do in a certain situation might not always be what's expected of her.

Expectations vs. Desire

A close relative of the previous conflict, this occurs any time a character's personal wants and goals run headlong into the expectations others might have of her. Perhaps her sire expects her to loyally serve the magaji, as he himself has done for countless decades. Maybe he Embraced her in order to pass along his ancient knowledge and sorcerous teachings, only to learn that she's become far more interested in using her undead proclivities to acquire wealth and power.

These expectations need not come from other Laibon. A character can still feel compelled to follow her parent's dreams that she make it to the big city and become a doctor, despite the fact that they're now dead and the rather drastic limitations imposed by her new nocturnal existence. She might feel constrained by her religious faith and the expectations of local shamans to serve a village of kine when they correctly perform rituals of supplication, even though she'd much prefer to be out doing other things. If she was a patriot, loyal to her government, people or tribe, the duties imposed on her by that loyalty might not simply evaporate after the Embrace.

As any good Storyteller has guessed, the best time to play up these conflicts of interest is when the players' characters are right on the verge of accomplishing something they really wanted, then giving them a reason — through obligation or duty to another — to either put it off or abandon it entirely. The struggles they'll go through trying to find a way to accomplish both can fuel the story for quite some time.

Legacy vs. Legacy

This is one of the most common forms of struggle among the Laibon and also one of the most familiar to Storytellers of **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Though nearly any sort of conflict can erupt for any reason, certain legacies maintain common enmity with one another. In some respects, the divisions are so frequent that they almost begin to resemble the conflict between the Western Kindred sects.

(That's an important *almost*. These are not sects, and the legacies involved shouldn't be pigeonholed.)

The most common of these conflicts, and perhaps the most dangerous, is the growing power struggle between the Guruhi and the Xi Dundu. The shadowless Laibon represent the greatest threat to the magaji's power in modern history; they're organized, ruthless and absolutely power-hungry. Perhaps more importantly, where the players' characters are concerned, is the fact that the Guruhi, still bound by tradition and old ways of thinking, require the aid of younger Laibon, Laibon with the ability to develop new solutions and take advantage of modern strategies, to ward off the Xi Dundu. Whether the players side with the old, in hopes of preventing something even worse from assuming control, or they ally themselves with the new, committing innumerable atrocities for the Xi Dundu in exchange for a place in the new order, is entirely up to them.

Of course, this is not the only struggle between legacies, merely the most far-reaching. The Kinyonyi are known as mercenaries and assassins, so they often find themselves the hunted rather than the hunters if a powerful Laibon is slain. Entire domains have been purged of Kinyonyi in the wake of a particularly vicious assassination, even if no solid proof existed that they were responsible. The Osebo occasionally grow too destructive to be left unchecked. Nobody really wants the ghoulish Naglopers assembling in any great numbers. The Nkulu Zao are paranoid enough to battle anyone they consider a potential threat, and this often puts them in conflict with Guruhi attempting to expand their domains, Xi Dundu attempting to form new domains and Akunanse who demand the right to go where they wish, when they wish.

For a particularly fascinating story, make a point of ensuring that the tribe of players' characters includes members from both sides in a conflict between legacies.

Legacy vs. Individual

The familial ties between members of a given legacy in a domain make it dangerous in the extreme to openly oppose or attack any local Laibon. If the characters humiliate, injure or kill an enemy, they might well find their foe's entire "family" coming after them in retaliation.

Obviously, this doesn't happen every time two Laibon go at it. Only if the vampire in question is particularly well liked or powerful, or if the others of his legacy decide that the characters represent an ongoing threat, are they likely to interfere. When they do, however, the characters find themselves facing not a single aggravated Laibon, but every one of his brothers and sisters as well.

When faced with the enmity of an entire legacy, an individual or small tribe really has only a few options, and taking them on in direct combat is rarely one of them. First, the characters can simply flee. The family ties

within a legacy rarely extend far beyond a specific domain, and unless the characters' crimes are truly heinous, they're unlikely to be pursued. Some characters might not be willing to flee, however, either because this domain is home, or because they have objectives in the area that they haven't yet achieved.

If the characters are willing to humble themselves and accept any censure or atonement laid upon them, it might be possible to make amends to the injured legacy before things get out of hand. The wrath of the Laibon can be extreme, especially if the wounded party is still privy to the decision-making process, but most Laibon would rather have unliving vampires owe them favors and perform services for them than to slay potentially useful tools in an act of vengeance. Storytellers shouldn't make it impossible for the players to earn a reprieve, but she also shouldn't miss the opportunity such a situation offers for multiple stories and unpleasant tasks before the debt is resolved.

The players' characters can go to ground, hiding either in the neighborhoods of the cities or nearby farming villages. Storytellers can evoke substantial tensions through a series of near-discoveries as the players struggle to remain unseen until they can accomplish their goals. Alternatively, they can seek allies of their own among other Laibon of the domain. This can easily spiral out of control, however, as the actions of one legacy draw reprisals from another, and then vice-versa, until a personal enmity has snowballed into a full-fledged war.

Young Laibon might find themselves targeted by the local members of a specific legacy through no fault of their own. Perhaps one of them is the childe of a Laibon who drew the wrath of the local Shango many years ago before escaping, or maybe the characters represent a potential threat to the domain, such as agents of a Guruhi magaji in a Xi Dundu-dominated region. In these cases, the characters might be hard pressed even to survive long enough to learn what the conflict's about.

Legacy vs. Laibon Society

It's not common, but occasionally an entire domain can turn against a specific legacy. This most frequently occurs along the same Guruhi-Xi Dundu rivalry mentioned earlier. If a magaji wields sufficient respect or fear, she might be able to muster all of the "lesser" Laibon in her domain to help ward off a Xi Dundu incursion. Alternatively, if the Guruhi in a region have proven too heavy-handed, their so-called lessers could rise up en masse to help overthrow them.

As mentioned previously, occasionally the Laibon will turn on the Kinyonyi of a region if powerful leaders have been slain, and this isn't necessarily restricted to the Laibon of the victim's legacy. Sometimes, every Laibon in the region becomes active in hunting the assassins, and one Kinyonyi is as good as another.

In many cases, the mere presence of a specific legacy is enough to rile up the locals. Some Guruhi make a practice of purging their domains of Naglopers or Xi Dundu on general principle, regardless of their activities. Furthermore, a single criminal or rogue element can ruin it for the entire legacy. Since the Laibon think of each other in terms of family ties, they often assume that the actions of one vampire represent the desires and attitudes of his family. Even if they do not, local leaders who have been forced to punish a troublemaker often turn on his fellows preemptively, before they can even think about seeking vengeance for the criminal.

It seems one-sided, but the winner in a fight between Laibon of a specific legacy and everyone else in the area isn't always obvious. If the legacy in question holds a great deal of a domain's power, or has numerous mortal pawns, it might well come out on top of the struggle. In more than one domain, a coalition of young Laibon from numerous families has attempted to throw off the yoke of the Guruhi, only to find itself soundly beaten. Still, under most circumstances, if a legacy has enemies on every side and no allies to whom it can turn, its best bet for survival is simply to pull up stakes and find someplace else to call home.

Laibon vs. Outsiders

By strict interpretation, the Laibon might well consider anyone from outside their home domain to be an outsider. In this instance, however, we're referring to conflicts between native Laibon and other groups or individuals who are latecomers to the Ebony Kingdom.

Late Arrivals

The most frequent of these outsiders, although still quite rare in the overall scheme of Laibon society, are the Malkavians, the Mla Watu, the Nkulu Zao and the Ventrue. All four of these legacies are relative newcomers to Africa, and while the other Laibon have grown to accept their presence, at least to an extent, these legacies are neither trusted nor welcomed in most domains.

Most conflict between the Laibon and the Mla Watu and Nkulu Zao comes about simply because both these hunted, waning bloodlines want nothing more than to be left alone. Unfortunately, they've both been known to set up shop either very near, or even within, a preexisting domain. This isn't as unreasonable an action as it might seem. After all, even the most isolationist vampire still needs to be relatively close to at least a small community of kine, but most communities that are worth a Laibon's attention already have an indigenous vampire population. The Mla Watu and Nkulu Zao are between a rock and a hard place. They wish to be left alone, but their very nature requires they set up shop in the places most likely to be claimed by other vampires. Occasionally, the Mla Watu are able to work out an arrangement with the local magaji, perhaps trading a small domain of their own in

exchange for occasional access to the ancient secrets they are rumored to posses. When such arrangements break down, however, the Mla Watu prove to be both terrifying and subtle enemies, since their necromantic powers provide them with abilities that the other Laibon do not understand. The Nkulu Zao are somewhat harder to deal with, given the legacy's innate paranoia, and contact with them erupts much more frequently into open conflict.

How the Laibon deal with the Ventrue, who are still very much outsiders despite the fact that they've had at least a small presence in Africa since the earliest nights of British colonialism (if not before), depends greatly on the individual Laibon in question. Those native vampires who maintain an interest in bringing modern technology and socio-political notions into Africa are often willing to deal with the Ventrue in the hopes of trading a bit of knowledge of the Ebony Kingdom for access to the government and corporate contacts that so many Ventrue have. Elder Laibon, however, and many younger Laibon who still believe in the old ways or still hold grudges based in the West's historical treatment of Africa, would like nothing so much as to see every last Ventrue driven from Africa. These Laibon aren't shy about launching open assaults on these outsiders, as the Ventrue lack the family support that prevents frequent warfare between other Laibon legacies. Some Ventrue react accordingly, attempting to obtain domains in the Ebony Kingdom through violence rather than infiltration and negotiation. So far, they've proven largely unsuccessful, but those Laibon who are familiar with the workings of the Kindred dread the night — which cannot be too terribly far off — when the Ventrue grow frustrated with their current efforts and turn the attentions of the entire Camarilla sect toward the continent.

Any attempt to draw generalities about conflict with Malkavians is doomed to failure, so we'll simply say that for every Malkavian who manages to fit into Laibon society — or at least exist in relative peace beyond the periphery — another is causing all sorts of trouble for her hosts and invariably must be either driven out or slain.

True Outsiders

Although they are exceedingly rare, so much so that only a tiny handful of Laibon have ever met them, other foreign creatures occasionally appear in Africa in pursuit of their own goals. Many of these entities can be found in Chapter Seven, while others are still utter mysteries to the Laibon.

Although little is known about them, other Western Kindred besides the Ventrue and the Malkavians show an interest in Africa. Kindred from one family of nomads and wanderers that seems to share the Akunanse affinity for animals occasionally drift into the Ebony Kingdom. They rarely cause trouble, and they usually leave as quickly as they appear. Still, they have an unfortunate tendency to hunt wherever and whenever they choose, and this poaching on Laibon territory often leads to swift retaliation against the intruder.

A truly hideous breed of Western Kindred, one as ugly as the most inhuman of the Akunanse or Guruhi, seems to hold some particular interest in Laibon society. More than one of these horrible creatures has appeared in the midst of a Laibon domain, demanding to meet with the local "prince." Apparently, some rumor or urban myth among these Kindred has convinced some of them that Africa is one great kingdom, claimed by their own kind. Of course, while some Guruhi resemble these vampires, the Laibon deny any such connection. Some of these Kindred merely slink away in dejection when they learn the truth, but some grow angry enough that they become a threat that must be dealt with accordingly.

Finally and perhaps most dangerously is a family of Kindred witches, practitioners of great and foul magics, who have shown sporadic but intense interest in the workings of the African continent. These warlocks have established more than one stronghold in Africa, usually a collection of lesser witches led by a single master. These sorcerers are intractable in their search for information. Rumor has it that they have captured and dissected numerous Laibon, and even that they stole a form of Laibon sorcery many years ago and adapted it to their own purposes (see **Blood Sacrifice: The Thaumaturgy Companion**). Most Laibon believe that these warlocks cannot be allowed to gain a true foothold in the Ebony Kingdom — it's one of the few points on which even the Guruhi and the Xi Dundu often agree — and, to date, few of their strongholds have survived more than a few years. Still, their interests have not waned, and each time they are driven forth, they return in increasing numbers. It's only a matter of time, the Guruhi fear, until they become too entrenched for any single magaji to drive them out.

In all cases, the Laibon have noticed particular patterns of behavior shown by the Western Kindred that provide the native vampires some advantage when confronting them. Obviously, the Laibon have the advantage of fighting on their home turf. They know the local authorities, both mortal and undead, they know the local terrain and creatures both natural and unnatural, and they know how best to manipulate the native kine into fighting on their side, even unwittingly. All of this is to be expected, but the Kindred seem bound and determined to make the Laibon's job even easier.

Most Kindred who find their way to the Ebony Kingdom seem either unable or unwilling to accept that things work differently here. Perhaps their single most obvious lack of understanding relates to the Masquerade itself. Because the restrictions imposed by the need for secrecy are looser in Africa, the Laibon are willing to take



chances and to make use of certain abilities and Disciplines in the presence of kine that the Kindred wouldn't dare. Even when the Western vampires see the Laibon acting this way, most of them cannot bring themselves to shake off so many years of stasis and habit. This frees the Laibon to bring resources to bear against these outsiders that the Kindred cannot counter.

Even when a rare Kindred finds it in herself to accept this foreign, less concrete idea of the Masquerade, her problems aren't over. The Laibon have had millennia to determine exactly which lines they cannot cross, to discover what behavior is acceptable and what, even among those Africans who believe in magic and spirits, will draw unwanted attention. The Kindred don't have this knowledge, and those who shake off the shackles of the Masquerade often push too far in the other direction. They go from being too cautious to being too careless, flaunting their full power and undead nature in front of people who are prepared to accept only so much, and no more. More than one Kindred in Africa has been inconvenienced, injured or even killed by African witch-hunters, tribal shamans and hedge magicians, local police or even common farmers determined to rid their villages of these evil creatures. Many Laibon use this as a weapon, deliberately drawing peoples' attention to a foreign rival with the full knowledge that the Kindred will almost certainly prove either unwilling to bring her full power against the kine, or else will go too far and rile up even more opposition.

Overestimating the requirements of the Masquerade isn't the only mistake outside vampires make in Africa. Some Western vampires seem convinced that the Laibon are all of a single bloodline, and they're often stunned to discover otherwise, allowing the Laibon extra time to act. Once they've learned that the Laibon are more than a single family, many Kindred make the fatal error of assuming that sect allegiances from elsewhere in the world apply here as well. Many of the African legacies are easily mistaken for Western clans; a Kindred who assumes that such a resemblance extends into the realm of political alliances might find himself attacked by those he expected to ally with him. On the flip side of that coin, the Kindred often underestimate the family ties shared by a tribe or by the members of a legacy in a given domain. Because they don't recognize the connections a given Laibon enjoys, they make the mistake of assuming that she has no connections at all. Only when an entire domain retaliates for actions taken against a single Laibon do these Kindred learn the folly of their actions.

Finally, some Kindred make the same mistake when thinking of Africa as do many American and European kine; that is, they assume that the continent is made up

of nothing but primitive cultures, and that the people are therefore less intelligent or less capable. The modern cities of many African nations should put the lie to such beliefs, but some Kindred operating among the rural villages and farms never see such evidence.

The people of Africa, of course, are no less intelligent or observant than anyone else, and are in some cases quicker to recognize a vampire for what he is, precisely because they remain closer to their spiritual and mystical teachings. Hedge sorcery and similar examples of mortal magics are far more common in Africa than in First-World countries, and more than one Kindred in Africa has met Final Death, not at the hands of the Laibon, but beneath the magics of a tribal shaman.

Laibon vs. Mortals

A culture in which many people still believe devoutly in spirits, magic and the supernatural must, almost by definition, produces more than its share of those few brave mortals who take it upon themselves to defend their people from those extraordinary threats.

Laibon on the Outside

It's important to point out that the reverse of all this holds true on those rare occasions when the Laibon travel beyond the bounds of the Ebony Kingdom. If you're using the Laibon as adversaries in a standard **Vampire: The Masquerade** story, or if your players' characters are traveling elsewhere in the world, the Laibon preconceptions can prove just as harmful to them as the Kindred's.

Many Laibon do not survive their first journey to a Kindred-occupied city. The Camarilla reacts swiftly and violently to blatant violations of the Masquerade, and even the Sabbat doesn't like foreigners coming into its territories and drawing attention. A Laibon who attempts to behave in a European or American city the way she does in an African domain will likely find herself the subject of a blood hunt, pursued by archons or templars whose first and primary objective is to eliminate the Masquerade breach. Some Laibon who learn quickly and manage to curb their normal behavior often overcompensate, refusing to use any of their supernatural abilities for fear of drawing the wrath of the Kindred sects.

The Laibon also do not understand that their sense of family isn't shared by the Kindred. Many Laibon fail to act against Kindred rivals, even when the opportunity arises, because they fear a retaliation that, in all likelihood, would never come.

The Laibon, for all their tendencies to dismiss kine as nothing more than a late-night snack, face substantial danger when it comes to African hunters. Many of these hunters possess hedge magics or other sorcery that, while far weaker than the Laibon Disciplines, grant them abilities far beyond those the vampires expect. Furthermore, unlike their Western counterparts who usually work alone or in isolated groups, African hunters can call upon a substantial portion of the populace around them for information and succor if not support in the hunt itself, since far more Africans believe in the supernatural than the citizens of First-World nations.

Of course, no reason exists why your characters' mortal antagonists have to be hunters. Plenty of other kine can interfere with a tribe's or Laibon's objectives without necessarily even being aware that the vampires are involved. Perhaps the police in Cape Town are investigating a smuggling ring that happens to be the characters' primary means of income. Maybe the characters have somehow earned the ire of a pseudo-religious sect operating from a large compound outside the nearest city — such cults are not at all uncommon in Africa, as the poverty-stricken seek any sort of hope for the future. Maybe the Red Cross or other international health organization has discovered what they believe to be a new disease in the characters' home village, a disease whose symptoms are exhaustion, listlessness and weakness. The village might soon have health workers and government officials swarming over it, perhaps even quarantining it, all to find the source of a "sickness" that is actually the result of Laibon feeding.

Laibon vs. Government

Many reasons exist why individuals (or factions) work, either overtly or covertly, against a nation's government, and the Laibon aren't always able to distance themselves from such conflicts. A number of African nations are military dictatorships, ruled by juntas that are no less oppressive than any of the fascist or communist regimes of history. Others are not blatantly tyrannical but are simply corrupt, devoting most of their funds and attention to increasing their own power and comfort, ignoring the needs of the people below them.

Open rebellion is uncommon, if only because the army possesses far more firepower than the populace could ever hope to acquire. Instead, resistance against these governments takes the form of smuggled or stolen goods, both to bring funds to the people and to take them from the government coffers; assassinations of semi-important figures, since the truly important ones are usually unreachable; demonstrations held in the presence of international media, when the government is less likely to crack down; riots that are sometimes spawned from those same protests; and the occasional terrorist attack on government installations.

Most Laibon involved in these endeavors are the young ones, those who still feel a connection with the kine or who suffer under these policies as harshly as their mortal neighbors. Some make full use of their supernatural abilities, even going so far as to tell their coconspirators at least some of their true nature. Others simply join up as yet another participant, using their Disciplines to aid the cause only when they may do so discreetly.

Occasionally, experienced Laibon also turn their efforts against mortal government. Unlike their younger brethren, who sometimes struggle for idealistic goals, the elders normally act because a government program or expansion threatens their own domain. Many elders possess sufficient contacts that they need never oppose a mortal government directly, instead pulling strings in an attempt to steer it down a different course. When this method fails, however, some elders are more than willing to turn their considerable resources against these officials, fully aware that any sabotage, assassinations or terrorism will be blamed on any one of numerous mortal insurgent groups.

It's important to note that not all governments in Africa are corrupt, and not all "resistance" groups are heroic freedom fighters. Many of these insurgent groups represent extremist political or religious factions that firmly believe that they, not the current regime, should rightly have control. They employ the same techniques mentioned thus far, with more emphasis on terrorism and assassination and less on public demonstration. Laibon get caught up in these causes for the same reason mortals do — that is, fanaticism in all its forms — or else because they feel that a new regime would be easier to manipulate than the current one and wish to see a change of power for their own ends.

Although the Laibon rarely involve themselves in all-out war, they occasionally take advantage of such widespread carnage when it happens. No Laibon are responsible for the Rwandan genocide, of course, and most Laibon consider it no less a crime than do most kine, if only because it's wasteful. You can be sure, however, that somewhere in the chaos, some elder Laibon took advantage of the situation to strike against an already weakened Rwandan magaji. The Laibon are nothing, after all, if not opportunistic, no matter how hideous that opportunity might be.

Mysticism and Religion vs. Secular Power

Much of the conflict between people and government, as described, comes from the age-old collision of the secular and the spiritual. Many of the fanatic extremist groups desire to make their own religion dominant, regardless of the wishes of others. On the other hand, many of the most dictatorial governments seek to suppress religion as it challenges their own authority.

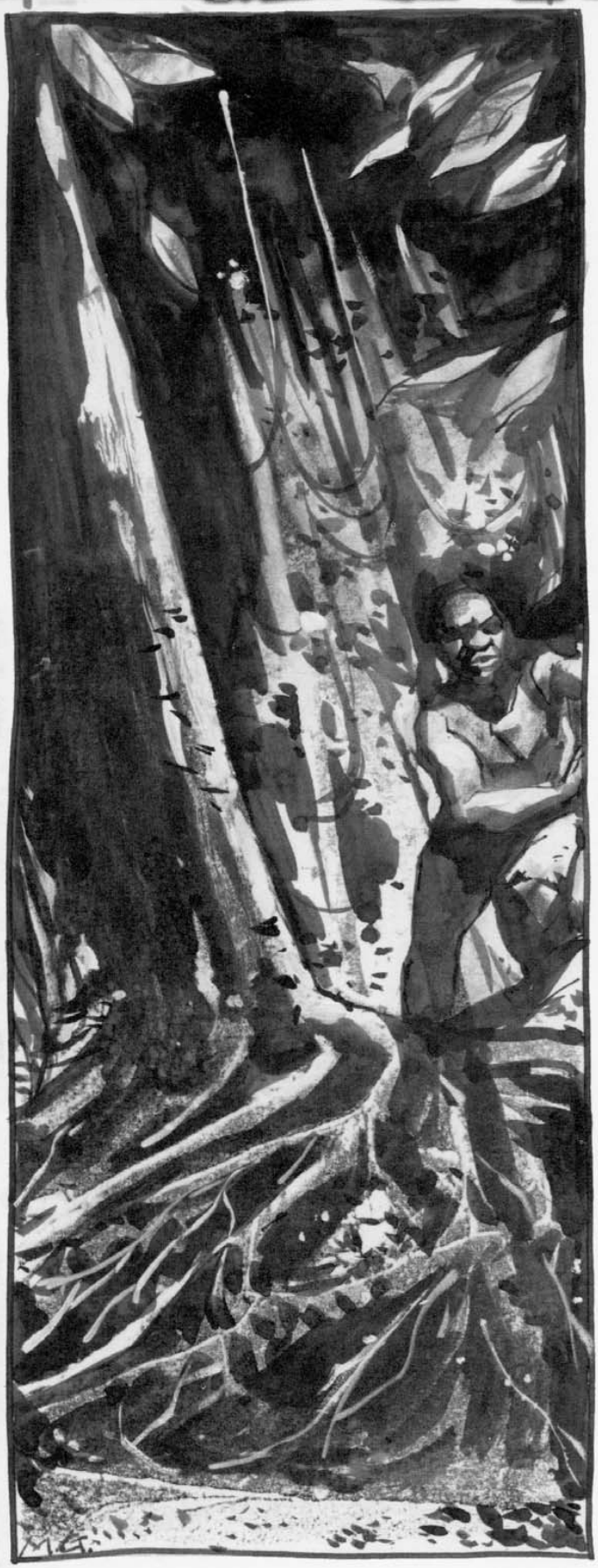
Many African people suffer divided loyalties, unsure whether their government or their priests/ shamans are due the greater part of their allegiance. Tradition demands that the dictates of God and/ or the spirits take precedence over all else, but that simply isn't the way the modern world works. Only by creating and supporting a solid, 21st-century government can an African nation hope to become a true part of the world order.

For this reason, in many African nations and societies, religious leaders and politicians have nothing good to say about one another. Most of the domestic unrest described thus far is inspired or at least aided and abetted by spiritual figures. Many of these leaders deliberately rile their followers up, declaring that they've a right to better government and living conditions here and now, and that nothing is to be lost by fighting for them because they'll certainly be better off in the afterlife. In some cases, each side actually believes that it's doing the right thing for its members. In most instances, however, the leaders are simply looking for the best way to make themselves rich and powerful.

Africa, as mentioned previously, is home to an untold number of religious cults and sects. They attract people and Laibon both, calling to those dissatisfied not only with the conditions in which they live, but with the policies and practices of local government. The people often feel that no political insurgency or rebellion has any hope of success. Yet when their movement is couched in religious terms, blessed by God and commanded by a leader who has proclaimed himself the voice or physical manifestation of that God, they come to believe that they cannot fail. Most of these cults die out on their own when their leaders abandon them with all the money and goods bilked from the members. In a few cases, theft isn't enough; some of these "holy men" have slaughtered their entire congregations before moving on to the next group of believers. Some cults are obliterated in battle with the police or the military, either because they opposed the government and lost, or because the government didn't wait for opposition and attacked first. Only a very few survive beyond a few decades, or at most a few generations. Laibon who join these cults are just as fanatic as their mortal brethren. Those who form cults around them as herds or pawns, however, know they can maintain their sect for only so long before it's either destroyed by outside, secular forces, or the people demand results that the Laibon cannot produce.

Laibon vs. Nature

It's an often overlooked aspect of storytelling games, but the environment itself can provide a substantial number of plot hook and story concepts, particularly such a setting as the Ebony Kingdom. In the standard **Vampire: The Masquerade** game, the only environmental



threat the characters are likely to run into is the occasional race against the sunrise. That's no less a threat to the Laibon than it is to the Kindred, but it's far from the only one.

Disease is far more prevalent here than in Europe or the United States. With so many people suffering from influenza, cholera, AIDS and other illnesses, it's become extremely difficult for Laibon in the hardest-hit portions of the continent to avoid exposure. In most cases, these diseases cannot harm the Laibon herself, but that doesn't make them any less of a threat. A Laibon who assists the spread of any deadly or debilitating illness is simply poisoning her own well, as it were. And in those rare cases where an offshoot of some disease is capable of affecting vampires, it obviously becomes an even greater threat.

The pervasive hunger of Africa's poorer communities is also a threat to the Laibon — again, not because the vampires themselves suffer from it, but because no Laibon can long survive without a healthy community of kine from whom to feed. A surprising number of Laibon are involved in international charities and other organizations attempting to alleviate the constant famine, precisely because they seek to strengthen their herds.

Another element of the African environment that comes into play far more often than it does in the West is the wildlife. Barring truly unusual circumstances, the worst animal attack one of the Kindred is likely to suffer is mauling by a pack of wild dogs, or perhaps a snake bite. In Africa, though such events are still relatively rare, it's entirely possible to encounter a hunting lioness or irritate a territorial rhinoceros during mating season while traveling outside some of the villages that lie miles distant from the large cities. Let those players who scoff at Animalism as the poor cousin of the Laibon Disciplines have their foolish chuckles. They'll think differently when they're charged by a bull elephant in heat.

The African jungle itself can prove a hazard to traveling Laibon, not due to any inherent threat, but simply because it's entirely too easy to become utterly lost if one hasn't taken the proper precautions. In the cities, individuals have maps, street signs and usually someone one can stop and ask for directions. A Laibon who wanders off the beaten path in the jungle has a fairly good chance of finding herself still wandering aimlessly as the sun begins to crest the eastern horizon. She'd better hope she can find a particularly deep and unmoving patch of shade.

Finally, many African communities located near the banks of the continent's great rivers know too well the dangers of flash floods during the rainy seasons. The Laibon can do precious little to prepare for this eventuality, short of packing up and moving elsewhere. Granted,

a vampire isn't going to drown when his haven is filled with rushing water in mid-afternoon, but he could be trapped if the building comes down around him. Even worse, he might find himself caught up in the current with the other detritus and dragged, gurgling impotent screams, into the sunlight.

And this is Just the Beginning...

So many more options for stories and conflict exist, both built on and completely unrelated to the previous examples. What happens if two Laibon, both of whom have built religious cults around themselves, go to war? How do the Laibon deal with the shapeshifters, the hideous wolves, spiders and even stranger creatures that dwell deep within the darkened jungles — or, in the case of the truly bizarre shark-men, off the Cape of Good Hope? Do any of the African governments know of the Laibon, and if so, to what use have they put that knowledge? How does the rest of a domain react when two of the region's tribes come into conflict? How do the Laibon react to these strange, mystical beings who have but recently come south from Egypt, bearing with them an ancient spiritual presence? How does the magaji of a rural community fight back the encroaching expanse of the nearby cities?

And why are you still reading, when you have so many stories to tell?





Chapter Seven: Antagonists and Bestiary

There is always something new out of Africa.
—Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*

Antagonists

In the Ebony Kingdom as elsewhere, vampires encounter threats from other supernatural beings at times. Because of the multitude of legends in Africa, the lines between different types of supernaturals blur somewhat, but certain basic distinctions still exist. Ghosts and hunters are similar in the Ebony Kingdom as everywhere else. Rather than having only Lupines, however, the Ebony Kingdom has many different types of beast-men. In addition, those creatures that might be regarded as faeries elsewhere are often considered to be servants of one or another of the trickster gods in the Ebony Kingdom. Africa also has some of its own unique threats, including powerful creatures that are seemingly immortal ("mummies" by some accounts) and creatures that are commonly thought to be extinct.

This chapter presents basic information on the most common foes (or, occasionally, allies) Laibon might encounter in their travels. Antagonists who are no different in the Ebony Kingdom than anywhere else (ghouls and the Arcanum, for example) are not reprinted here for ease of use. For more information on them, see **Vampire**.

Unless noted otherwise (as with spirits), antagonists who have traits separated by a slash (/) can be used in incremental levels of threat they pose to the Laibon. Those with higher traits are (obviously) more competent than the "basic" level of antagonist.

Sorcerers

In many respects, the Ebony Kingdom is a much more mysterious and magical place than much of the outside world, and as a result, mortals with sorcerous abilities are more common in the Ebony Kingdom than they might be elsewhere. This is not to suggest that every African is a witch doctor or shaman, or even that most modern Africans know one personally, but in rural areas, the old magical traditions are alive and well. Since these same rural areas are often preferred havens for Laibon, as the locals are more superstitious than city folk and less risk of discovery thus exists as a result, most Laibon will encounter a sorcerer sometime in their unlives. Those Laibon who still uphold the traditional customs of their mortal tribe might even try to return to consult the medicine man in times of trouble or need — and some even find the advice they seek. Many tribal shamans do not take kindly to the interference of the undead in mortal affairs, though.

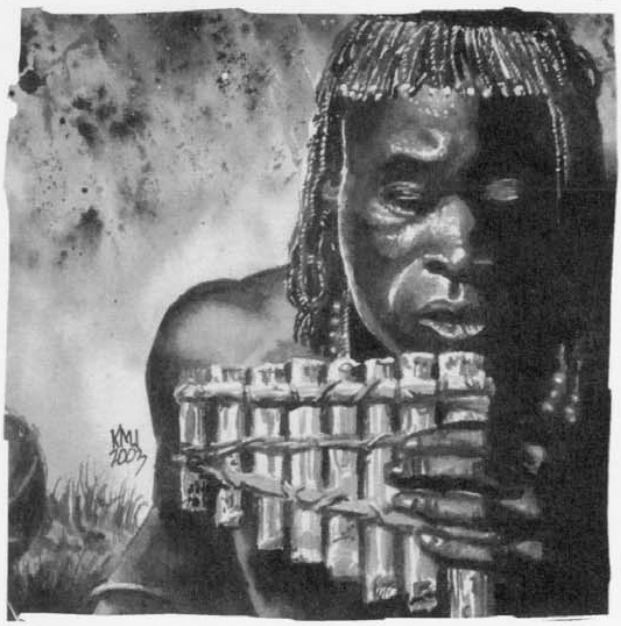
African sorcerers vary widely by tribe and specialty. They range from devout theurges doing the work of their god to tribal shamans protecting their village and ancestors; from witch doctors dispensing charms for a price to doomed sorcerers gathering the blood of Laibon for their experiments. Especially among small, isolated villages and nomadic tribes, magic is often viewed as a normal part of life and not "supernatural" or "other" in any way. Most such tribes have at least one shaman, priest or witch doctor to take care of such matters for them. Most tribes also believe in "witches," sorcerers who use their powers solely to advance their own ends, rather than to protect the tribe. In fact, one of the traditional duties of the tribal shaman or witch doctor is to protect the tribe from these witches. Since many tribes believe that witches are psychic vampires, or that they are able to steal blood from a victim without ever touching him or her (by casting an evil spell), it's not surprising that many of these traditional sorcerers also have no love for the Laibon. Indeed, some even consider Laibon to be the creatures responsible for these legends of witches.

Laibon are most likely to run afoul of sorcerers when visiting mortal villages or settlements, either to feed or (at times) to consult the local shaman. Some consider all Laibon to be evil; others judge on individual merit or legacy, though it's worth noting that not all sorcerers even have a way to check if someone is a vampire. While a shaman who communes with his tribe's ancestors might learn to use his powers of supernatural sight, a witch doctor specializing in herbs and charms might be able to identify a Laibon only by waving fire around and seeing who runs away. Sorcery is by no means an all-encompassing art, and most practitioners tend to specialize in whatever area they consider most valuable or in which they have the greatest talent. As a result, those who can identify Laibon might have few abilities useful for fighting them. When several sorcerers work together, though, the results can be truly devastating.

Some Laibon have reported that sorcerers have a rough hierarchy of "lesser" and "greater" practitioners. Although this is mostly speculation, some scholars of the Shango and Akunanse legacies believe that the lesser variety are of limited talent, only able to use the paths of sorcery that some Laibon also use (see Chapter Four). Greater sorcerers, in contrast, are able to create new paths by study or, by some accounts at least, on the spot if necessary. It seems, however, that these greater sorcerers' spells become less predictable if worked in non-traditional ways or in front of Westerners or modern Africans — as opposed to traditional African villagers. (If the Storyteller uses **Mage**, feel free to disregard the paths here for "greater" sorcerers and replace them with appropriate Spheres based on the character's paradigm. Africa is a very Tradition-heavy place; the Technocracy should generally be confined to large cities, since their Devices usually fail in places where locals believe in traditional magic.)

Although they are most often found in villages or smaller settlements, sorcerers sometimes make it their business to seek out Laibon. Some of these sorcerers are vampire-hunters, others wish to obtain Laibon vitae for use in powerful magics, and still others are simply curious. Sorcerers straying into a magaji's domain, however, are never taken lightly. At times, they might even be invited to sit with the Laibon and treated as honored guests (at least until they misbehave in some way). What better way to keep a potential enemy within easy reach and sight? Some Laibon also seek out sorcerers as potential teachers for their magical practices; usually the most eager teachers are those who require Laibon vitae for some concoction or other. Rumors occasionally circulate of different types of sorcerers inhabiting large cities, following Western magical practices or creating technological devices to perform magic for them, but most Laibon discount these stories as the ravings of vampires driven mad by unlife in the city. Yet Storytellers are encouraged to be creative (and to consult **Sorcerer** or **Mage** if desired) when designing sorcerers to fit a particular environment.

The following are archetypes for the most common varieties of sorcerer found in the Ebony Kingdom.



Shaman

Shamans usually gain their power by entering trance states, during which they communicate with tribal ancestors to gain wisdom and magical power. Often they learn powers similar to those the spirits themselves possess, including supernatural perception, enhanced senses, various mental abilities and how to summon and solicit aid from nature spirits. Some, particularly those charged with helping to protect a tribe, delve into areas such as warding, herbalism or charm-making, but shamans generally avoid the study of curses or magics that cause damage directly, since such things are offensive to the spirits from whom they learn their magic.

Most shamans will not attack or even seek out Laibon unless they or their village (or, when this is even possible, their ancestors) are directly threatened by one. Of the different types of sorcerers in the Ebony Kingdom, shamans are the most likely to aid or offer advice to a Laibon who approaches them in a proper and respectful manner.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4/5, Appearance 2, Perception 4/5, Intelligence 4, Wits 3/4

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 4, Crafts 1, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Empathy 4, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 1, Investigation 3, Leadership 4, Linguistics 3, Medicine 1, Meditation 5, Melee 2, Occult 5, Science 2, Subterfuge 2

Equivalent Disciplines and Thaumaturgy: Animalism 2, Auspex 5, Chimerstry 3/4, Necromancy: Ash Path 2/4, Necromancy: Sepulchre Path 3/4, Obfuscate 2/4; Thaumaturgy: Elemental Mastery 2/5, Thaumaturgy: The Focused Mind 3/5, Thaumaturgy: The Green Path 2/5, Thaumaturgy: Movement of the Mind 3/5, Thaumaturgy: Neptune's Might 1/4, Thaumaturgy: Spirit Manipulation 2/5

Blood Pool: 10/15, **Willpower:** 6/8

Witch Doctor

Not to be confused with witches, witch doctors are just as concerned with protecting their tribe or clan as many shamans. Some, however, operate in isolation, trading their abilities for goods and services from the locals. Witch doctors usually learn their abilities from another witch doctor, so the profession often follows family lines. In some tribes, a child exhibiting strange behavior or a particular type of birthmark might be apprenticed to the local witch doctor, as witch doctors are not usually expected to have children of their own.

Where shamans devote themselves to spirits, witch doctors concentrate much more heavily on the physical world. Most witch doctors have some knowledge of herbalism, alchemy and various types of charms and curses. Many learn some of the magics related to warding or protection, and some concentrate on more martial sorcery concerning the summoning of animals or the creation of hostile conditions (control of the weather, flame or water, for example). Because they lack the intuitive knowledge of spirits possessed by shamans, witch doctors who try to call upon spirits might end up with hostile ghosts or demons instead, so most don't make the effort. The few who do might be responsible for the "witch" in "witch doctor," as they fall to the worship of darker powers after seeing the potency of their servants.

Like shamans, most witch doctors try to steer clear of Laibon, though they are more likely to seek them out at certain times, since Laibon blood is known to be a powerful ingredient for magic. Some are willing to bargain for a quantity of vitae, while others try to take it by force. Generally, witch doctors tend to have more self-confidence than shamans, and many even attempt to create servants of Laibon or bind them for later use. Much as they



hate to admit it, witch doctors know more than they might like to admit of the darker side of magic, and this can lead to their downfall through plans that are ostensibly "for the good of the tribe" but are actually no more than risky personal ventures. As a result, Laibon are more likely to run into witch doctors than any other type of sorcerer.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

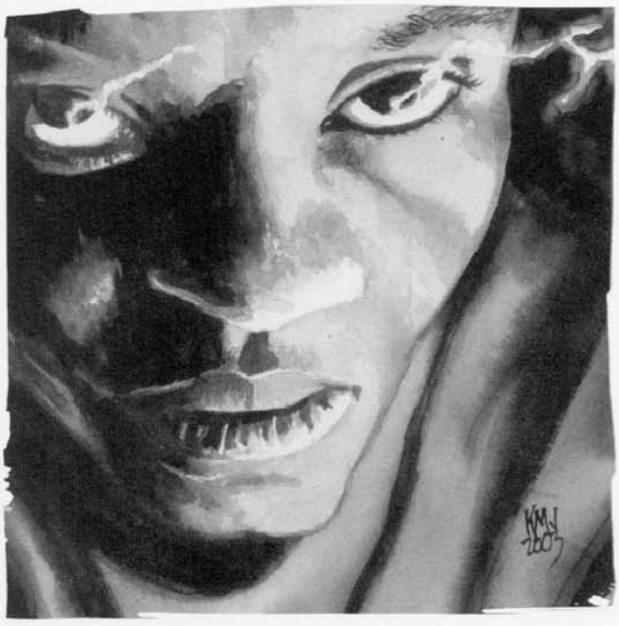
Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 3, Crafts 3, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Empathy 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 1, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Leadership 2, Linguistics 3, Medicine 3, Melee 3, Occult 5, Science 2, Subterfuge 3

Equivalent Disciplines and Thaumaturgy: Animalism 2/4, Auspex 2, Celerity 2/4, Dementation 3/5, Dominate 2/4, Fortitude 2/3, Necromancy: Sepulchre Path 2/4, Obfuscate 3, Thaumaturgy: Hearth Path 2/4, Thaumaturgy: Path of Mars 3/5

Blood Pool: 10/15, **Willpower:** 6/9

Priest

Priests come in many different varieties, depending on which god or gods they serve. Many are similar in certain respects to shamans, using trances to learn their gods' will and learn magical abilities. Others serve as vessels for their god to "ride," through which the god acts, or they learn the will of the god by speaking to a head priest. Many gods teach similar magics to those studied by shamans. Those who follow trickster gods sometimes specialize in illusion or conjuration, while those who follow gods of death or disease can rival witches in their cruelty. Those who follow gods of war can become truly formidable, using magic to enhance their usually already superior physical abilities.



Laibon are most likely to encounter one of two types of priests — devotees of a god of healing or war, seeking either to cure them or destroy them, or followers of a god of death or disease seeking new converts or servants. In either case, Laibon usually treat priests with great caution, since occasionally they exhibit True Faith in addition to their faith-based magic. Sometimes Laibon of the same tribe as a particular priest might be able to speak to and even gain the aid of that priest, but such alliances are usually short-lived, often relating to the destruction of a particularly cruel or destructive magaji or elder. According to some tales, particularly powerful priests temporarily (or even permanently) transform Laibon into mortals or vice versa (though the latter is usually reserved for tales of the followers of death and disease gods). In any case, their religious zeal ensures that priests are always potent foes should Laibon run afoul of them.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Crafts 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 4, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 2, Leadership 4, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Occult 5

Equivalent Disciplines and Thaumaturgy: Animalism 3, Auspex 3, Dementation 1/3, Dominate 2/3, Fortitude 2/3, Obfuscate 3/5, Potence 2/3; other Disciplines and Thaumaturgy based on priest's allegiance.

Blood Pool: 10/15, **Willpower:** 5/10

Medicine Man (Inyanga or Sangoma)

The medicine man is the jack-of-all-trades of traditional African sorcerers. Most medicine men do have a rather extensive knowledge of herbs and plants, particularly their medicinal qualities (though many also study their properties for potion- and charm-making). The medicine man is the traditional guardian of rural villages and settlements. While the shaman might sometimes care more for the spirits of his tribe's ancestors, and the witch doctor for his own experiments and pursuits, the medicine man is always concerned first and foremost with the well being of the people in his care. True medicine men are rare, and as a result, many make their homes between several villages in order to serve more people.

Medicine men study magic in all its traditional forms. Rather than specializing, they often try to learn as much as possible about all magical pursuits. This results in most of them becoming quite learned, though a shaman or witch doctor can often best them in a particular area of specialty. Old and wise medicine men usually exceed shamans and witch doctors in power, however, and these medicine men often have inexperienced shamans and witch doctors as disciples or errand-boys. Medicine men are more likely than shamans to seek out Laibon if they learn a vampire may be in the area, though it's still more common that they



will stay in their area and erect wards and protective charms rather than inviting trouble. (Interestingly enough, *laibon* is a Masai word for a medicine man. This may be because medicine men, with their wealth of knowledge and experience, are considered to be prime Embrace candidates by so many legacies.)

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Crafts 3, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Empathy 3, Etiquette 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Leadership 3, Linguistics 3, Medicine 5, Melee 3, Occult 5, Science 3, Subterfuge 3

Equivalent Disciplines and Thaumaturgy: Animalism 3, Auspex 4, Chimerstry 3/4, Dementation 3/4, Dominate 2/3, Fortitude 2/4, Necromancy: Ash Path 2/3, Necromancy: Bone Path 2, Necromancy: Sepulchre Path 2/3, Obfuscate 2/4, Potence 2/3, Thaumaturgy: Biothaumaturgy 2, Thaumaturgy: Focused Mind 2/4, Thaumaturgy: Hands of Destruction 2/3, Thaumaturgy: Elemental Mastery 2/3, Thaumaturgy: Green Path 2/4, Thaumaturgy: Hearth Path 2/3, Thaumaturgy: Movement of the Mind 2/3, Thaumaturgy: Neptune's Might 2, Thaumaturgy: Path of Mars 2/4, Thaumaturgy: Spirit Manipulation 2

Blood Pool: 10/15, **Willpower:** 5/8

Witch

The most hated and feared of sorcerers, the witch (or obayifo, a common African term for witches) is the bane of Laibon, legitimate sorcerers and other supernatural beings alike. A witch is distinguished by using his or her power solely or almost solely for personal gain, often to gain an advantage over others or prolong his or her life. Often sucked in by the lure of power promised by darker magics, witches study poison-making, curses, evil charms and the summoning of evil spirits. Although less common in the Ebony Kingdom than it is in the Caribbean, the creation of zombies can sometimes be a specialty of witches as well.

The most successful witches pose as some other type of sorcerer, disguising their dark magic as standard herbalism or summoning (and in fact learning something of those specialties to aid themselves in the effort). Some attempt to disguise themselves as priests of a death or disease god, but their ambition betrays them. A true priest, even one whose god is feared or reviled, allows the will of the god to guide his actions, while witches almost always act solely in their own interests. When revealed, as most inevitably will be (often by the familiars they keep, commonly owls or baboons), most other sorcerers waste no time in hunting them and destroying them by any means necessary. When witches encounter Laibon, it is most often because they are fleeing other sorcerers who wish them dead. In fact, many witches assume that Laibon are fellow servants of "the dark powers" and will aid them. Frequently they find that their existence is just as offensive to many Laibon as it is to sorcerers.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 5, Alertness 3, Crafts 3, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Empathy 4, Etiquette 3, Finance 2, Firearms 1, Hypnosis 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Leadership 2, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Occult 5, Science 3, Subterfuge 3

Equivalent Disciplines and Thaumaturgy: Animalism 4, Auspex 2/3, Dementation 4/5, Dominate 4/5,



Fortitude 2/3, Necromancy: Ash Path 3/4, Necromancy: Bone Path 3/5, Necromancy: Sepulchre Path 3/5, Obfuscate 3/4, Potence 2/4, Serpentis 2/4, Thaumaturgy: Elemental Mastery 3/5, Thaumaturgy: Hands of Destruction 3/5, Thaumaturgy: Hearth Path 3/4, Thaumaturgy: Mastery of the Mortal Shell 3/5, Thaumaturgy: Neptune's Might 2/3, Thaumaturgy: Path of Corruption 3/4, Thaumaturgy: Path of Mars 2/3, Thaumaturgy: Path of Transmutation 2/4, Thaumaturgy: Spirit Manipulation 3/4, Thaumaturgy: Vine of Dionysus 3/5, Thaumaturgy: Weather Control 3/5

Blood Pool: 10/15, **Willpower:** 5/8

Spirits

The Ebony Kingdom is rich in spirits of various types, as Laibon who have developed skill in Auspex know all too well. These spirits fall into three basic types: ghosts, the spirits of mortals who have passed on; nature spirits, which have existed from the beginning of time and represent essential forces of nature; and trickster spirits, seemingly carefree souls who are actually devout servants of the gods of trickery and subterfuge. The three types have significant differences (trickster spirits, for example, being the only type of spirit with a physical body), so the three different types of spirits are explained separately.

Ghosts

Africa isn't known as the Dark Continent because of the skin tone of its inhabitants. The Ebony Kingdom is a dark place, in large part because of the frequency of ghostly activity within it. This activity has increased in recent nights, suggesting to some Laibon that trouble has arisen in the realm of the ancestors. To those who are willing to listen, some ghosts now speak of terrible storms ravaging their lands, and of increasingly powerful evil spirits seeking to destroy them. Some Laibon with an ear to the Underworld fear that these evil spirits might come after the physical world next, and sightings of increasingly powerful evil spirits would seem to confirm this suspicion.

Ghosts are often treated with more reverence and respect in the Ebony Kingdom than fear or suspicion. Usually this is because Laibon and mortals alike recognize that the wise ancestors who protect so many tribes were once, long ago, simple ghosts like any other. Still, if angered, they are capable of the same feats of outrage as ghosts outside Africa — traditional hauntings, complete with possessions, spontaneously thrown objects, terrifying illusions and the like. Indeed, they can often do so more easily, since the veil separating the realms of the living and the dead is weaker in areas of superstition and mystery such as the Ebony Kingdom.

Abilities and Weaknesses

• Ghosts "feed" on emotion. Doing so recharges their passion pool, which is used to fuel their supernatural powers. Laibon in frenzy or in the throes of feeding may actually find themselves strengthening a ghostly opponent.

• Ghosts manifest most effectively in "haunted" sites and places where great suffering or trauma has left a psychic residue (such as graveyards, hospitals or sites of great battles). In such places, the Shroud between the worlds of the living and the dead is weak. Ghosts in the Ebony Kingdom, however, are generally able to manifest more easily than those in other parts of the world.

• Normally, ghosts and Laibon are unable to interact. Laibon with Auspex, however, might be able to perceive ghosts (see p. XX). Vampires can influence one of the Restless by manipulating her fetters (objects or persons important to the ghost in life), or they can affect a ghost directly with certain applications of Thaumaturgy, Necromancy or other Disciplines. With effort, ghosts can also reach across the Shroud to affect the physical world, either to hurl objects, use other powers or possess mortals to attack Laibon. Some wraiths can even fully manifest to directly affect the physical world.

• Ghosts are far more powerful in the Underworld than they are when they're able to pierce the Shroud. (Stats to the right of the slash reflect the ghost's ability in the Underworld.)

In the past, ghosts who returned to the flesh were exceedingly rare, though recently they have become much more common. Many of these newly risen ghosts are little more than *zombu*, having imperfect control of their bodies and great difficulty speaking. Some, however, are of the type observed in the past — intelligent, creative and frighteningly resistant to damage. If spirits are resorting to inhabiting physical bodies to escape the Underworld, say some Laibon, the devastation there must be truly unbearable.

The following are the main types of ghosts encountered in the Ebony Kingdom.

Wraith

By and large, wraiths are the newcomers to the spirit realms, those who often don't realize they're dead yet and still have quite a bit of unfinished business in the physical world. Some Laibon (often those with Auspex) find themselves drawn to help these individuals carry out their goals, while others try to convince them (either by words or by force) that they no longer belong among the living. Because they depend so heavily on emotion, wraiths whose goals or beliefs are challenged can become quite enraged, making them more formidable than one might expect.



Attributes: Strength 0/2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 3, Brawl 1, Crafts 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 3, Investigation 1, Law 2, Melee 1, Occult 2, Politics 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 1, Chimerstry 1, Dementation 2, Dominate 1, Obfuscate 2, Vicissitude 1

Willpower: 5, **Passion Pool:** 5

Ancestor

A wraith who is wise or lucky enough to survive several decades or more becomes known among the living and the dead as an ancestor. Because of their more extensive experience, ancestors are often very powerful, though they have also learned to use their power only when absolutely necessary. Ancestors sometimes advise sorcerers or take younger wraiths under their wing, so the Laibon are most likely to come into conflict with them in conjunction with sorcerers or other wraiths. Most other times, ancestors keep to themselves, gathering wisdom and helping other wraiths to survive. Particularly religious or worthy Laibon might be able to secure an ancestor's favor and tutelage through supplication or discussion.



Attributes: Strength 0/4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Empathy 4, Intimidation 4, Investigation 2, Law 3, Linguistics 2, Melee 3, Occult 5, Politics 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Abombwe 2, Auspex 2, Chimerstry 3, Dementation 4, Dominate 5, Obfuscate 2, Obtenebration 3, Presence 2, Vicissitude 4

Willpower: 9, **Passion Pool**: 10

Spectre

No one is sure how, but some ghosts eventually come to feed on dark and destructive emotions such as anger, greed and pain. These ghosts are known as spectres, and they lack even the basic reverence for life that most ghosts learn through death. Spectres will go to any lengths to create the emotions on which they must feed. Those with some knowledge of vampires may try to provoke them into frenzy to gain the power to destroy them.



Attributes: Strength 0/3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Intimidation 4, Melee 3, Occult 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 2, Chimerstry 4, Dementation 4, Dominate 5, Presence 2, Thaumaturgy: The Lure of Flames 3, Thaumaturgy: Movement of the Mind 3, Vicissitude 3

Willpower: 7, **Passion Pool:** 9

Zombu

A *zombu* is the unfortunate result when a ghost tries to possess a mortal or manifest (no one is quite sure which), and doesn't quite succeed. The unfortunate ghost is bound into the body and the physical world, but it has only rudimentary control over it. Nonetheless, spirits trapped in such a way are usually unable to escape, which could be why *zombu* so often exhibit rage and violent tendencies. A particularly creative ghost might be able to enlist a Laibon's aid in escaping his prison of flesh, but most times Laibon meet *zombu*, it's in physical combat.



Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2,

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 1, Intimidation 4, Melee 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 2, Fortitude 4, Potence 4

Willpower: 7, **Passion Pool:** 9, **Blood Pool:** 10

Note: Because of their corpse-bodies, *zombu* take wound penalties only from aggravated damage. *Zombu* possess a blood pool, but in most cases, their blood is full of formaldehyde and other chemicals that are either distasteful or poisonous to Laibon.

Revenant

Not to be confused with Sabbat revenants, this is a revenant in the truest sense of the word — someone who returns from death. Revenants are still very rare compared with *zombu*, but more seem to be roaming the Ebony Kingdom than in the past. Most Laibon who encounter one never even realize it — revenants' resistance to injury, pale condition, and at times terrifying temper makes them seem in most cases to be Laibon. If their "disguise" as Laibon is somehow revealed, however, revenants can be even more implacable foes than many Laibon.



Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Intimidation 4, Melee 3, Occult 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 3, Celerity 4, Dominate 5, Fortitude 5, Potence 4, Presence 2

Willpower: 9, **Passion Pool:** 10

Note: Like *zombu*, revenants take wound penalties only from aggravated damage. Revenants also possess a blood pool, but in most cases, their blood is inert and stagnant, tasting horrible but still providing sustenance to a desperate Laibon.

Nature Spirits

The most enigmatic of spirits, little is known of the goals or purpose of nature spirits, or even whether they have any. Although many Laibon believe in these spirits because of their traditional African upbringing, it's safe to say that very few have ever seen one. Sometimes it's possible to catch a glimpse of a nature spirit by using Auspex, but this is far less predictable even than trying to see ghosts. Laibon do encounter nature spirits most often

when trying to view ghosts — as most nature spirits appear in exotic, colorful and entirely non-humanoid forms, they are easy to distinguish from the dead. Since some nature spirits seem to have an affinity for Lupines and other beast-men (see p. XX), Laibon also encounter them when in contact (or conflict) with the shapeshifters.

Because they embody principles of the natural world, nature spirits often possess an alien mindset that makes communication with them difficult. Even mental communication through Auspex fails to bridge the gap between a Laibon and, for example, a tree spirit (which might understand certain ideas, but might also think of rain as "life-water" and of humans as "killers of trees"). Storytellers are encouraged to roleplay out any such interactions to emphasize the difficulty of communicating with nature spirits.

The following are several examples of nature spirits; Storytellers are encouraged to be creative when coming up with others. **Mage** or **Werewolf** might also be helpful.

(**Note:** Being incorporeal, nature spirits have no blood points and are normally invisible. They use Willpower to power their abilities, and they regain it more easily than mortals or Laibon, at the rate of one point every five minutes.)



Fire Spirit

Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Investigation 3, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 3, Celerity 2, Thaumaturgy: Lure of Flames 5

Willpower: 10

Air Spirit

Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Investigation 3, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 3, Celerity 4, Thaumaturgy: Movement of the Mind 5, Thaumaturgy: Weather Control 5

Willpower: 10



Water Spirit

Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Investigation 3, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 2, Thaumaturgy: Neptune's Might 5, Thaumaturgy: Weather Control 5

Willpower: 10

Forest Spirit

Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Animal Ken 4, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Investigation 3, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 4, Auspex 4, Celerity 3, Thaumaturgy: Elemental Mastery 5, Thaumaturgy: The Green Path 5

Willpower: 10

Eriad (Chaos Spirit)

Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Investigation 3, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 2, Celerity 2, Chimerstry 3, Dementation 5, Obtenebration 3, Thaumaturgy: Hands of Destruction 4, Thaumaturgy: Path of Corruption 4, Thaumaturgy: Vine of Dionysus 5

Willpower: 10

Trickster Spirits

The word "spirit" is something of a misnomer where trickster spirits are concerned, since they do actually have physical bodies. As far as most Laibon know, trickster spirits serve the various trickster gods of Africa (Eshu, Legba, Eleggua, Anansi the Spider, etc.), infusing themselves into the body of a mortal to create a mortal agent of these gods. Since many African religions include notions of fate, the purpose of trickster spirits is to act counter to fate, thus creating free will. Not all trickster spirits actually perform tricks, though. Many perform their tasks in other ways, such as playing music or creating tribal art.

Trickster spirits seem to spend most of their time roaming the Ebony Kingdom, spreading their often-chaotic influence among mortals and supernatural creatures alike. Many do try to avoid the Laibon, as their presence seems to inhibit tricksters' abilities. These abilities include divination, illusion-casting, control of nature and minor shapeshifting. They seem to be divided into different tribes or castes of ability, including storytellers, musicians and shapeshifters.

Tricksters draw the energy to fuel their powers (known as Glamour) from the creative efforts of mortals. Creative efforts directed at traditional art forms of a tribe (pottery, woodcarvings, metal working) are especially potent, and places where such items have long been created might contain stores of untapped Glamour. Laibon might also be used to create Glamour, though the undead are often too static to produce anything truly creative.

Tricksters may be treated as mortals for the purposes of healing damage, though some do know magics that allow them to heal more quickly. Much of the time, they appear indistinguishable from mortals, though viewing them with Auspex will reveal a swirling, chaotic spirit form trailing behind their physical body.

The following are several examples of African trickster spirits (fae).

Pooka Shapeshifter

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Investigation 3, Occult 2, Performance 3, Security 2, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 4, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 2, Celerity 2, Chimerstry 3, Obfuscate 4, Protean 4

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 6, **Glamour:** 6

Note: Pooka are distinct from the beast-men in several ways, including their fondness for trickery and deception, as well as their inability to change into animal form in plain sight. Pooka have only two forms — human and animal — without any in-between stages, though some animal features might be visible to those using Auspex to view the fae form of a pooka in human guise.

Eshu Storyteller

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3



Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Investigation 2, Occult 3, Performance (Storytelling) 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 2, Chimerstry 3, Obfuscate 2, Presence 4, Thaumaturgy: Weather Control 4

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 7, **Glamour:** 8

Satyr Musician

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Investigation 3, Leadership 3, Occult 2, Performance (Music) 3, Security 1, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 4, Survival 2

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 1, Auspex 2, Celerity 3, Chimerstry 3, Melpominee 3, Presence 4

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 5, **Glamour:** 8

Beast-Men

Kindred fear Lupines, but the Ebony Kingdom's shapeshifters are more diverse. Laibon have more than just Lupines to worry about — more than the wolf-men lurk in the forests and deserts of Africa. Akunanse and Kinyonyi explorers have returned from remote areas with tales of deadly jackal-men, cunning cat-men and even lizard-men of enormous size. Perhaps the great diversity of animals in Africa has led to diversity in animal-men as well, or perhaps the beast-men have adapted to better hunt Laibon.

No one is entirely sure why the beast-men despise Laibon so much. Some have speculated that because nature spirits are sometimes seen to accompany beast-men, perhaps the beast-men attack Laibon because they consider them unnatural, a blight upon the beast-men's spirit allies. When trying to question the spirits about such things, however, Laibon never seem to make any progress. Still, because their own forms often come to resemble those of beast-men closely (thus allowing them, at times, to blend in), Akunanse are occasionally considered the authority on them when information is needed.

Abilities and Weaknesses

• Were-beasts can take several forms: human, beast and some forms that combine both. The most feared of forms is the hybrid form, traditionally the "wolfman" form, although with other types of beast-men it varies (a lizard-man in this form becomes a massive, scaled monstrosity, for example). This form is generally huge and extremely potent. All Physical Attributes are doubled, but Social Attributes may be used only to intimidate or frighten (except with other beast-men or animals).

• Some beast-men possess increased speed, taking up to six actions in a single turn (as Celerity, but without blood point restrictions). This ability seems to be restricted to wolf- and jackal-men, who also seem to have a much more explosive temperament than other beast-men. Cat-men, in particular, have sometimes been known to remain silent for an entire battle, disappearing afterward into the surroundings without a sound.

• Were-beasts heal very rapidly, regenerating a health level each turn. Only fire, silver or the teeth and claws of other supernatural creatures (such as a Laibon's fangs) can cause lasting injuries, although beast-men can still heal these injuries as normal mortals. All beast-men soak bashing and lethal damage with their Stamina; wolf-men, jackal-men and lizard-men soak aggravated damage the same way. As living beings, however, beast-men do not halve bashing damage.

• Beast-men power their supernatural abilities with Gnosis, a measure of their spiritual energy. Gnosis is regained through meditation or by bargaining with spirits. It is believed that some of the abilities of beast-men may be learned from spirits as well.

• Were-beasts are able to enter the spirit world (the realm of the nature spirits), there traveling quickly and invisibly to attack their enemies. Thus far, attempts to observe them in this state with Auspex have failed.

• Silver is damaging to at least some beast-men, including wolf-men and jackal-men. These beast-men cannot soak damage from silver weapons and cannot regenerate such wounds as quickly as normal. As for the weaknesses of other were-beasts, Laibon can only speculate.

• The were-beasts are allergic, sometimes violently so, to vampiric vitae. Although some species might be able to be blood bound (possibly wolves or jackals, by some accounts), others exhibit a number of symptoms upon ingesting the blood. These symptoms include vomiting, terrible boils, acidic eruptions from the skin — even, in extreme cases, spontaneous combustion. This is hardly a foolproof way of disposing of beast-men, however... at least, not for Laibon who aren't suicidal.

• Beast-men can call upon mystical abilities, some similar to sorcery, others resembling certain Disciplines or other supernal powers. These powers depend on the beast-man's species and area of expertise, and they can be represented by Disciplines.

Several examples of the most common types of beast-men are listed here. Other, rarer types of beast-men are said to exist, including spider-men who some say have many similarities to the Akunanse, but if they do exist, no Laibon has ever confirmed it. Ghost allies of certain Laibon also speak of raven-men who are able to travel freely between the living world and the Underworld, but these may also just be tales, created by minds warped by death.

Young Lupine

Attributes (human): Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Crafts 2, Dodge 2, Firearms 1, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 1, Linguistics 2, Melee 2, Occult 2, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 2, Celerity 3, Fortitude 2, Potence 1, Protean 4

Humanity: 7, **Willpower:** 5, **Gnosis:** 4

Experienced Werewolf

Attributes (human): Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Crafts 2, Dodge 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Leadership 2, Linguistics 2, Melee 3, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 3, Auspex 2, Celerity 4, Fortitude 3, Potence 2, Protean 4

Humanity: 6, **Willpower:** 7, **Gnosis:** 6



Jackal Warrior

Attributes (human): Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Crafts 2, Dodge 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 4, Leadership 2, Linguistics 3, Melee 4, Occult 4, Stealth 4, Survival 4

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 2, Celerity 4, Fortitude 2, Potence 1, Protean 4, Thaumaturgy: The Focused Mind 5, Thaumaturgy: Path of Mars 5

Humanity: 6, **Willpower:** 8, **Gnosis:** 7

Man-Lion Scout

Attributes (human): Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Crafts 2, Dodge 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 4, Investigation 4, Leadership 1, Linguistics 2, Melee 3, Occult 3, Stealth 4, Survival 4

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 4, Celerity 4, Fortitude 2, Potence 1, Protean 4, Visceratika 3

Humanity: 7, **Willpower:** 7, **Gnosis:** 5

Ancient Lizard-Man

Attributes (human): Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Crafts 3, Dodge 4, Firearms 1, Intimidation 5, Investigation 4, Leadership 4, Linguistics 5, Melee 4, Occult 6, Stealth 4, Survival 4

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 3, Auspex 4, Celerity 4, Fortitude 2, Obfuscate 4, Potence 1, Protean 5, Thaumaturgy: Elemental Mastery 3, Thaumaturgy: The Green Path 4

Humanity: 5, **Willpower:** 10, **Gnosis:** 10

Hunters

Throughout history, some mortals have been unable or unwilling to accept the presence of the Laibon in the Ebony Kingdom. But recent nights have seen the appearance of a new breed of hunter. Seemingly normal people have begun to awaken to the truth of the world around them, gaining the ability to see vampires and other supernatural beings for what they are. Strangely, these new hunters often hail from backgrounds entirely unrelated to or ignorant of the supernatural. With the exception of the powers they are able to develop, these hunters are exceedingly normal — at least, to start with.

This progression leads to interesting conclusions on their part following their awakening to the supernatural. Many consider their new state *carte blanche* to destroy any and all supernatural beings, regardless of type, affiliation or intent. Those with a religious streak believe themselves chosen by God (or the gods), executing this "mission" with particular zeal. Many grow to lose their old identities or professions, becoming absorbed in their new calling, and a troubled few allow that calling's demands to drive them quite mad.

Worst of all, however insane their new occupation may drive them, these hunters are nearly incorruptible. In past times, when some hunters drew their power from faith, defeat could sometimes cause them to doubt the power in which they believed. But these new hunters seem to draw their power from some other source, and along with it comes a resistance — a near immunity, in fact — to powers of supernatural deception. Even worse, Laibon who have managed to capture a hunter have reported that any attempts to blood bond or Embrace a hunter fails outright. Vitae has no effect, and attempts to Embrace hunters simply kill the victim. No one is sure of the reasons, but these immunities make hunters far more dangerous than they might appear on the surface.

Abilities and Weaknesses

- Hunters draw their powers from Conviction, the measure of their devotion to their appointed task. Conviction may be regained through study, meditation or destruction of unnatural beings such as vampires.
- Hunters are completely immune to all supernatural powers of deception or mind-control. These powers include Disciplines such as Obfuscate, Chimerstry, Dominate, the Obtenebration power Shroud of Night. They include the blood bond as well. Powers that affect emotion (such as Presence) rather than thought, however, are still effective on hunters. Indeed, Presence is often a cornered Laibon's only card to play against an enraged hunter, unless she wants to get physical.

• Hunters are immune to the effects of vitae. In addition to the blood bond, hunters may not be Embraced or made into ghouls. Any attempt to Embrace a hunter that would normally be successful automatically fails.

• When viewed with supernatural powers of perception, hunters give off an air of extreme power, while simultaneously appearing mortal. To those who view auras, the aura of a hunter appears pure gold — which, to those not expecting it, is more than a little unnerving.

• Hunters are divided into several different castes: protectors, destroyers, healers and so on. Any given hunter may pursue only one of these paths, and one associated power (simulated with Disciplines), and switching from one path to another is exceedingly difficult. Small consolation though it may be, one hunter is seldom enough to destroy a Laibon, since each can learn only one of the hunter powers. Unfortunately, however, this often means that hunters travel in packs.

The following are some basic archetypes for the most common types of hunters.

Devout Crusader

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Investigation 3, Linguistics 2, Melee 2, Occult 2, Security 2, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 4, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 3, Obeah 5

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 7, **Conviction:** 8

Vengeful War Hero

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2



Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Drive 3, Firearms 3, Investigation 2, Melee 2, Security 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 2, Fortitude 2, Valeren 5

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 5, **Conviction:** 6

Patient School Teacher

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 2, Crafts 2, Dodge 2, Drive 2, Empathy 2, Investigation 4, Melee 1, Occult 1, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 2

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 4, Presence 4

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 6, **Conviction:** 7

Honest Laborer

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Investigation 3, Melee 2, Security 2, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 4, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 2, Thaumaturgy: Path of the Blood's Curse 4, Thaumaturgy: Path of the Father's Vengeance 5

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 7, **Conviction:** 7

Mummies

In nights past, a myth of the Followers of Set became known among other Laibon. The myth told of beings who were truly immortal, blessed by the gods of Egypt, returning from every death more powerful than before. The Setites referred to these beings as mummies, fearing them for their ties to Horus and Osiris, the mythic nemeses of their dark lord Set. Other Laibon expressed anything from amusement to fascination with the tales, some jokingly inviting the mummies to rid them of the Followers, while others pondered whether they might transcend their own curse and become one of the Reborn.

In past times, even meeting a mummy was a rare event, as a mere handful existed worldwide. In recent nights, however, mummies have begun appearing more and more frequently in the Ebony Kingdom (and presumably, outside it as well). Although they are still an uncommon sight, the Reborn do occasionally make visits to the lands south of Egypt, but according to the Followers of Set, most still cluster in their ancestral homeland.

Unlike the beast-men or many sorcerers, mummies who visit the Ebony Kingdom are very forthright about their beliefs and purposes. Mummies believe they have been chosen to serve Ma'at, the natural order or way of the world in Egyptian cosmology, and also the goddess who presides over that order. Part of preserving Ma'at is leading a good and virtuous life. Another is hunting down and destroying the servants of Apophis, the great

evil serpent of Egyptian lore. Since Set was a follower of Apophis, the reason for mummies' hatred of Set's children is clear. Some also believe that other vampires serve Apophis (knowingly or not) by their existence. Many are willing, however, to discuss their beliefs with Laibon in the hope that they might join the cause of Ma'at. Some even tell tales of loyal vampire servants of the god Osiris who were rewarded with their lost mortality. For some Laibon, particularly those who already hate the Setites, the offer is something to strongly consider.

Abilities and Weaknesses

• Mummies power their supernatural abilities with Sekhem, a type of magical energy which they believe is an integral part of the soul. Sekhem may be regained by prayer, meditation or simple rest.

• Mummies are identical to mortals in many ways. They are alive and able to soak bashing and lethal damage just as mortals do. They heal damage quickly, however. Treat damage as one level lower when calculating healing time. Mummies are not normally able to soak aggravated damage, but some know magics that allow them to do so temporarily.

• Because of the nature of the resurrection spell that is used to suspend them in time, mummies experience life even more fully than mortals do. This does make them susceptible to addiction, though they are immune to disease.

• Mummies can be killed, after which they enter a ghost-like state for a period while regaining their strength. A phantom form manifests to protect their physical body during this time, to ward off potential threats (treat it as having Physical Attributes equal to [Willpower divided by 2]).

• Mummies possess knowledge of ancient Egyptian magical rites (which they call Hekau), which may be simulated by certain Disciplines. These powers are fueled by Sekhem rather than blood. Many Hekau powers concern names, and a skilled mummy who knows a person's True Name can work nearly limitless effects upon that person.

• For those who are able to see auras, mummies appear nearly indistinguishable from mortals. Other forms of supernatural detection still reveal them as beings of power, however.

Mummies venture into the Ebony Kingdom relatively rarely, most often on hunts for Setites of particular notoriety (or infamy). Many Reborn are extremely powerful, but they prefer to save their powers for emergencies. According to some, using great power frivolously creates an imbalance in Ma'at. The following are examples of mummies of varying age and ability.

Newly Reborn

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Crafts 2,Dodge 2, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Investigation 3, Melee 1, Meditation 1, Occult 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 3, Dominate 2, Fortitude 1, Necromancy: Ash Path 2, Necromancy: Sepulchre Path 1, Obfuscate 1, Thaumaturgy: Alchemy 3, Thaumaturgy: Countermagic 3, Thaumaturgy: Elemental Mastery 2, Thaumaturgy: Green Path 2, Thaumaturgy: Hearth Path 3, Thaumaturgy: Lure of Flames 2, Thaumaturgy: Neptune's Might 2, Thaumaturgy: Oneiromancy 2, Thaumaturgy: Path of Curses 2, Thaumaturgy: Spirit Manipulation 2, Thaumaturgy: Weather Control 2

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 5, **Sekhem:** 5

Experienced Mummy

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Crafts 3, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Empathy 3, Investigation 4, Meditation 3, Melee 3, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 4, Dominate 3, Fortitude 2, Necromancy: Ash Path 4, Necromancy: Sepulchre Path 3, Obfuscate 3, Thaumaturgy: Alchemy 3, Thaumaturgy: Countermagic 4, Thaumaturgy: Elemental Mastery 3, Thaumaturgy: Green Path 4, Thaumaturgy: Hearth Path 4, Thaumaturgy: Lure of Flames 4, Thaumaturgy: Neptune's Might 4, Thaumaturgy: Oneiromancy 3, Thaumaturgy: Path of Curses 4, Thaumaturgy: Spirit Manipulation 3, Thaumaturgy: Weather Control 4

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 7, **Sekhem:** 8

Ancient Magician

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 5, Alertness 5, Brawl 3, Crafts 5, Dodge 4, Drive 1, Empathy 4, Investigation 4, Meditation 5, Melee 4, Occult 6, Stealth 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4, Survival 5

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 5, Dominate 4, Fortitude 4, Necromancy: Ash Path 5, Necromancy: Sepulchre Path 5, Obfuscate 4, Thaumaturgy: Alchemy 5, Thaumaturgy: Countermagic 5, Thaumaturgy: Elemental Mastery 5, Thaumaturgy: Green Path 5, Thaumaturgy: Hearth Path 5, Thaumaturgy: Lure of Flames 5, Thaumaturgy: Neptune's Might 5, Thaumaturgy: Oneiromancy 5, Thaumaturgy: Path of Curses 5, Thaumaturgy: Spirit Manipulation 5, Thaumaturgy: Weather Control 5

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 9, **Sekhem:** 10

Bestiary

It goes without saying that Africa is home to far more than just vampires and supernatural creatures. The Ebony Kingdom includes vast forests, expansive plains, scorching desert and great oceans as well. In each of these environments lives a wide variety of wildlife suited to the ecosystem in which it developed. These animals often serve as companions, messengers or soldiers for Laibon with the Animalism Discipline, or occasionally as enemies for those who act unwisely in their territory. Some Laibon choose particularly strong (or intelligent) animals for use as ghouls, as well. Most animals in the wild (that is, not domesticated or made ghouls) will not attack mortals or Laibon unless they are extremely hungry (in the case of carnivores) or they or their young are directly threatened.

Most animals are best described with only Physical traits. Few have Intelligence scores higher than 2, or Perception scores lower than 3. Those animals for which an Intelligence or Wits score is listed are the most trainable and cunning of animals. Intelligence in an animal should not be compared with that in mortals or humans — an Osebo with Intelligence 2 is still far smarter than an orangutan with Intelligence 4. Rather, it should be used to indicate how easily the animal can be taught simple tasks or (in the case of wits) improvise the use of tools or quickly figure out an escape route.

The teeth and claws of all but the smallest animals inflict lethal damage; other attacks (such as kicks from animals without claws) inflict bashing damage. Traits or Abilities in parentheses are gained through mortal (or Laibon) contact and training and not present in wild animals. Animals with an Incapacitated health level can generally survive longer when injured; those without one simply die. Any of the animals detailed here can be made into ghouls (for more information, see below). Note that animal blood is much less satisfying than that of humans. For this reason, some animals that have more physical blood than humans still have lower blood pool ratings.

Animal Ghouls

It's not surprising that in a land as rich with various types of animal life, that very same animal life might itself be a valuable resource. It's how poachers make their living, after all. Still, among the Laibon, animals represent an entirely different type of resource. Beyond possible vessels for feeding when necessary, animals are an integral part of many Laibon's retainers. Creating animal ghouls is easier than doing so with mortals, and such ghouls are on the whole more obedient and easier to control than humans, as well. Certain animals may even be taught to perform simple tasks or to communicate. With all these factors in their favor, a significant number of Laibon prefer animals to mortals as ghoul servants.

Naturally, animals are generally less intelligent than people, and one result is that as ghouls, they may learn only the physical Disciplines. As always, any ghoul acquires Potence, gaining one dot upon consuming the first portion of a Laibon's blood; some, particularly those already large or well protected enough (elephants, crocodiles), quickly learn Fortitude as well. Celerity is the rarest of Disciplines among animals, as it requires a level of intelligence to consciously direct vitae within the body (as neither Potence nor Fortitude requires blood-point expenditure). A fair guideline is that only animals with an Intelligence score listed (apes, parrots, dolphins) are able to grasp the idea. So yes, zippy elephants with Celerity are right out. As for non-physical Disciplines, animals have neither the self-control to learn them nor the intelligence to use them. (Storytellers, if you want your players' Laibon running around with Thaumaturgy-wielding spider monkeys or shadow-sculpting ostriches, be our guest, but that seems more comical than horrific.)

For all their limitations in learning Disciplines, however, animal ghouls do have some distinct advantages over their human counterparts. Many are tougher, with either greater resistance to damage or to pain, and most also have outstanding perceptual ability. A human ghoul might need to learn Auspex to spot an enemy approaching at 50 yards or hear a rival ghoul approach by the rustling of distant grass. Many animals can do this normally, without the use of any supernatural power. In addition, the increased loyalty bestowed by the blood bond virtually guarantees that animal ghouls will never betray their master unless they are horribly mistreated — another advantage of animal ghouls over the more duplicitous and untrustworthy human variety.

The most problematic disadvantage of animal ghouls is that they frenzy more easily than humans, since they have less consciousness with which to steel themselves against the Beast. Animals already possess violent instincts before ingesting vampiric vitae, so the vitae strengthens the Beast already within them. Frenzy is still usually a concern only when the animal's life is in danger (or the animal perceives it is), but particularly loyal animal ghouls might frenzy even if their vampiric master is threatened. Animal ghouls still frenzy rarely compared with Laibon, but human ghouls rarely frenzy at all.

When creating a ghoul using the animal traits given here, add one dot of Potence (and/ or Fortitude, with Storyteller permission — and remember that Celerity must *always* be taught, however) and increase the animal's blood pool to 10 for as long as it remains a ghoul. Just like humans, animal ghouls must be fed vitae at least once a month, losing one dot of Disciplines for each month they

are without the blood. Their maximum Discipline level depends upon their domitor's generation. Animals, like humans, also become blood bound to their domitors after three drinks of vitae.

At the Storyteller's discretion, for particularly large animals such as elephants and whales, more than one blood point per month might be required to maintain the animal as a ghoul. Two blood points might be necessary for an elephant or a smaller whale, while a blue whale might need four or even five blood points each month.



Land Mammals

Antelope

Strength 3/4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for four/six dice; bite for three

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1 (Brawl 2, Empathy 3, Stealth 2)

Blood Pool: 2/3

Note: Antelope come in various sizes and species, ranging from slightly larger than a rabbit to slightly smaller than a horse. Traits before the slash are for smaller antelope such as the dikdik or duiker; those after the slash are for larger breeds like the sable or the impala. Smaller antelope should also be treated as having one fewer "-2" health level.

Baboon

Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for four dice; beat with fists for three

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Climbing 3, Dodge 2, Melee 1, Stealth 1 (Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 4

Note: Because they have some aptitude with Melee, baboons can be trained to use simple weapons.

Camel

Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for six dice; bite for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 1, Survival 3 (Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Empathy 2)

Blood Pool: 5

Note: The camel's aptitude for Survival refers to its ability to survive for several weeks in the desert without water.

Cheetah

Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Claw for four dice; bite for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Hunting 3, Stealth 1 (Intimidation 3, Stealth 2)

Blood Pool: 5

Note: Cheetahs are considered the fastest land animal. They can be treated as having Celerity 2, but they can sustain this level of speed for only several minutes (if running) or three rounds in combat.

Chimpanzee

Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for four dice; beat with fists for three dice; use weapon (variable damage)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Climbing 3, Dodge 2, Melee 1, Stealth 1 (Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Linguistics 1, Melee 2, Stealth 3)

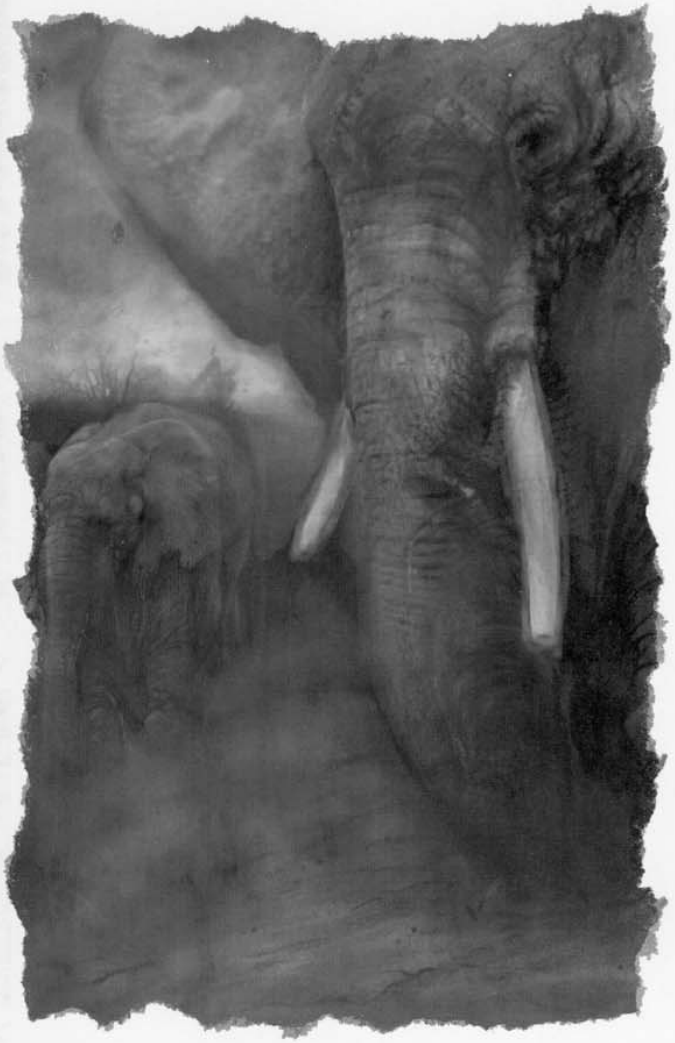
Blood Pool: 4

Note: Linguistics 1 refers to the fact that chimps may be taught the basics (up to a 200-word vocabulary) of sign language. Although few Laibon have the inclination or the expertise to do so, chimps' intelligence still makes them prime ghoul candidates. Their aptitude for Melee means they can also be trained to use simple weapons.

Elephant

Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated



Attack: Charge with tusks for nine dice; trample or kick for eight dice; slap with trunk for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 2 (Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Dodge 1)

Blood Pool: 6

Gazelle

Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for four dice; bite for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Dodge 2 (Empathy 3, Athletics 3)

Blood Pool: 4

Giraffe

Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for five dice; bite for four dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 1 (Empathy 2, Athletics 3, Dodge 2)

Blood Pool: 5

Note: "Called shots" to a giraffe's neck require neither a special roll nor an increased difficulty to hit.

Gorilla

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Intelligence 3, Wits 1

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for five dice; beat with fists for four; pick up and throw victim for seven dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Climbing 2, Dodge 1, Intimidation 2, Melee 1 (Empathy 2, Linguistics 1, Stealth 2)

Blood Pool: 4

Note: Because they have some aptitude with Melee, gorillas can be trained to use simple weapons. Linguistics refers to their ability to learn sign language.

Hippopotamus

Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for six dice; bite for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 2, Swimming 2 (Athletics 3, Dodge 1, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 5

Note: Hippopotami have one additional soak die because of their exceptionally thick skin.



Hyena

Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Claw for four dice; bite for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Hunting 2, Intimidation 3, Stealth 2, Swimming 1 (Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Empathy 2, Stealth 3, Swimming 2)

Blood Pool: 4

Jackal

Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, Incapacitated

Attack: Claw for three dice; bite for four dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Hunting 2, Intimidation 1, Stealth 1, Swimming 1 (Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Stealth 2, Swimming 2)

Blood Pool: 3

Lemur

Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Intelligence 2, Wits 1

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -5

Attack: Bite for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Climbing 4, Dodge 3, Melee 1, Stealth 2 (Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 2

Note: Because they have some aptitude with Melee, lemurs can be trained to use simple weapons.

Lion

Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Claw for four dice; bite for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Hunting 3, Intimidation 2, Dodge 2, Stealth 1 (Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Empathy 2, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 5

Porcupine

Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -3, -3

Attack: Quills (reflexive attack when touched) for five dice; bite for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Stealth 2 (Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 3, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 2

Rhinoceros

Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Charge with horn for six dice; trample or kick for six dice; bite for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Stealth 2 (Athletics 3, Dodge 1, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 5

Serval

Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, Incapacitated

Attack: Claw for three dice; bite for four dice

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Hunting 2, Dodge 3, Intimidation 1, Stealth 2 (Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Empathy 2, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 4

Note: The serval is a small jungle cat, resembling a 40- or 50-pound leopard, with its head more resembling a house-cat, but with much larger ears. Even some mortals like to keep them as pets, as their size is about the same as a dog, and when domesticated they are only slightly more wild than dogs.

Tiger

Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Claw for four dice; bite for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Hunting 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2, Stealth 1 (Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Empathy 2, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 5

Warthog

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -3, -3, Incapacitated

Attack: Charge with tusks for five dice; bite for four dice; trample or kick for three dice



Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2 (Athletics 4, Empathy 2, Stealth 1)

Blood Pool: 4

Wildebeest

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for six dice; bite for four dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 3 (Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 4, Empathy 2, Stealth 1)

Blood Pool: 5

Wolf

Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite and claw for four dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Intimidation 2, Stealth 2 (Athletics 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 3)

Blood Pool: 2



Birds

Eagle

Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -5

Attack: Claw for two dice; bite for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2 (Brawl 3, Empathy 4, Intimidation 4)

Blood Pool: 1

Hawk

Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -3, -3

Attack: Claw for two dice; bite for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Intimidation 2 (Brawl 3, Empathy 3, Intimidation 3)

Blood Pool: 1

Ostrich

Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Willpower: 1, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -3, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for four dice; bite for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Dodge 2 (Brawl 1, Empathy 3, Stealth 1)

Blood Pool: 3

Parrot (Gray)

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -2, -5

Attack: Claw for two dice; bite for one (desperation)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Linguistics 1 (Empathy 3, Enigmas 1, Intimidation 2)

Blood Pool: 1/2 (two parrots equals one blood point)

Note: Gray parrots have the mental capacity of a three- to five-year-old human child. They possess basic problem-solving skills and can both understand and use simple language. Their ability to speak makes them favorite ghouls for many Laibon, particularly those who wish to speak through them using Ride the Beast.

Vulture

Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -5

Attack: Claw for three dice; bite for five

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3 (Athletics 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 4)

Blood Pool: 2

Note: Vultures are normally scavengers, unless they are extremely hungry or provoked. They may be trained to attack mortals and vampires, however; their hooked beaks are well suited to ripping or tearing flesh.

Reptiles

Boa Constrictor

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -3, -3, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for four dice (may attempt to swallow); crush for seven dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Intimidation 2 (Athletics 4, Empathy 2, Intimidation 4)

Blood Pool: 2

Cobra/Spitting Cobra

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -2, -5

Attack: Bite for two dice (plus five dice of poison damage to living creatures); spitting cobras can also spit venom for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3 (Athletics 3, Intimidation 4)

Blood Pool: 1/2 (two cobras equal one blood point)

Crocodile

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for seven dice; tail slap for five dice

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Intimidation 2, Swimming 4 (Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Intimidation 3)

Blood Pool: 4

Insects & Arachnids

Note: All statistics given here are for swarms, except where otherwise noted as "single." For more information on swarms and suggested rules, see p. 304 of **Vampire**.

African "Killer" Bees

Strength 0, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK

Attack: Swarm and sting for six dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Flying 4, Intimidation 3 (Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Empathy 2)

Blood Pool: 0 (Try sucking the blood out of an insect.)

Fire Ants

Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK

Attack: Bite and sting for seven dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 2 (Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Empathy 2)

Blood Pool: 0

Giant Dragonfly (single)

Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

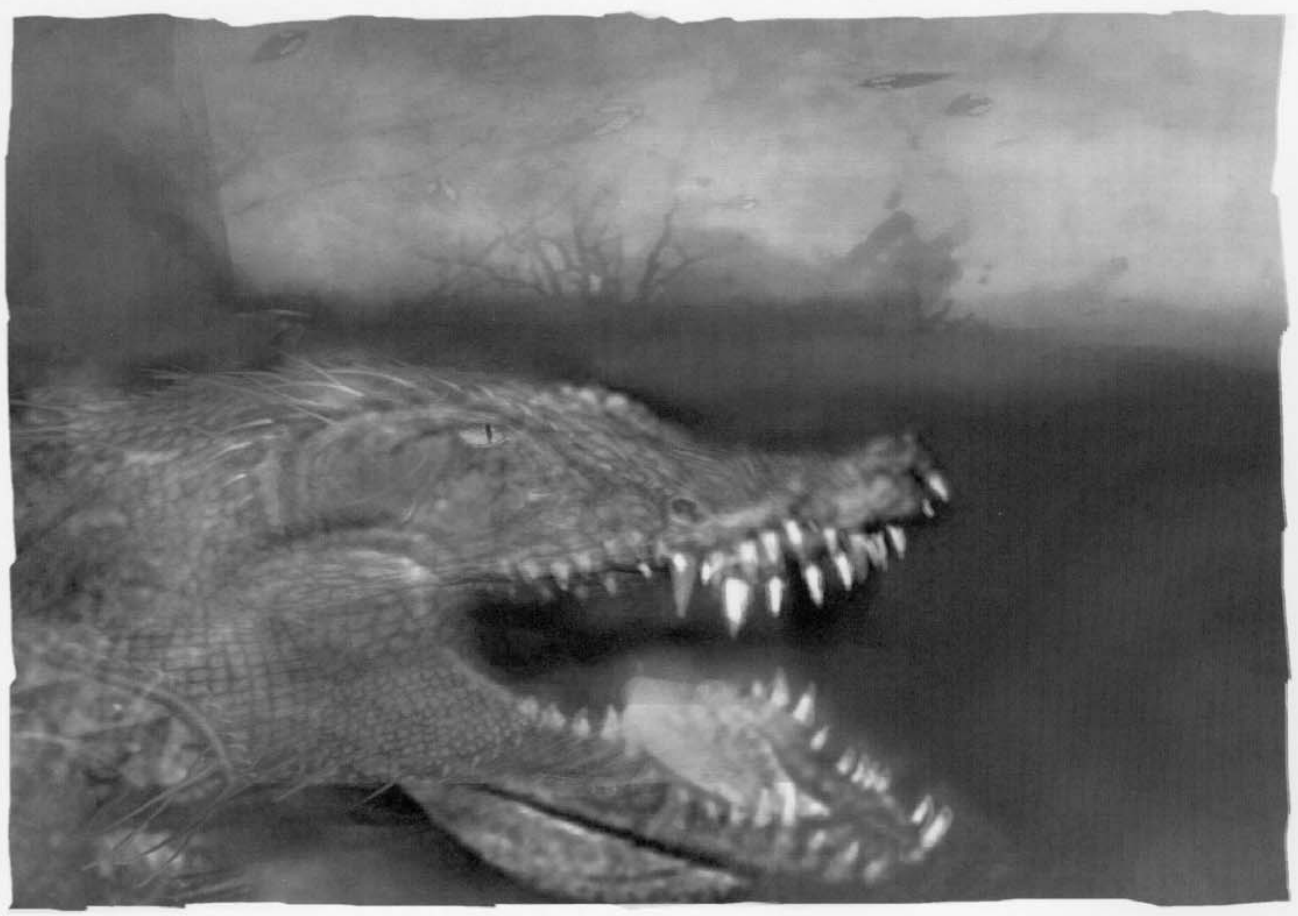
Willpower: 1, **Health Levels:** OK, -5

Attack: Bite for one die (desperation)

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Intimidation 3 (Athletics 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 4)

Blood Pool: 1/4 (Disgusting)

Note: Although dragonflies, both giant and otherwise, have no real attack to speak of, many mortals and Laibon without much knowledge of the animal kingdom don't realize it. This is why the Giant Dragonfly has no Brawl but Intimidation 3. People tend to be scared of dragonflies (especially enormous ones)



even though they're generally harmless. Laibon either create swarms of them to frighten away potential enemies or use their ability to hover in mid-air for spying in hard-to-reach places.

Scarab Beetle

Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK

Attack: Bite and eat flesh (as a swarm) for nine dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Intimidation 2 (Alertness 4, Brawl 4, Empathy 2)

Blood Pool: 0

Note: Scarabs are scavengers, and as such, they eat human flesh only if they are starved or specially trained through use of Animalism. Vampiric flesh, however, is thoroughly dead, which makes it just as delectable to scarabs as the flesh of a fresh corpse is.

Scorpion (single)

Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Willpower: 1, **Health Levels:** OK, -3

Attack: Sting for one die (plus 10 dice of poison damage to living creatures)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Intimidation 3 (Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 2)

Blood Pool: 1/4

Tarantula (single)

Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Willpower: 1, **Health Levels:** OK, -5

Attack: Bite for two dice (plus four to 10 dice of poison damage, depending on species)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Climbing 3, Intimidation 3 (Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 2)

Blood Pool: 1/4

Sea and Lake Creatures

Crab or Lobster

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Willpower: 1, **Health Levels:** OK, -2, -5

Attack: Snap with pincers for two to five dice (depending on the size of the crab or lobster)

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Intimidation 1 (Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 2)

Blood Pool: 1/4 to 1, depending on size

Note: Crustaceans such as crabs and lobsters have one additional soak die because of their hard exoskeletons.

Dolphin

Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for five dice; swipe with tail for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 3, Enigmas 4, Linguistics 2, Swimming 4 (Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Empathy 4, Enigmas 5)

Blood Pool: 3

Note: Dolphins have been considered to be the most intelligent of the "lower" mammals for some time, even more so than monkeys or apes. Some biologists believe that dolphins might even exceed humans in intelligence. Their ability in Linguistics reflects dolphins' ability to communicate complex ideas to each other through sonar, as well as to understand and respond to human speech. Their Enigmas Ability reflects their exceptional problem-solving skills. If any animal might be able to learn non-physical Disciplines as a ghoul, dolphins would be that animal. This is merely speculation, however, and not an encouragement to create Vicissitude-wielding sea critters.

Piranha

Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Willpower: 1, **Health Levels:** OK, -5

Attack: Bite and eat flesh for two dice; swarm with other piranhas for eight dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3,

Blood Pool: 1/2

Note: Swarming piranhas should be treated as having six "OK" health levels.

Sea Turtle

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for five dice; claw for three dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Intimidation 1, Swimming 4 (Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Empathy 3, Intimidation 3)

Blood Pool: 3 to 5, depending on size

Shark

Strength 4/6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Willpower: 2/3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, (OK,) -2, -2, -5 (-5), Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for six/eight dice

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Swimming 4 (Alertness 4, Empathy 1, Intimidation 4)

Blood Pool: 3/5

Note: Traits before the slash are for smaller sharks such as hammerheads, while those after the slash are for larger sharks such as the whale shark. Health levels in parentheses are for large sharks only.

Swordfish

Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -5

Attack: Bite for four dice; puncture with nasal appendage ("sword") for six dice

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 1 (Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Empathy 2)

Blood Pool: 3

Whale

Strength 5/9, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4/6

Willpower: 4/7, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, (OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1,) -2, -2, (-2, -2, -3, -3,) -5, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for six/ 12 dice; swipe with tail for four/ nine dice; jump out of the water and crush (on the surface only) for eight/ 15 dice (which could also inflict damage on the whale, depending on the size and type of the person or object being crushed)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Intimidation 2/3, (Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Empathy 4, Intimidation 4)

Blood Pool: 6/15

Note: Traits before the slash are for most species of whale, while those after the slash are for the massive blue whale, the largest animal on the planet. Health levels in parentheses should also only be used for the blue whale.


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Appendix: Minor Legacies and Clans

Death most resembles a prophet who is without honor in his own land or a poet who is a stranger among his people.
—Kahlil Gibran, *The Voice of the Poet*

Not all vampires that one might find in Africa truly call the Ebony Kingdom their home. Of these, the Malkavians and Ventrue are largely similar to their clanmates elsewhere, though they have forsaken something that causes them to take refuge in Africa. As for the Nkulu Zao and the Mla Watu, other circumstances have conspired to make them what they are tonight — for better or for worse.

Note that the Malkavians and Ventrue remain clans; they are simply strangers in a strange land. The Mla Watu and Nkulu Zao, however, have truly become legacies, shaped as much by the domain in which they reside as their creators.

Malkavians

Sometime in the Dark Ages, a small group of Malkavians followed a member of their clan who claimed to be the returned Messiah into the depths of the Dark Continent. Their leader, who African Malkavians remember as "Arcus," promised that they would find ancient tomes of wisdom concerning the origin of the Kindred, the world and the entire cosmos. What they actually found, while perhaps a missing link of some kind, was far more than they expected or bargained for. And the natives didn't exactly welcome them with open arms.

It might seem that the Malkavians could find a niche in the Ebony Kingdom as medicine men or advisors because of their peculiar insight. The reality is that in a vampiric society where the Shango and Akunanse already filled those roles, the Malkavians were at a sore disadvantage because of their insanity. Although a few cautious magaji have occasionally chosen Malkavians as their advisors, most Laibon consider them far too unpredictable and disturbing to trust for simple tasks, let alone information or advice. Their numbers are too small to worry most magaji and they have no real continental organization to speak of, but it's safe to say most Laibon are hesitant to deal with the Malkavians. Most wish they'd just go away.

In the modern nights, no one is really sure whether Arcus is still around (or if he even existed in the first place). "Arcus sightings" occur several times a year, but the last believable report of his whereabouts was in the 19th century in the Congo. Still, the Malkavians have continued on without him, Embracing sparingly and continuing to look for the ancient scrolls of wisdom in the Ebony Kingdom. Most believe that they have only to look in the right location; the most dangerous are those who believe that they already have.

Nickname: Hyenas

Appearance: As with Malkavians elsewhere in the world, appearance varies. It's difficult to generalize with a legacy whose members each have their own peculiar brand of insanity. The problem with picking psychopaths out of a crowd is that for the most part, they look just like everyone else.

Haven: Like their appearance, Malkavians' havens vary widely based on temperament. A Malkavian is just as likely to dwell in a huge mansion as a condominium, an RV or even a communal underground hive of several insect-obsessed lunatics. Some stick to what's familiar from their mortal days; others let their madness guide them when selecting a haven. Be creative.

Background: African Malkavians Embrace a bit more selectively than their Western counterparts. The criteria are still different from Hyena to Hyena, but most Malkavians are aware (even in their delirium) that the only thing keeping other Laibon from wiping them out is their relatively small numbers. Most Laibon see the Malkavians as an annoyance to be avoided rather than a threat to be wiped out, and any Malkavian who isn't suicidal has a vested interest in keeping it that way.

Character Creation: Malkavians who are Embraced in Africa often have survivalist concepts, while those who are old enough to have been part of the original

Stereotypes

Akunanse: If I was that ugly, I'd think up a good excuse for it, too.

Followers of Set: Ooh, look at me, I'm a scary evil serpent monster, ruining everything and everyone around me. Amateurs. It's only amusing to play at being a monster if no one knows you're doing it.

Guruhi: "Yes, O Great and Powerful Magaji. No, O Great and Powerful Magaji. Please let me wipe your great and powerful arse for you, O Great and Powerful Magaji." If that's all they want from their subjects, then none of 'em get it. Not a single one.

Ishtarri: So close. They know they've lost something, just not what it is. We could teach them so much, if only they'd listen.

Kinyonyi: Not nearly as foolish as they'd like to make you think. Maybe everyone's taken by their mercenary disguise, but I knew a Kinyonyi once that could make the walls melt and the Earth's pull reverse itself. At least, I think he was the one doing it.

Naglopers: And they call *us* insane.

Osebo: You know, whomever they may serve, I can really respect the Osebo. They know their job, and they do it well. And most of them aren't half as dumb as everyone seems to think.

Shango: I'd say the Shango are the ones to go to if you're looking for true wisdom or guidance in this god-forsaken kingdom, but unfortunately I've never found one that was willing to talk to me. I think the clarity of my vision must frighten them off.

Xi Dundu: This is where the Ebony Kingdom is going, but no one seems to realize it. The Guruhi just keep on with business as usual, but soon their own shadows will stab them in the back and we'll all be at the mercy of the Xi Dundu.

migration are mostly academics and explorers (and should, of course, have a reason for why they followed any leader to a strange new land). Many rely primarily on Mental Attributes, but those who focus primarily on Physical Attributes are more common in the Ebony Kingdom than elsewhere. Knowledges and Skills are usually prized above Talents. Common Abilities include Awareness, Academics, Investigation, Occult, Science and Survival. Natures and Demeanors range from identical to wildly different; common Archetypes include Child, Curmudgeon, Deviant, Fanatic, Martyr, Pedagogue, Penitent, Perfectionist, Scientist, Thrill-Seeker and Visionary.

Legacy Disciplines: Auspex, Dementation, Obfuscate

Weaknesses: Because of the madness inherent to their vitae, all Malkavians are utterly, incurably insane. Specific illnesses can range from anxiety attacks to narcolepsy, multiple personalities to schizophrenia. When creating a Malkavian character, a player must select at least one derangement. This derangement can be temporarily fought with Willpower, but it may never be permanently overcome. For Malkavians with multiple derangements, one derangement should be assigned as the character's primary illness. Other derangements may eventually be cured, but the primary derangement will always remain.

Organization: Just as in the rest of the world, the Malkavians of the Ebony Kingdom have no particular organization, particularly because there are so few of them. There's still the Madness Network, of course, which means that they might even be able to pick up tidbits from outside Africa, but such insights are rarely very useful. It's common for Ebony Kingdom Malkavians to travel in small coteries — three or four at the most — for mutual protection and guidance. There's often at least one sire-childe combination in such coteries, as sires usually want to be sure that their childer aren't going to get themselves in too much trouble before releasing them. All-Malkavian coteries might seem like the blind leading the blind, but at least to their own fractured minds, three or four people with different forms of insanity might add up to an undamaged intellect every once in a while.



Quote: *Yes, well, how can you be sure this* isn't *the lost tomb of King Solomon, eh? I've never seen glyphs like these before. Fascinating... What's that? No, you'd better go in first. I need to stay out here and deal with the government snipers when they arrive. Best to take cover. It won't be long now.*

Mla Watu

If the mere mention of one legacy causes shivers in most Laibon, it would have to be the Mla Watu. The reason is twofold — first of all, the Mla Watu have made it clear through the years, to those unlucky enough to have prolonged contact with them, that they wish to be left alone. More importantly, though, the Mla Watu traffic with the dead. Not content to simply ask the ancestors for their advice or wisdom like mortal shamans and certain Akunanse or Shango, the Mla Watu seek to control them. Many Laibon find this practice utterly repulsive, and many others fear subjugation after meeting Final Death, so as a result, the Mla Watu generally get the solitude they desire. The disappearance of the few who have tried to hunt the Mla Watu out of righteous indignation at their subjugation of the dead has also helped to guarantee the legacy's independence.

One side effect of avoiding the Mla Watu, of course, is that most other Laibon don't know very much about them. Those who have spoken to members of the legacy usually report quiet vampires, often claiming to be quite old, and in many cases with a scholarly bent. Not much is known about the legacy's past, but a few Mla Watu have let slip rumors that they used to be a much greater legacy in the past. (Those kholo who are old enough to remember say that the legacy has been in the Ebony Kingdom only since the beginning of the second millennium AD, though.) Those few Laibon who have chanced to meet elders of the Mla Watu tell even stranger tales, suggesting that they're not even of African descent. This revelation might shed some light on the legacy's true origins — at least, for those incautious enough to want to investigate.

Beyond their interest in the dead, the Mla Watu value knowledge above all other things, and those who dealt with them and survived to tell about it attest to this fact. Mla Watu often seem to be obsessed with collecting books, scrolls and other obscure sources of information, particularly concerning the occult. This might be why, despite the legacy's relative newness to the Ebony Kingdom, it's whispered that the Mla Watu know more about the history of the Laibon than does any other legacy. Of course, if they do have this knowledge, the Mla Watu guard it as closely as they guard their own origins.

Nickname: Ghost-Eaters

Appearance: Older Mla Watu tend toward the fashions of their breathing days — often medieval European garb, particularly that of scientists and doctors of the time, and cloaks are always a favorite. Younger members of the legacy (though "younger" in this legacy is very much a relative term) prefer modern equivalents (lab coats and the like) or modern culturally appropriate clothing for their region.

Haven: The Mla Watu are generally solitary, though they do sometimes gather to collaborate on particularly involved research. Most maintain comfortable havens with no scarcity of books, modern and ancient, and often

Stereotypes

Akunanse: For savages, they possess a remarkable degree of insight. Watch them carefully; they see more than they let on.

Followers of Set: Even a snake can sometimes be a useful tool. Just be very sure it is they who are the pawn and not the reverse.

Guruhi: The ruling hand of the Ebony Kingdom. Take my advice: Steer clear of them whenever possible. We have not survived this long by alerting those in power to who we are and what we do.

Ishtarri: If the Followers of Set succumbed to the same vices they peddle, they would become the Ishtarri. Some may be potent warriors, but most are too busy with self-indulgence to question what lies in the shadows of the Kingdom. Let us see that it stays that way.

Kinyonyi: Whatever their faults, the Kinyonyi are usually willing to serve without asking too many questions. Just be wary of allowing them to overstay their welcome.

Naglopers: If you are in need of fresh bones or human flesh and unable or unwilling to procure it yourself, the Naglopers may prove useful. Otherwise, you would do well to consider them as animals beneath your notice.

Osebo: Most Osebo report back to some Guruhi or Shango master, so treat them the same as you would either of those legacies. Just remember that soldiers are rarely as intelligent as the generals they serve.

Shango: The court magicians of the Guruhi have more tricks up their sleeves than one might expect. Still, beneath their confident exterior lies, I suspect, a fear of us, the only legacy with magics they have failed to master. I hear tell that some of them even come to us seeking to learn our powers over the dead. If I were you, I would only even consider teaching one who first swears loyalty to me and perhaps takes the blood oath as well.

Xi Dundu: They may share with us a desire for power, but the similarity between our legacies ends there. The Xi Dundu are depraved fools who chase after material success and control, while true power lies only inches away in their powers over shadow. If I had their gifts, I would not squander them as they do.



artifacts as well. In recent nights, collections of exotic skulls and skeletons have also come into vogue within the legacy. Skulls of Lupines or other strange creatures are especially prized, granting a great deal of prestige if they are authentic.

Background: The Mla Watu are a small legacy, and for the most part, they like it that way. Having fewer childer to keep track of means more time for research and planning, as well as fewer people to betray them to outsiders. Still, new recruits are necessary from time to time, and the Mla Watu pick those they feel are best suited to the study of death, usually well-educated people with a background in the subject. Doctors or surgeons, coroners, laboratory scientists and even professors are the usual candidates. From time to time, local priests or medicine men are chosen, but most are priests devoted to gods related to death — Shokpono, the Yoruba god of smallpox, is a favorite. Priests of more mainstream gods often have deep-seated moral objections to exerting control over the dead.

Character Creation: Mla Watu are almost always Mental-primary characters. Physical protection, when necessary, is relegated to ghouls with Potence. Knowledges are usually favored, followed by Skills. Common Abilities include Occult, Academics, Linguistics, Medicine and Science. Nature and Demeanor are usually similar but rarely identical; some common Archetypes include Architect, Conformist, Curmudgeon, Director, Pedagogue, Perfectionist, Scientist and Traditionalist.

Legacy Disciplines: Auspex, Fortitude, Necromancy

Weaknesses: No matter how much blood they drink (or spend), the Mla Watu remain pale as corpses. Perhaps this is because of their preoccupation with death, or perhaps the reverse is true. Whatever the reason, the Mla Watu's appearance increases all Appearance-related difficulties by one. In addition, their pallor decreases the difficulty by one on all attempts to detect them as vampires. It's worth noting that this weakness makes most African members of the legacy (all but the oldest of the Mla Watu) look anything from cadaverous to downright frightening, depending on their features and original skin tone. At the storyteller's discretion, this incongruity of features and skin color may increase difficulty by two when dealing with African mortals (or with all Africans, mortal and Laibon alike).

Organization: The Mla Watu have no official organization, but rather an unwritten understanding of mutual help and protection. They are well aware that most of the Ebony Kingdom despises them, and the same is probably true outside Africa as well. Therefore, if the necessity were to arise (as yet, it has not), the legacy could mobilize itself quickly. Since all Mla Watu work toward the same goals — greater knowledge of Necromancy and the Underworld, and eventual revenge against those who broke their legacy so long ago — it's not surprising that most are in touch with at least a few other Mla Watu on a regular or semi-regular basis. It's rare to find more than one in the same domain for more than a few weeks at a time, however. The entire legacy is said to gather for several weeks each winter in an unknown location to discuss their findings and perform arcane rituals.

KEIF JONES

Quote: *Welcome to my home. I see you have already made yourself comfortable. The skull you hold in your hand is one of my favorites. I am told it belonged to the great Shaka himself. Very regal cheekbones, don't you agree? Now, please be so kind as to explain your presence, unless you wish your skull to join King Shaka's in the trophy case.*

Nkulu Zao

The childer of Zao-lat find little peace, no matter where they run, and the few who survive have run far indeed. Many believe that only a handful of Zao-lat's childer haunt the night at any time, but a few suspect that this is a myth propagated by his offspring themselves. They believe that if the other Laibon think there are so few, they are not a threat and not worth the effort to hunt. In truth, no one knows how many exist at any one time, least of all the Nkulu Zao.

During times long past, a group of power-seeking magi discovered the slumbering Ancient and supposedly destroyed him only because he allowed it to happen. Zao-lat's vitae was drained dry at the fangs of the most powerful of the magi, then all the sorcerers proceeded to hunt down and destroy the Ancient's progeny. For many years, the magi thought that they were successful, but a few resourceful "Kindred" survived and scattered to the four winds. Some made their way as far as Africa and took the Bavili name for the "dead souls of Zao-lat."

In other areas of the world, vampires who are believed to have descended from Zao-lat have been the consistent victims of the other clans and their plots to exterminate the lineage. In the Western world, for example, the Salubri have struggled to survive and claim to offer succor and secrets to perhaps the only escape from damnation for a vampire. Most vampires reject the notion that the Salubri are healers, though, and the blood hunts rage on.

In Africa, the Nkulu Zao have given up any attempts to offer "healing" of the Curse of Cagn to any other Laibon. Hidden away in the depths of the jungles and desert wastelands, the Soulsuckers do what they must in order to ensure their survival. Most believe that everyone and everything is out to destroy them, thanks in no small part to the deadly efficiency of Tremere propaganda. They are true soul-suckers, having become what many of the vampires had suspected all along, their fears having raised a terrifying demon to unlife. And while the Nkulu Zao believe that Golconda is still attainable, many have reached a point of paranoia so fevered that they never trust a mortal long enough to Embrace her, let alone herd her toward the speculative salvation that Golconda promises. Whispers persist, however, that the Nkulu Zao have discovered that Golconda does not exist and believe that the Curse of Cagn is preferable to damnation.

Nickname: Soulsuckers

Appearance: Appearance varies widely, as the few known Nkulu Zao have chosen their progeny sporadically for wildly different reasons, so little, if any generalizations can be made with any accuracy. Unlike their Western brethren, the Nkulu Zao have all but lost their distinctive, third eye. Some still posses a functional one, but many of the Laibon's have healed over. Whether that means they have lost sight of their purpose, no one knows for certain.

Haven: Soulsuckers keep small, unassuming havens (when they can) and try to stay as far away from other Laibon as possible deep in the bush. With the creeping modernization, however, such remote locations have become more difficult to find. Nkulu Zao typically lead Spartan unlives, keeping physical trappings to a bare minimum and rarely possessing many material belongings, always aware of the need for flight.

Background: The Nkulu Zao Embrace less and less, as their mistrust grows to a rightfully fevered pitch. In the distant past, individuals with high levels of Humanity, such as holy men and healers, were desirable. Now, few Kindred can discern much rhyme or reason in the childer they Embrace — if they ever do, for many believe the only way to transcendence is by death at the hands of their freshly Embraced childer.

Character Creation: Mental and Physical Attributes are often primary to the point of necessity, as are Skills. If the Soulsucker has Backgrounds of Allies and Resources, she is uncommon indeed. Most Nkulu Zao have

Stereotypes

Akunanse: They are wise, without a doubt, but that does not vouch for their trustworthiness at all.

Followers of Set: Their sole virtue is the honesty of their selfishness.

Guruhi: They fashion themselves as kings, but it is the brutality of the kingdom itself that makes their claims worthless

Ishtarri: Content to wallow in pleasure, they are not worth the blood in their veins.

Kinyonyi: They can be either damnation or salvation themselves, yet they waste their unlives in the pursuit of lucre.

Naglopers: It astounds me that they take such pride in their open failure as individuals.

Osebo: Had we only met them first...

Shango: The hammer of the gods is simply a tool, and they have allowed those other than the divine to wield it.

Xi Dundu: They thrill to be the beginning of the end, and they are worthy of all the hate directed at them.

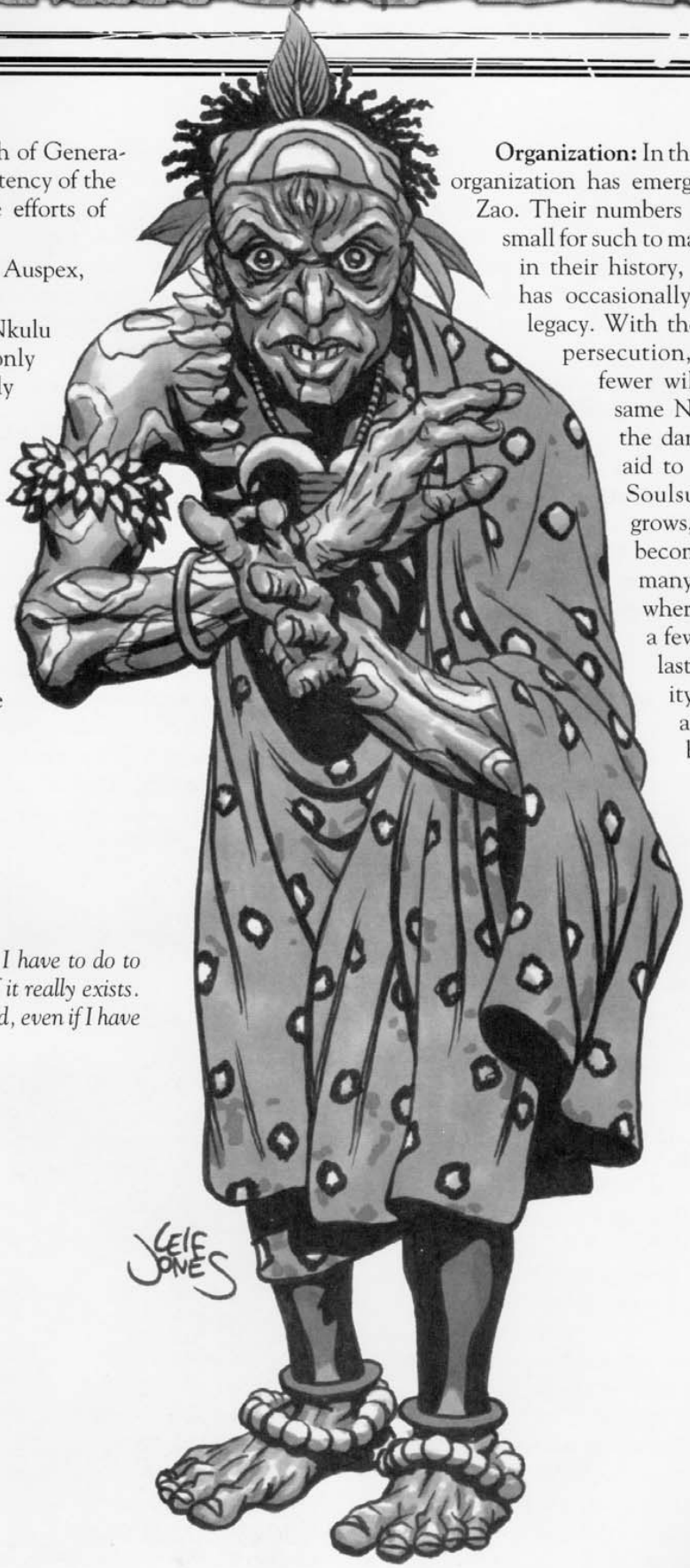
at least a few dots worth of Generation to represent the potency of the legacy's Blood and the efforts of their sires.

Legacy Disciplines: Auspex, Fortitude, Obeah

Weaknesses: The Nkulu Zao may take blood only from those who willingly give it to them. If the vessel resists the feeding, the Nkulu Zao loses a point from her Willpower pool in addition to drawing no sustenance from the vitae itself. Additionally, the character might need to check for degeneration, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Organization: In the past, little, if any, true organization has emerged among the Nkulu Zao. Their numbers have always been too small for such to matter. At various points in their history, though, fierce loyalty has occasionally surfaced among the legacy. With the passage of years and persecution, however, and with fewer willing to Embrace, the same Nkulu have festered in the darkness and rarely offer aid to any, even to another Soulsucker. As their fear grows, the Nkulu Zao have become less likely to flee, as many feel that they have nowhere else to run. More than a few have taken a twisted last-stand sort of mentality and devour the soul of any they feel threatened by — almost anyone who disturbs them.

Quote: *I do what I have to do to reach my destination, if it really exists. Everyone else be damned, even if I have to damn them myself!*



Ventrue

To the Ventrue, much of Africa is like *Casablanca*. Those who dwell there are either expatriates fleeing some greater concern, or they are inscrutable plotters, there for their own ends, and Devil take anyone who finds himself in the way. Still, Ventrue pride is an indelible thing, and even those who visit the Ebony Kingdom for scurrilous purposes do so with all the hauteur endemic to their heritage.

For the most part, the Ventrue don't bother blending in. As a predominantly Caucasian clan, the Ventrue know they stick out. Some even hail from less enlightened times, still seeing Africa as "the Dark Continent" and populated by lesser peoples. Others come for commercial reasons or to further some part of a larger plan in progress. To be sure, Africa has no indigenous Ventrue legacy, and even those Ventrue Embraced there feel a sense of detachment from their former home. Legacies are families, but clans are something altogether different in this part of the world.

Still, the wise Laibon doesn't count the Ventrue out of the picture just because they're far from home. The Ventrue, as always, are industrious, resourceful and well connected. Despite being from different continents, a Ventrue and a Laibon might maintain active contact and owe each other favors. Those Ventrue who are smart enough to see Africa's resources for what they are have a lot to gain from the Ebony Kingdom, and those Laibon who are wise enough to know what the Ventrue represent have a great deal to gain from amicable relations. In the end, that mercenary nature is what draws the Blue Bloods to the Ebony Kingdom, no doubt: the promise of some advantage that hasn't even occurred to whatever rival currently suffers their scorn.

Nickname: Blue Bloods

Appearance: The Ventrue largely appear as they do elsewhere in the world, rarely making the effort to "go native" because so few of them have any long-term plans to stay. Natives Embraced into the clan tend toward the rugged and "useful" to the sire, as the Ebony Kingdom is not the place Ventrue go to dally and show their affluence, when greater displays of such are better made back home. As such, African Ventrue often have a somewhat utilitarian look, with gear for whatever they think might come their way and the manner and facial expressions of veterans who have seen their share of horror. They can hail from any of the local peoples, so no single culture or ethnicity is more predominant than any other.

Haven: Visiting Ventrue rarely see any need to give up their creature comforts, unless going incognito is of absolute necessity. Such being the case, many Ventrue rent palatial estates (or at least estates that live up to their standards) or outfit their expeditions with the most luxurious amenities. The Laibon sometimes tease them for these little vanities, reminding them that they are not the Great White Hunters on safari into the Dark Continent. At this the Ventrue merely shrug — in some minds, that's *exactly* what they are.

Background: Those Embraced in the Ebony Kingdom, surprisingly, often come from less distinguished stock than one might suspect. Psychologically, the Ventrue who consider themselves so far and above the "naked savages" of the Ebony Kingdom would never deign to Embrace there. Therefore, it falls to the more progressive members of the clan to pass on the Curse of Caine to those who have those unique characteristics that they seek in a childe. Of course, "progressive" is a relative term among the Ventrue, and as often as not, a Ventrue bestows the Embrace upon one whom he intends to be the African equivalent of his man Friday

Character Creation: Par for the course, most Ventrue focus upon their Mental and Social Attributes. Skills and Knowledges prevail among Abilities, and no Ventrue worth the Embrace is going to neglect his Backgrounds,

Stereotypes

Akunanse: Suitable for stuffing above the mantle — unless they have some secret worth telling you.

Followers of Set: Shamefully, they are cut from the same cloth as their equally repugnant kin elsewhere.

Guruhi: A king is only as estimable as his kingdom, and that's quite little in a land of sand, mud and relentless sun.

Ishtarri: They understand the nature of the world, and they are better than this backward continent deserves.

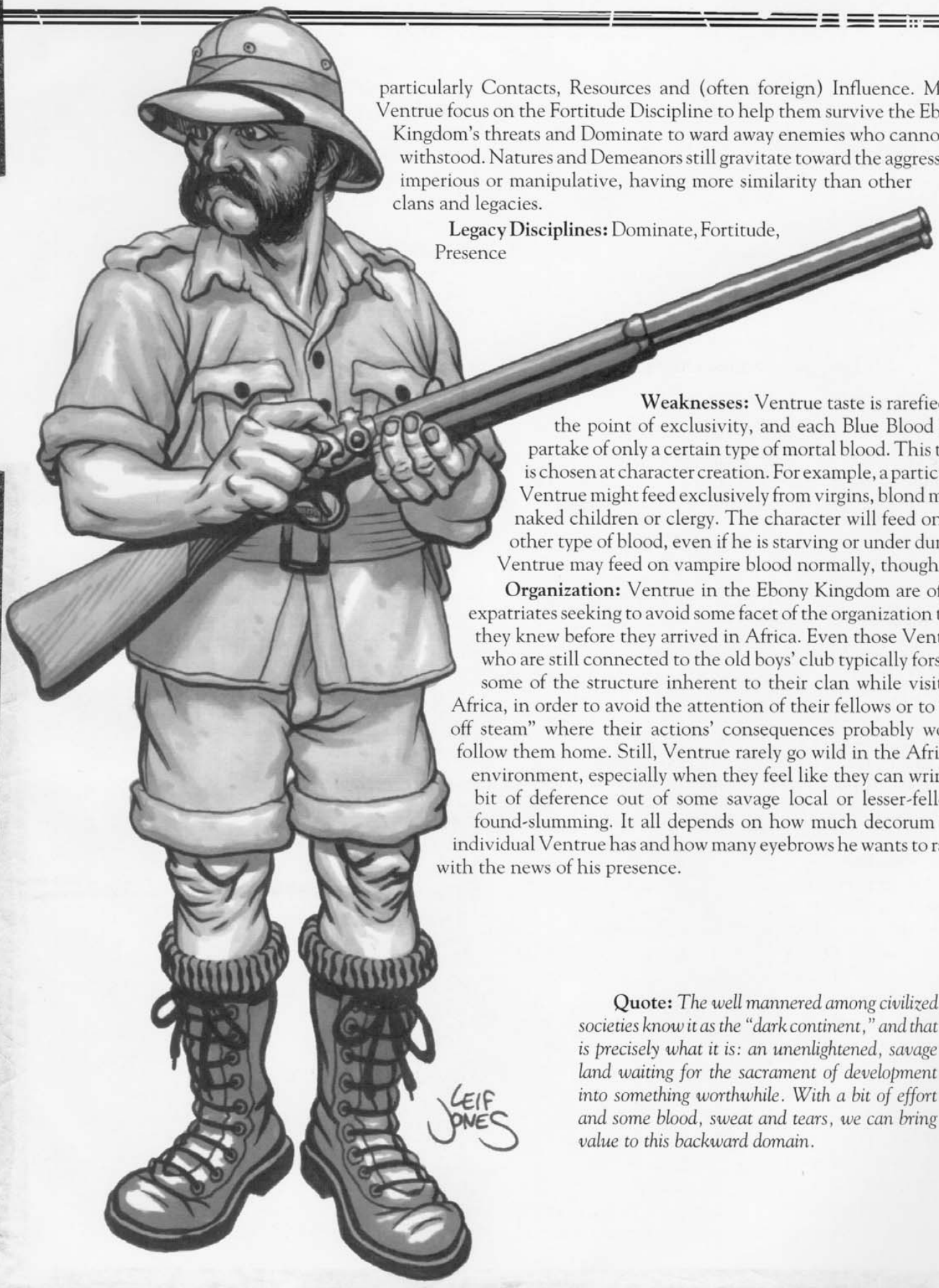
Kinyonyi: Every kingdom has its vagabonds. They are no worse than the detritus found elsewhere.

Naglopers: Don't the locals have enough to worry about without letting the exploits of these wretched monstrosities haunt them?

Osebo: I wish some of my Western kin would follow the Osebo's example and learn their proper place.

Shango: Remarkable. I'll take two, please.

Xi Dundu: Pretenders to the throne and oblivious to its insignificance on a larger scale — their ambition is wasted on a domain of negligible value, though I'm glad it keeps their attention focused here.



particularly Contacts, Resources and (often foreign) Influence. Many Ventrue focus on the Fortitude Discipline to help them survive the Ebony Kingdom's threats and Dominate to ward away enemies who cannot be withstood. Natures and Demeanors still gravitate toward the aggressive, imperious or manipulative, having more similarity than other clans and legacies.

Legacy Disciplines: Dominate, Fortitude, Presence

Weaknesses: Ventrue taste is rarefied to the point of exclusivity, and each Blue Blood can partake of only a certain type of mortal blood. This type is chosen at character creation. For example, a particular Ventrue might feed exclusively from virgins, blond men, naked children or clergy. The character will feed on no other type of blood, even if he is starving or under duress. Ventrue may feed on vampire blood normally, though.

Organization: Ventrue in the Ebony Kingdom are often expatriates seeking to avoid some facet of the organization that they knew before they arrived in Africa. Even those Ventrue who are still connected to the old boys' club typically forsake some of the structure inherent to their clan while visiting Africa, in order to avoid the attention of their fellows or to "let off steam" where their actions' consequences probably won't follow them home. Still, Ventrue rarely go wild in the African environment, especially when they feel like they can wring a bit of deference out of some savage local or lesser-fellow-found-slumming. It all depends on how much decorum the individual Ventrue has and how many eyebrows he wants to raise with the news of his presence.

Quote: *The well mannered among civilized societies know it as the "dark continent," and that is precisely what it is: an unenlightened, savage land waiting for the sacrament of development into something worthwhile. With a bit of effort and some blood, sweat and tears, we can bring value to this backward domain.*

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Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom

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OOOOO

Orun + Aye

Orun
O O O O O O O O O O

Aye
O O O O O O O O O O

Merits/Flaws

Courage

O O O O O

Willpower

O O O O O O O O O O
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Blood Pool

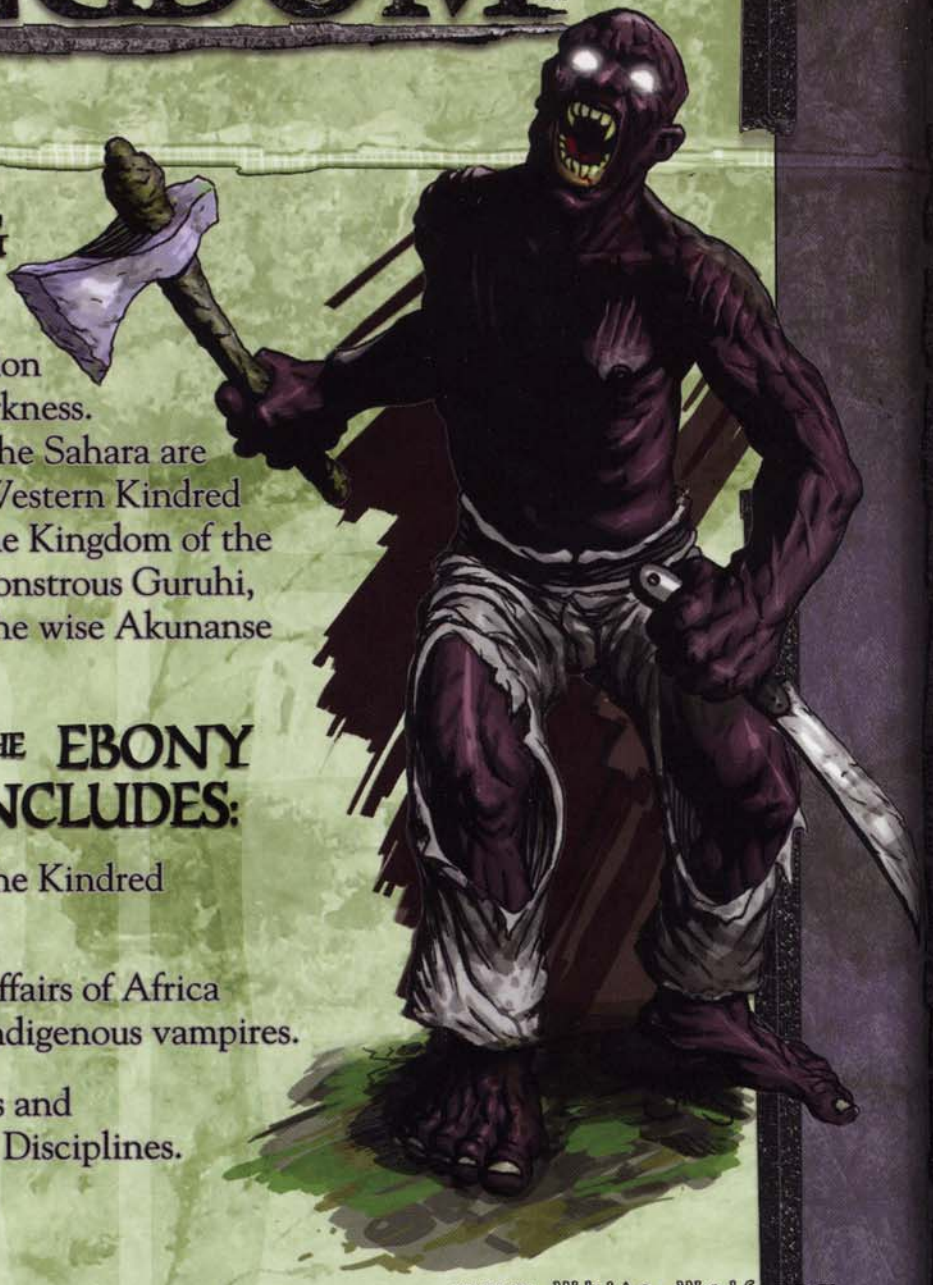
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Health

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

Experience

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