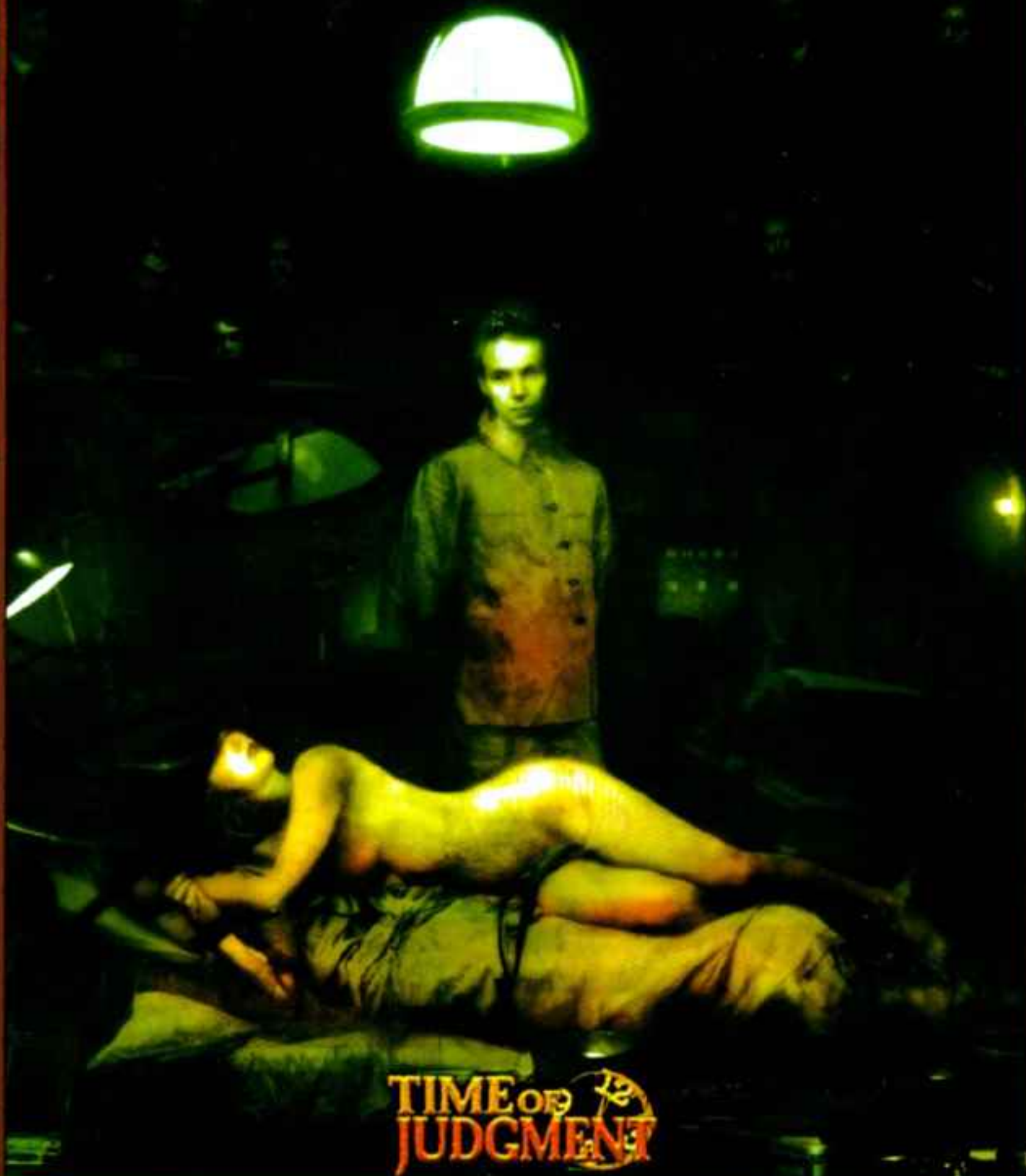


The Red Sign

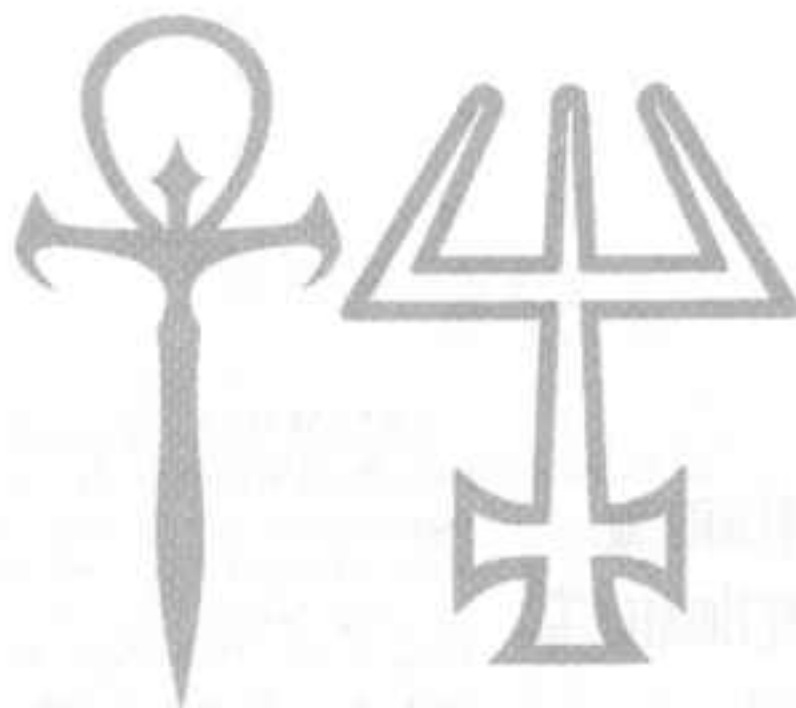


TIME OF
JUDGMENT

An apocalyptic chronicle for Vampire: The Masquerade® and Mage: The Ascension®




The Red Sign™



BY BRIAN CAMPBELL, CONRAD HUBBARD,
JACOB KLÜNDER AND CARRIE LEWIS

VAMPIRE CREATED BY MARK REIN • HAGEN.



CREDITS

Written by: Brian Campbell, Conrad Hubbard, Jacob Klünder and Carrie Lewis.

Vampire and the World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen.

Storyteller Game System Design: Mark Rein•Hagen

Developed by: Justin Achilli

Editor: Allison Sturms

Art Director: Richard Thomas

Layout & Typesetting: Becky Jollensten

Interior Art: Michael Gaydos, Vince Locke, Christopher Shy, and Drew Tucker

Front Cover Art: Christopher Shy

Front & Back Cover Design: Becky Jollensten

SPECIAL THANKS

Thanks to Dracula. Thanks, Dracula.

Thanks also to the drunken sluts at Origins '03, but not for what you think. Come on, now, people.



1554 LITTON DR
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
30083
USA

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The Red Sign™

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EMPERORS AND KINGS,
ARE BUT OBEYED IN THEIR SEVERAL PROVINCES,
BUT HIS DOMINION THAT EXCEEDS IN THIS,
STRETCHETH AS FAR AS DOETH THE MIND OF MAN:
A SOUND MAGICIAN IS A DEMI-GOD.
HERE, TIRE MY BRAINS TO GET A DEITY.

—CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, *THE TRAGEDIE OF DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Since the night God handed down his Curse, Caine and his progeny have sought a way to circumvent it — short of actually redeeming themselves in the eyes of God. Now in the Final Nights, however, a cabal of vampires and mages has found a way to negate God's will. Join us in this, one of the final chapters of the World of Darkness, as we present a morality play in which man not only exceeds himself, but damns others with him.



LO
CA
ES



INTRODUCTION

The merely improbable we can do today. The impossible takes a little longer.

— Etherite motto

Everything is true; nothing is forbidden.

— Hassan I-Sabbah

STRANGE DAYS ARE UPON US. A new star blazes in the heavens; barriers between worlds are falling; corpses of the unburied dead have risen to seek human victims; a cosmic reckoning is at hand. The impossible is slowly becoming possible, and the legendary is becoming real. These are the End Times, the Final Nights — for all those who doubt such rhetoric, you need only open your eyes.

This book offers an impossible story, a myth of modern horror. It is a tale of damnation and redemption, of hope and madness. At the center of it all, the unthinkable happens: A vampire becomes mortal again. This is not some chance occurrence or urban legend that allegedly happens in a forgotten corner of the world. It is witnessed, it is verifiable, it is brought about by a conspiracy with means and motive — and it has

consequences for all those who walk in shadow and darkness.

You, in the role of the Storyteller, must decide on the particulars. More importantly, you will have the chance to decide who this redeemed soul is. In the pages that follow, elaborate webs of conspiracies unravel, in which many different factions, chantries, coteries, and organizations have been pursuing this goal for centuries. Three conspiracies are closer to this goal than any other: one led by a Giovanni, one by a New World Order technocrat, and the third by a Celestial Chorister. Other, smaller groups contest for control of vital resources — with so much effort, it is inevitable that one will succeed.

Detonated in your chronicle, this event can change the World of Darkness forever. In physics, every action

has an equal and opposite reaction; this event will send shockwaves of chaos and alarm throughout the supernatural world. You must decide how close your players' coterie or chantry is to ground zero at the time. If their characters are living mages, they will bear witness to the eradication of the boundary between the worlds of the living and the undead. The Masquerade will shatter, and hideous truths will be revealed. If your players' characters are vampires, they may rush to prevent this event, or they may struggle to deal with the consequences when it occurs. Or perhaps one of *them* may find redemption... and pay its terrible price.

Many of the conspirators involved are visionaries who pursue the impossible on a regular basis; whether you think of them as mages, technocrats or Traditionalists is up to you. The world is full of possibilities, but you are the ultimate arbiter of its reality. There is no one absolute "canonical" storyline for this book; instead, we'll give you a host of choices, and you must decide which one to present to your players. More precisely, their heroes will be at the heart of the story, and they must deal with the consequences. They can save the world... or advance its destruction.

Sound impossible? Good. Making the impossible real is one of the themes of this book. Ancient creatures and cosmic visionaries may think they understand the world they live in, but when world-shaking events occur, they must face their fear of the unknown. Once you believe in one impossible feat, far more fabulous achievements become easier. The end is nigh — this book offers you a chance to bring your chronicle one step closer to Gehenna. The sky's the limit. Mastery over the limits of reality may even bring a few idealists closer to Ascension. With each new revelation of the End Times, we have brought you closer to that world's destruction. Before this tale is over, the heroes of your chronicle will have the chance to leap into the abyss — and see if it destroys them.

RECONSIDER

Think back to the first time you played **Vampire**, the night you first considered this simple question: "What if vampires were real?" (If you haven't played that game, you'll have even more to think about before you launch your own Red Sign chronicle.) By asking that one question, you opened yourself up to a thousand others. Every aspect of human existence changes when a mortal undergoes the Embrace. He turns from the human, daylight world to walk in darkness forever. Finding a home, companions, money, sustenance, grati-

fication — the mortal equivalents become tainted one by one.

Understanding all these changes depends on the next question: "What happens when a mortal becomes a vampire?" If you've played World of Darkness games long enough, you know the answer in countless permutations and variations, possibly as though you had lived through such an experience yourself. Now consider a different question: "What if a vampire became mortal?" If such an event were possible it could bring an end to centuries of suffering... or it could bring new horrors never before experienced. What happens to the Kindred's Masquerade when a mortal knows everything about their society, because he used to belong to it? If one of Caine's childer is redeemed, can he return to a normal life, or must he flee from shadows forever afterward? One question leads to a hundred others, and a hundred permutations of triumph and despair.

Who could possibly bring about such an impossibility? In this case, it's a cabal of willworkers who restructure reality on an almost daily basis. When we speak of the impossible, consider what mages might do. What happens when a mage holds power over life and death? Is it possible that he may be corrupted by that same power? Does it give him power over the undead... or would it make him their slave? What would the elders who benefit from the Camarilla and Sabbat do when outsiders offer their followers an escape? Whenever a mage defies creation, it has a habit of punishing him for his hubris. In our story, several chantries of mages probe the limits of reality, perhaps pushing it to the brink of destruction. The very forces of creation may push back in ways they couldn't possibly anticipate. If they aren't careful, they may summon something they can't put down.

THE REDEEMED

A fateful hero stands at the center of this story — we'll call her the Redeemed. At the start of her story, she aspires to overcome a curse that has enslaved her kind for millennia. Some claim it is as old as the Biblical legend of Cain and Abel, the children of Adam and Eve. Vampires, in a vain attempt to put the horror of their existence in a context they can understand, speak of "Caine" as the first of their kind, cursed by God Himself to suffer for all eternity. Our hero is well versed in this story, for all of her kind are indoctrinated with this lore from the moment of their first Embrace.

That story is considerably different from the ones mortals tell. In countless legends of vampires, the act

that creates such a monster is one of damnation. Vampirism bestows "immortality," but with a terrible price: the need to feed on the blood (or souls) of lesser creatures. In certain legends, the forces of righteousness repel the vampire. Whether represented by the sight of the Christian cross, or some other manifestation of "true faith," it should vary from one story to another.

Humanity has accumulated strange tales about the Damned, desperately trying to define what they have glimpsed in darkness. In some legends, vampires are the result of a divine curse, perhaps as punishment for an atrocity the vampire committed while alive. In other myths, vampirism may be bestowed by malefic, infernal or demonic powers—all who feed on blood are servants of these dark powers. Whether tormented by angels or demons, the hope of Heaven lies outside this monster's grasp; he must suffer for all eternity without the hope of redemption. Perhaps his destruction may bring about his own oblivion... or perhaps it is the beginning of an eternity in Hell.

The Redeemed defy all these speculations. Real vampires are acquainted with personal horror, watching as their former lives erode and vanish piece by piece. It is the result of a personal choice, one made by the vampires who chose them to share in their curse. For Kindred and Cainites alike, it is a legacy passed from an existing vampire to a chosen victim. The victim must be killed—drained completely of her blood—and then, as the victim dies, nourished with a taste of the vampire's vitae blood. He becomes her sire; she becomes his child. It is a matter of circumstance, or if one dares to say so, a quirk of fate.

No God intervened; no higher power passed judgment. When the Redeemed became entangled in this Embrace, she may have pleaded for her master's power, or she may have been oblivious. Her sire may have punished her for some real or imagined slight, or he may honestly have thought of it as a gift. But what fate awaits her when that backhanded immortality comes to an end? What happens when a vampire's soul—so obviously extant, scrutinized by so many supernatural talents—when that creature is destroyed? Does some dark fate await, is it consigned to oblivion, or was it shattered at the time of her Embrace? For those who have heard this story countless times before, still more questions wait to be answered.

Redemption offers the answers.

And once it is found, another question must follow: Can other Kindred follow the path to redemption? This book offers up several initiates who will risk everything

to blaze this trail. Or if you like, your players may offer up one of their own. Redemption offers a faint ray of hope in a World of Darkness. Consider the horrors that lie ahead, that hope may be all that will sustain them.

THEME

One of the themes of this book is hope. As the saying goes, darkness cannot exist without light. One casts the other into sharp relief, defining and defying its opposite. As Gehenna approaches, the world will plunge into darkness, but if all of creation is destined to spiral toward annihilation, there must be some hope of escape. Without it, there is no free will, no point in going on. No matter how we tell this story, our heroes are doomed and the outcome is ultimate defeat. The Redeemed is one soul who has triumphed over evil, and her fate will inspire or condemn all who hope to follow her example. Perhaps she may even delay that catastrophe—or avert it entirely.

MOOD

Depending on your preference, the mood of this chronicle can be conspiratorial, philosophical, or Lovecraftian. By conspiratorial, we mean that a vast network of mages and Kindred have allied to bring about one vampire's redemption. One approach to this book is to have your protagonists unravel the web of this conspiracy strand by strand... until they reach the center, and realize the monstrous truth that lies there. The first act of redemption will send tremors not only through this web of lies, but throughout the world. Follow any one of these conspiracies, from one contact or conspirator to the next, and you'll find the madman or visionary at the center who seeks the power to change not just one soul, but the world.

When we say philosophical, we mean that this story is about more than mere physical conflicts, like killing vampires of a rival sect or draining mortals of their blood. The events of this book may challenge the character's ideas and ideals. One cathartic event will soon refute all the characters know, and we encourage you to have them reconsider that world. Religious implications, political repercussions and scholarly outrage result. Whether the protagonists of your chronicle are aspiring elders or Traditional scholars, all who bear witness to this act of redemption will find their ideas and politics called into question. They may join the conspiracy seeking it, or form their own to stop all who would dare take such risks. If the Ritual of the Red Sign cannot be stopped, then the troupe's characters will have to deal with the consequences of this event.

LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR

Vampires scheme in the center of these conspiracies, but they are only one half of our story. To achieve the impossible, and make redemption a reality, they will need allies who can defy reality. The mages of this story must gather arcane lore, defying the laws of Man and God to shatter the boundaries between worlds. For them, this chronicle not only requires extensive conspiracies and agonizing debates of philosophy — the dominant mood throughout the mages' sections of this book is Lovecraftian.

This word has been in the vocabulary of horror fans for decades. The American horror writer H.P. Lovecraft (1880-1937) crafted a series of tales defining the Cthulhu Mythos, a dark world in which cosmic powers were destined to annihilate humanity and all creation. Just as the Antediluvians are fated to rise, the Elder Gods of Lovecraft's stories are prophesied to return "when the stars are right." They exist outside human sanity and reason; they cannot be defined, for encountering them can drive a man beyond madness. The World of Darkness concerns personal horror, but as the End Times advance, it must deal instead with how these tortured souls handle more cosmic horrors. The fact that cosmic

forces can exist outside human understanding challenges not only the boundaries of our knowledge, but our sanity as well. Only a few idealists, armed with resolve and insight, can hold these forces at bay. Ancient rituals and dusty tomes offer the rituals and reasons behind this hopeless world. In a truly Lovecraftian story, most of the heroes die horribly or go insane. **The Red Sign** is not intended to have the "body count" or mental attrition many attribute to Lovecraftian stories and adventures, but it does challenge the very structure of the world, promising redemption and madness in equal measure. The supernatural investigators of your story — whether mages, vampires, or mere mortals — must decide how to tilt the balance.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In this book, we'll build up to this impossible event step by step.

Chapter One is written from a Vampire player's point of view, bringing you ideas, stories, and events that can lead up to a vampire's redemption. It describes



in great detail the largest conspiracy of vampires (and related creatures) that is close to finding redemption, one led by Ambrogino Giovanni.

Chapter Two is for **Mage** players, suggesting movements and philosophies that realize this one cathartic event. As a companion to the previous chapter, it details the largest and most successful conspiracy of mages pursuing this goal, one led by a rogue technocrat trained by the New World Order.

Chapter Three describes the Ritual of the Red Sign, offering various ways to either define it broadly or break it down in mechanistic detail. It addresses the story from a more holistic view, describing many types of conspiracies seeking redemption — along with the potential consequences of their actions.

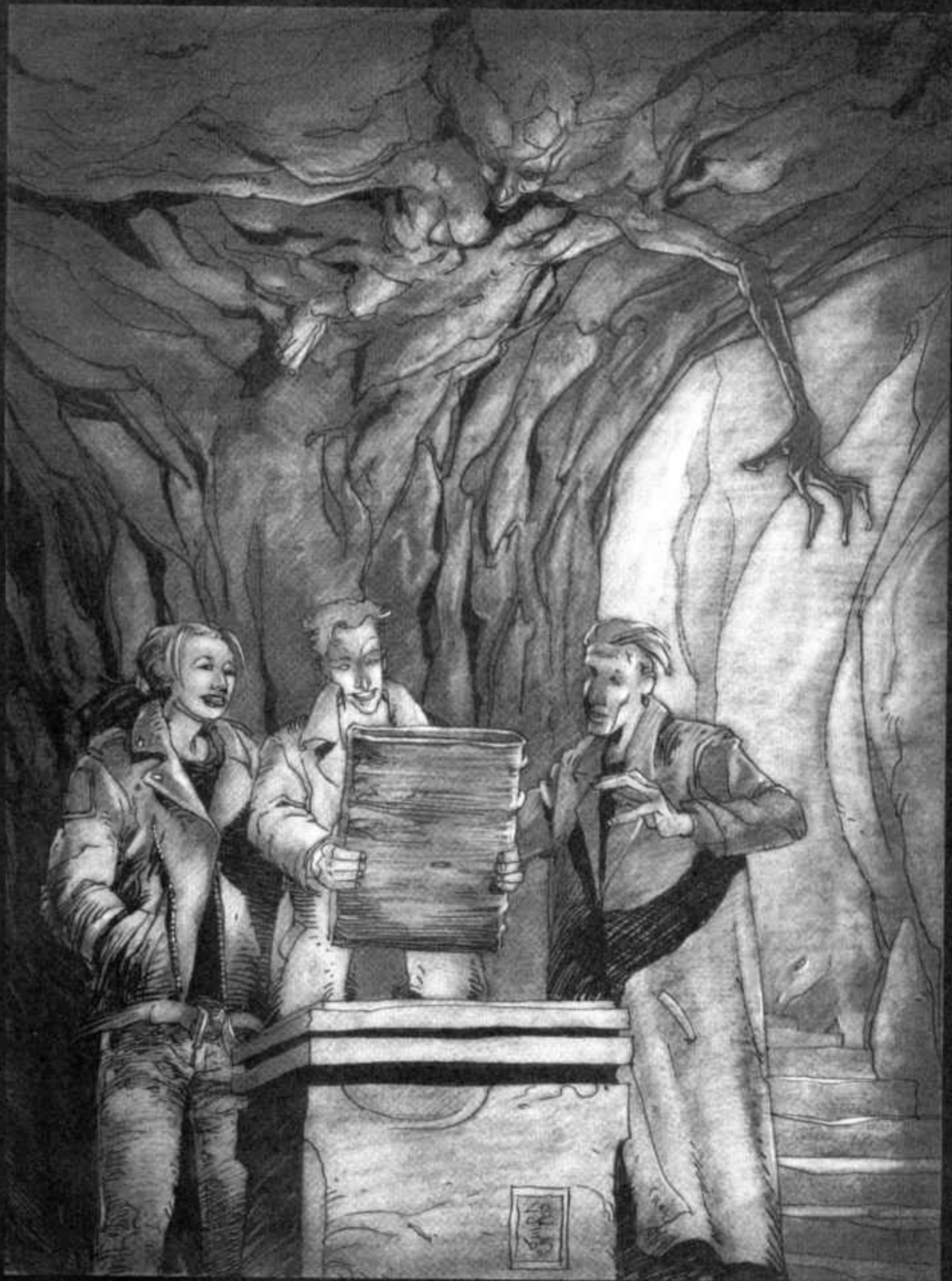
Chapter Four offers statistics and backgrounds for the characters who compose these conspiracies. You may bring in them into your game as complex coterie and chantries, or you may use them as tools to advance the story in your own preexisting chronicle.

Chapter Five gathers the ideas of the previous four chapters together, showing Storytellers various ways to bring them into their chronicles. This isn't an epic "backstory" your characters must watch from a distance. We'll show you ways to get your coterie or cabal closely involved, and we'll offer you a host of options for unraveling this web of intrigue in your existing chronicle.

MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN

This book ends with a discussion of how societies of vampires and mages may be affected should the ritual actually succeed. Redemption is more than simply returning flesh to life. The soul, the spirit — something ephemeral and unquantified has prevented the ritual from being performed before now. You must ultimately decide: Is the Redeemed merely a man... or has the fact that he has returned from a lengthy and torturous existence as a vampire made him more than mortal? Has his soul been purified... or has some oversight created a monster lurking in a human form? We offer choices; you decide the truth. The future of the World of Darkness lies in your hands.







CHAPTER ONE: AN UNDEAD EVIL (VAMPIRES)

*Goddamn this master race
that we're born in
Goddamn this howling wolf
that we're serving
- New Model Army, "Master Race"*

"You say that you have news of our wayward brother, Ambrogino?"

Silvio nodded, swallowing as he did. He hated giving reports to Luna Giovanni. The woman was a dried-up old hag, who almost looked her true age of four centuries and change.

"It would seem that he has fallen in with a group of mages. He has also put together some sort of cabal of powerful vampires, Camarilla, Sabbat and unaligned. They appear to be working toward some sort of grand ritual designed to reverse the Embrace."

"My, my," the ancient mummy sitting in front of him clucked. "This does sound most interesting."

"Yes, old one," Silvio agreed, suppressing a shudder.

For a time, there was silence. Luna seemed to be contemplating something. Then: "We will send Benedict to protect Ambrogino. After all, dealing with mages and whatnot can be quite dangerous."

"He will not like that."

"He will not refuse." That statement carried a core of steel in it. "He will accept Benedict as his bodyguard or he

will be called back to Venice to answer for his actions. I am sure that he would like that even less."

"He will know that we are watching him. He will be careful what he says or does around Benedict. And he will try to eliminate him."

"Of course he will. However, Benedict will only be our most obvious spy. We have other resources at our disposal. And in the end, Benedict is expendable."

Silvio nodded. He knew that, in the end, so was he.

"We will watch from a distance. Should Ambrogino fail, only he will suffer the consequences. Should he succeed, it will be easy for us to step in and seize control. Should he die, well, then we will finally be rid of him." There was a pause. "You are dismissed. Put together a report on those vampires with whom Ambrogino associates and continue to keep an eye on him."

After Silvio had left the room, Luna leaned back, shaking slightly. Being possessed by her grandsire always weakened her. She wondered what had been so important in Silvio's report that it required the personal attention of Augustus, but she decided that she was better off not knowing.

Vampires are cursed.

Caine was cursed by God to wander the Earth in eternity, and his offspring are cursed with the Beast inside, with undeath, to watch all they love and hold dear wither and die. They are denied the light of the sun, the taste of good food, the pleasure of sex, the feeling of their heart beating within their chest. Darkness and damnation is all the world holds for them.

Of course, in these modern nights, only a very few young Licks really think like that. God is dead and nobody really believes that the tales of Caine and Abel and the angels of the Lord are anything but stories designed to explain the unknown. None is bound to any fate but that which they make for themselves. With the nights of the city lit by neon signs and streetlights, who cares about the sun? And are deathlessness and powers beyond mortal ken not payment enough for the loss of a beating heart? Is the sensual rush of bloodletting not ample replacement for food and sex? Certainly, too many vampires, be they Kindred, Cainite or something else, think so.

They are fools.

This "immortality" is not a gift and the powers granted by the state of undeath are but a reminder of the truth; that the race of Caine is forever and always cursed.

There are those who seek a release from this curse. Those who look for an alternative to the blind acceptance of damnation, who desire a return to the mortal life they once held. For as long as humans have searched for immortality, some vampires have, ironically, searched for the ability to become mortal once again. This search stretches back through the eons, to the very first whispers of the fabled state of Golconda. For millennia, this was a lonely road to walk, something attempted by a lone vampire or a tiny group dedicated to the single goal of defeating His curse.

But no longer.

A conspiracy has risen among the race of Caine, a group of vampires united in a single, apocryphal goal—to unlock the secret of the vampiric curse and find a way to restore life to the undead. It is a blasphemous and perhaps impossible goal, true, but one for which many vampires stand ready to risk their souls and defy God Himself.

AN ENDLESS QUEST

The search for a return to life is probably as old as the first vampires. Stories tell us that one of the mythical 13 Antediluvians, commonly called Saulot, quested far into the East in order to find a way to defeat the curse that had been placed upon him, and that he returned with many secrets, among them the key to Golconda.

Through the ages, many vampires have, for one reason or another, tried to return to at least a semblance of their former selves and more than a few have tried to reverse the curse altogether. Rumors, stories and half-told tales of both success and spectacular failure permeate Kindred society even in these modern nights, though most such stories are told as cautionary tales to warn those who would delve into mysteries best left undisturbed.

Yet, despite warnings and seemingly insurmountable odds, there are still those who, for various reasons, try to undo the Embrace. For some, this is a personal quest of redemption, fueled by a genuine desire to return to that which they once were. Others are driven by curiosity, that very human instinct that has killed far more than just the cat. Then there are those who hope for power by learning how to transform a vampire back into a mortal. A few of the searchers are insane (or at least appear thus to others) and some are bored and jaded, believing that learning this final secret might bring some passion and excitement back into their unives. Whatever the reason, there always have been vampires who tried to challenge the status quo of their existence. Many were the ways employed by those who sought to undo or lessen the curse. The search for the state of Golconda was chief among those. However, blood sorcerers among the Kindred looked to their rituals and spells for a solution, while others delved into ancient tomes and went in search of stone tablets whereupon soul-altering secrets were reportedly revealed. And then there were those who went in search of artifacts of great power or of places of mystery and magic, hoping that these would aid them in their quest.

For several millennia, this was something generally undertaken by either a single, questing vampire or by a small group. No great gathering of vampires ever united in order to try and unlock the mystery that is the vampiric condition. However, this changed with the ascension of Clan Tremere.

THE TREMERE PROJECT

In the 11th century, a house of mortal wizards did the exact reverse of what so many vampires had tried throughout the ages; fueled by a desire for immortality in the face of waning magical power, they turned themselves into vampires. The ramifications of this deed echoed through vampiric society, but this was nothing compared to the shock that hit the newly made clan itself. The Tremere found their magic warping and changing and they lost much of the power they had possessed when they had been mortal. Almost immediately, the leader of the House of Tremere assigned some of the most learned members of his house to determine why this was so. They soon surmised that truly powerful magic required a living soul to fuel it and becoming a

vampire destroyed this potential. Also, many members of this new clan slowly realized just how much they had given up in their quest for immortality. And so, the Tremere undertook a project, dedicated to figuring out how to reverse the process.

However, this project quickly faded into the background, as Clan Tremere was forced to struggle for survival. Other things took precedence and it was only with the forming of the Camarilla, and the relative stability that this promised for the clan, that the project could once again be approached with anything resembling real dedication. Etrius himself took an interest and appointed one of his children to lead the project. This effort received support from the top echelons of the Tremere pyramid and is without a doubt the largest and most intense effort to understand and alter the vampiric curse, spanning more than 500 years of research, magical experiments and collection of both artifacts and tomes. Less than a century after the reinvigoration of the project, other matters became more important, but those Tremere involved kept on, with the approval of the most powerful members of the clan. Hundreds of Tremere have been involved through the project's history, though most of these unknowingly. The number of Tremere working on the project itself is rather small, but they number some rather potent and influential Kindred who are able to command the assistance of those lower in the pyramid. In the most recent years, the Tremere have taken to experimenting on thin-blooded vampires in addition to their other efforts, but all in all, surprisingly little headway has been made. As one frustrated Tremere expressed it: "It is as if there is some greater force working against us. As if something doesn't want us to solve this riddle."

So far, the Tremere project has been mainly magical in nature. Those involved have studied the results of Kindred doing scientific research into the nature of vampires (like the illustrious Dr. Netchurch), but since it was a magical ritual that transformed the original Tremere from mortals into vampires, most of those involved with the project believe that blood sorcery is the answer to reversing the process of the Embrace.

The main reason for the Tremere's desire to find a way to reverse the Embrace is the hope that this will allow those of their members who were wizards before to once again wield their potent magic. As the Final Nights draw near and signs of Gehenna are whispered to occur with alarming frequency, the Tremere are determined to seize all opportunities to increase their power, hopefully before it's too late.

GOLCONDA

For those who believe it impossible to ever return to their lost lives, or who believe it to be a step on the way



to returning, the state of Golconda is desirable. This state of being, described sometimes as a balance with the Beast, sometimes as a denial of it, is considered nothing but an empty dream by some and a quest akin to the search for the Holy Grail by others. Certainly, many vampires have heard of a vampire who has met someone who had talked to a vampire who had reached Golconda, but little in the way of hard facts corroborates it. However, most sources seem to agree that Golconda lessens the grip that the Beast has on a Kindred's soul. It is also clear that the path to Golconda is a hard and difficult road to walk. Still, there are always seekers of this elusive state.

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE QUEST

There will always be vampires who, for some reason or another, want to return to what they once were. While most give up, adjust or commit suicide rather quickly, enough questing vampires continue their searches out there that opinions have formed in the various sects and clans.

THE CAMARILLA

It is ironic that, while the Camarilla "party line" is that vampires should call themselves Kindred and cultivate their connection to humanity, the general opinion among those in power in the Camarilla is against any attempt at returning to that humanity.

Some of this undoubtedly stems from ancient members who still remember the customs that applied to the nights before the Camarilla, where any attempt to undo the curse of Caine was considered heresy. However, much of it also stems from fear — fear of what a rival could do with the power to turn a vampire into a human. The mighty lords of the Camarilla shiver at the thought of their enemies wielding such a potent weapon against them. A third concern is the Masquerade — a mortal with all the knowledge about Kindred society and history (and weaknesses) that a Kindred would possess is not something that many Kindred are keen on seeing.

Those Kindred who express an interest in the possibility of becoming mortal again are usually mocked by their elders and told that it is a fool's errand. More persistent searches into these forbidden secrets might find themselves steered away more or less gently, while those who seem to have some hope of actually succeeding might be "disappeared." Needless to say, the Tremere keep their research into the possibility of reversing the Embrace very secret. Of course, the same can be said for almost every other Tremere project.

THE SABBAT

It probably comes as no surprise that the Sabbat considers this whole subject perverse and any member of the Sword of Caine who seems interested in the possibility is a target for insults at best, and violence at worst.

Of course, there are those among the Sabbat who have considered the offensive potential of anything that could turn a vampire back into a mortal. However, these Cainites have also realized that the cost and effort that would be involved in such a project makes it far too expensive when compared to mass Embraces and brain-washed fanatics.

In short, those few among the Sabbat who are genuinely interested in discovering a way to return to life operate in even more secrecy than their Camarilla counterparts.

THE INDEPENDENT CLANS

It is extremely rare for any Follower of Set or Giovanni to want to become mortal again. The Setites usually chose their childer carefully and do their best to indoctrinate them after the Embrace, teaching them that their new condition brings them closer to their dark god. The Setites view other vampires' attempts with interest, however, and it is not unheard of for a Setite to offer help to someone questing for their lost humanity. The result is seldom what the poor vampire was hoping for.

The Giovanni are usually just as careful as the Followers of Set, if not even more so, when it comes to selecting childer. Also, the childe-to-be is generally informed of what is about to happen prior to that actual Embrace and many of them know about vampires before being considered for the Embrace. This means that there is less of a shock connected to the transition and that a newly made childe can more easily adjust to her new condition. In addition, the clan's fixation on death greatly helps its members adjust to being undead. Where the Giovanni sometimes run into trouble is with their more catholic members. Those few who maintain a strong belief even in the face of the family's degenerate practices will sometimes decide that their only hope of redemption is a return to mortality. Such members are usually watched with curiosity, and any significant results they make are added to the knowledge of whoever supervises the surveillance.

Among the Assamites, a desire to return to mortality is rare, but far from unheard of. Muslim members are often told that the Qur'an once had a passage that promised vampires the same redemption offered the djinn. The teachings of loyalty to Haqim generally drive any desire for humanity out of those who believe them. However, there are still some who desire to undo the curse. Previously, these seekers were ignored unless their actions caused trouble for more powerful members of the clan, but Ur-Shulgi seems to consider the rejection of the blood of Haqim something of a personal insult.

It is unlikely that there are any Ravnos left who have time to quest for mortality. The disaster that hit the clan still echoes deeply in the remaining members.

Should any take up the search, it will probably go unnoticed by those left, and remain the intensely personal matter it is to most other Kindred.

RUMORS OF POWER

For those vampires seeking a return to humanity, many rumors circulate regarding people, places and items that could potentially aid them in their search. However, like rumors of Golconda, the Antediluvians and other myths and legends of the Kindred, these tales are sketchy at best, with much more rumor than verifiable fact.

- **The Gem of Golconda:** This large, oval diamond in an archaic cut is said to have come from India in ancient times, when almost all of the world's available diamonds were mined on that sub-continent. Rumors say that a vampire carrying this diamond on his person no longer needs to use blood to awaken every night, but instead only every week. However, it is also said that the possessor will be drawn toward the Path of Humanity and those already on it will feel moral impulses stronger than before.

- **The Book of the Living:** In ancient Egypt, important people were buried with a so-called *Book of the Dead*, which was an instruction in how to navigate the Underworld. Persistent rumors abound about a "Book of the Living" or "Book of Life," which purportedly contains several secrets of resurrection and revival known to Egyptian wizards. Some speculate, however, that this is merely a rumor started by the Setites in order to prey on those seeking a return to mortal life.

- **The Holy Grail:** Most vampires just laugh when the Holy Grail is mentioned. It is a myth, they say, like the myth that vampires are the cursed spawn of Caine. A few elders, however, recall a rumor from the Middle Ages: a rumor about a knightly order of vampires said to possess the Grail and to practice a so-called "Grail Embrace," which is whispered to alleviate the eternal hunger that vampires suffer and bring the person who is given it closer to God.

- **The Well of Mirth:** Ever since the Middle Ages, some members of Clan Malkavian have considered this well, located in the Teutoburger Forest in the north of Germany, to be a holy site. In small doses, the waters have hallucinogenic properties, but rumors say that a vampire drinking deeply from the well will revert to being a mortal again, either for days, weeks, months or permanently, depending on tale. Those who seek out the well seldom return however, and it is whispered that ancient Malkavians guard the magical waters with the aid of faeries and less knowable allies.

- **Teotihuacán:** When the Aztecs found this city, it was abandoned, but strangely untouched by time. They did not settle, as rumors about strange gods and

ghosts roaming the city persuaded them to move on. Much later, archaeologists have been at a loss to adequately explain why this city, which at its height would have rivaled Rome at its peak, was empty when the Aztecs arrived. Historically interested members of the Sabbat have examined certain findings and carvings, however, and have found what they believe to be representations of vampires, mage-priests, magical rituals and the sun. They believe that the Tlacique bloodline (which the Sabbat supposedly exterminated) or the priests of Teotihuacán might have known certain rituals that could either turn a vampire into a mortal or at least allow them to walk in the sun. Such rituals apparently required human sacrifice.

- **Cathayans:** The strange, enigmatic vampires of the Middle Kingdom talk about chi and the balance of the cold Yin chi of death and the hot Yang chi of life. The Children of Caine, they say, are strongly Yin-imbalanced, far removed from the chi of life. According to the Cathayans, a vampire who is Yang-imbalanced would be much closer to a mortal. Those Kindred who have looked into this have noted that Cathayans described as Yang-imbalanced are, indeed, warm to the touch and without any pallor. As such, some of those who search for a return to life have tried learning from Cathayans or experimenting on them. Talk of strange jade objects that, supposedly, should be able to channel Yang chi into the owner also occasionally arises among these would-be Sinophiles.

- **The Thin-Blooded:** In these final nights, some vampires' Blood is so weakened that they are hardly vampires at all. They can walk about in daylight with far less chance of burning to death than those of stronger blood, and they seem to be able to consume food — some talk assigns the thin-blooded with even being able to bear children. Thus, it is hardly any surprise that Kindred who seek to learn how to return a vampire to his mortal state take a strong interest in the thin-blooded. This usually takes the form of experimenting on one or more unfortunate high-generation vampires.

- **Demons:** It seems a fact that demons exist and that they are more than willing to make pacts with the Children of Caine for their souls. More than one story circulates about distraught vampires turning to the infernal in order to reclaim their mortality. Almost all of these stories, however, are distinctly Faustian, and are cautionary tales rather than suggestions.

A CONSPIRACY OF SINNERS

It has been mentioned that the quest for a way to return a vampire to the mortal state of being is a lonely



road. The Tremere project represents the only significant group effort toward this goal. Or at least, it was so until a few years ago.

Recently (quite recently, as vampires reckon time), a secret cabal of vampires has sprung up, a conspiracy across the boundaries of sect and clan. A group united in a single goal — unlocking the secret of God's Curse, defying Him and finding a way to reverse the Embrace. And this group just might succeed where others have failed because of one important fact: They have mages on their side.

Most vampires have only heard rumors about mages. They are said to be very powerful, with spells that can literally rewrite reality. As such, it is conceivable that powerful mages might be able to undo the Embrace and return a vampire to her former state. However, mages have their own agendas and their own goals. Although not as antagonistic toward vampires as Lupines, mages nonetheless keep their distance from the Children of Caine, who are wise to repay in kind. As such, it is easy to understand why there has been no "team-up" of mages and vampires in the past. And it does raise the question, why would mages involve themselves in Kindred affairs and help vampires undo the curse? (The answer to this question can be found in Chapter Two.)

THE BIRTH OF A CONSPIRACY

On the vampiric side, the conspiracy began with a number of disappearances, kidnappings of certain vampires by what appeared to be a group of technologically inclined mages who were, apparently, interested in experimenting with vampires. However, the conspiracy itself was not really born until Ambrogino Giovanni, a well-known scholar and searcher after magical lore, came into contact with one of the mages. Ambrogino's actions had drawn the attention of this mage and the two met when the mage decided to reveal his plans of constructing a ritual that could reverse the Embrace to the rogue Giovanni. Ambrogino was intrigued by the possibility of such a project actually succeeding, not because he was at all interested in returning to mortal life, but because the power represented by such a ritual was too much for him to pass up. He put his immense knowledge of vampires and the occult at the disposal of the project and volunteered to organize a group of vampires that would help finance that project and provide insight into the nature of vampires, as well as test subjects, artifacts and tomes that might prove useful.

Ambrogino immediately set his rather large network of contacts to work seeking out vampires from all clans who might have some sort of interest in supporting the creation of this ritual, as well as calling in favors and boons owed to him by various vampires. At first, he

passed it off as merely a theoretical question, an experiment carried out only in thought. If a person showed interest, Ambrogino met with them in person, little by little revealing more of his plans. His goal was first and foremost to ally himself with powerful members of both the Sabbat and the Camarilla. Although subtle, it was not long before Ambrogino was able to meet with a few prominent Kindred and Cainites and gradually draw them out on the subject of returning to life. Some vampires expressed interest, others indifference and a few seemed shocked at the very concept. In the end, Ambrogino was able to establish a small but powerful and influential cabal. He set himself up as head coordinator (being intelligent enough to know not to call himself the leader of the conspiracy), as well as chief liaison to the mages.

However, something has happened that Ambrogino is less than happy about. Somehow, one or more of the powerful members of the clan residing in Venice have gotten wind of his current endeavor and has sent a bodyguard for him, a certain Benedict Giovanni. Ambrogino recognizes Benedict as the spy that he is and knows that Benedict has, on numerous occasions, acted as an assassin for the clan. So far, Ambrogino fears to do anything but accept Benedict's "protection," but he has hatched several plans to remove this unwanted guardian.

Currently, the conspiracy is a small, core group of very diverse vampires who, for one reason or another, have joined the cause of unraveling God's curse. All of them have their own agendas, as is always the case with the Children of Caine, but for the moment, they seem able to work together in order to see the ritual through to its completion.

THE HEART OF THE CONSPIRACY

Three Kindred stand at the center of the vampiric side of the conspiracy. One of these is Ambrogino Giovanni. He is an old and powerful vampire whose ambition and lust for power has driven him since from before his Embrace. He has all but divorced himself from the elders of his clan, instead pursuing his own inscrutable goals. Ambrogino is involved in the whole thing out of sheer desire for power and knowledge. He cares little for the supposed curse of God, the ramifications of what the conspiracy is about to attempt or anyone involved but himself. While Ambrogino is intelligent, shrewd and knowledgeable, he is also overconfident and a bit too clever for his own good. He has plans to screw over everyone else involved and fully believes that he can outmaneuver any vampire or mage who gets in his way.

Ambrogino's main contribution, in addition to being the instigator of his side of the conspiracy, is to act

as a liaison between the various factions involved in the conspiracy. He also contributes funds and knowledge, as well as putting his own considerable magical skills to use. Finally, he is involved in organizing various digs and expeditions for artifacts and tomes of lore.

Natacha Dimitriva Radocara is the second central figure in the conspiracy. She is a Ventrue and the current primogen of that clan in St. Petersburg and a very influential Kindred. After the Shadow Curtain fell in Russia, she moved quickly and decisively in securing St. Petersburg for the Camarilla, with the help of several top members of the sect and, according to rumors, the approval of the Inner Circle. She has extensive contacts among the movers and shakers of the Camarilla in Europe and Russia, a lot of influence over Kindred and mortal affairs in her part of the world and a great deal of status. She was one of the first Kindred to respond when Ambrogino carefully sent out feelers. After meeting with the rogue Giovanni, she became the chief Camarilla member of the conspiracy and began cultivating contacts among Ivory Tower luminaries all over the world.

Her fellow conspirators believe that Natacha is involved in the conspiracy for much the same reasons as Ambrogino: ambition and lust for power. In reality, however, she has a combination of apocryphal curiosity and the boredom of the ages. She is truly curious to see if the Embrace can be undone and what the result will be, and it is something to occupy her. She revels in the secret conspiracy, hidden from the leaders of the Camarilla and taking place right under their noses in some cases.

Natacha contributes to the conspiracy in many ways. First and foremost, she is a financier, putting her vast fortune at the conspiracy's disposal. She is also recognized as the leader, or possibly CEO or Chairman of the Board, of the Camarilla side of the conspiracy. Also, her contacts within the ranks of the archons and among various princes and primogen have helped the conspiracy in several ways, from increased secrecy to gaining more members. Finally, she is able to supply test subjects by having her city's scourge and sheriff round up thin-blooded and unwanted Kindred and handing them over to either Ambrogino and the mages or those vampire thaumaturges that work for the conspiracy.

The last of the central vampires is the Lasombra Percival, the Archbishop of Guadalajara. Percival is one of the Cainites heavily involved in examining the mystery of Teotihuacán (see above). In fact, Percival was so obsessed with unlocking the mysteries surrounding the ruined city that he was rarely found in his city, instead letting a council of bishops govern the Cainite affairs there. Percival and Ambrogino knew of each other before the conspiracy, as Percival had contracted Ambrogino's help from time to time. Ambrogino be-

lieved that the idea of constructing a ritual to reverse the Embrace would appeal to Percival and he was quite right. Percival joined the conspiracy as soon as Ambrogino offered the possibility.

Others believe that Percival is involved because of the dual purposes of academic interest and the desire to add a new weapon to the Sabbat's arsenal. In fact, Percival cares nothing for the Sabbat. His interest, however, is quite real and much more than academic. Percival is insane and believes himself to be on a grand quest. Before the conspiracy, he had only a vague idea what this quest was, but he believed that Teotihuacán held the answer. When Ambrogino guardedly revealed his plans to let a group of mages attempt to defeat God's curse, Percival's insanity blossomed and he knew he had his purpose. Like the Holy Grail, this ritual would be a worthy quest for him. Percival has only a hazy idea of what he will do when, and if, the ritual works, but for now, the quest is all that matters.

Percival's contribution to the conspiracy is much like Natacha's: leading his fraction, hiding the conspiracy and its purpose from prying eyes of higher-ranked vampires and financing, though he cannot approach the resources and influence that Natacha commands. Percival is also involved in arranging digs (particularly in Teotihuacán, though Ambrogino believes this to be a dead end), acquiring books and artifacts and in supplying test subjects, especially thin-blooded ones taken from the swelling Cainite populations of Guadalajara and Mexico City.

Ambrogino, Natacha and Percival are recognized as the de facto leaders of the conspiracy. However, a number of other members are almost or equally important.

Rutor is an outsider Tremere, interestingly enough quite similar to Ambrogino in his relationship with his parent clan. Rutor has long had contact with a few other rogue Tremere and this, combined with his thaumaturgical knowledge, made him a valuable addition to the conspiracy. Ambrogino and Rutor had crossed paths a few times before and with Natacha's offer of sanctuary and resources, Ambrogino was able to bring Rutor over. Although it was first a mercenary arrangement, with Rutor serving as a sorcerer-for-hire, he gradually became a more and more integral part of the conspiracy. Ambrogino doesn't trust Rutor, but he must admit that he and his fellow Tremere are a valuable resource.

Shortly after joining the conspiracy, Rutor was contacted by yet another malcontent Tremere by the name of Andrew Stuart. Andrew brought with him a great deal of occult lore and a surprising expertise in the Kindred condition. He quickly became Rutor's right hand in the project and is responsible for a good deal of the progress made. However, unknown to anyone in the

conspiracy, Andrew is in fact a servant of Etrius. He was involved in the Tremere project dedicated to finding a way to undo the Embrace, and when Etrius learned of the conspiracy (how he did so, Andrew has no idea), he chose Andrew to be an infiltrator because of his subterfuge and interpersonal skills. Andrew's orders are to assist Rutor in any way possible and to report back to Etrius. Andrew is quite loyal, but as more and more progress is made, he has felt the seed of doubt take root within him. He was quite religious in life and although he had a crisis of faith upon his Embrace, he has never doubted that vampirism is the result of God's curse on Caine. Now, with a real chance of the ritual working, Andrew wonders whether or not vampires (or mages for that matter) should really tamper with God's will.

Rutor's involvement with the conspiracy started as a purely professional relationship, but as he learned more and more about what the end goal was and saw that it was a possibility that the ritual might succeed, he took an even greater interest. Finally, Rutor decided that he wanted to become mortal again. A revenant before his Embrace, Rutor thinks that he could become significantly more powerful if returned to that state, with all his knowledge and experience intact. He has also hit upon the rather strange idea that he will become, or at least could become, a mage if made mortal again, because of the Tremere blood in him.

Rutor supplies the conspiracy with magical expertise and experiments. He has a small group of a dozen outcast and rogue Tremere, including Andrew, who work for him, either in return for money, protection, instruction or all three. Only three of these, once again including Andrew, know of the conspiracy and its final goal, the rest just carry out their experiments without asking (though not always without wondering and possibly even investigating).

Duality, a Tzimisce, is also a vital part of the conspiracy. It is a templar for Percival and a practicing *koldun*. Duality lends its Koldunic Sorcery to the conspiracy, supplying a different and more spiritual angle than that offered by Rutor and his Tremere. Interestingly enough, Rutor and Duality seem to be able to work together without ripping each other's heads off, not even verbally.

Duality is also the head of a small cult of vampires and mortals. The rest of the conspiracy believes this to be little more than a combination mystery and blood cult (and for the mortal members, this is all it really is). In reality, the cult is dedicated to bringing about Gehenna — the destruction of the old world and the creation of the new, with the cult members as central figures. Duality itself firmly believes that the Eldest of the Tzimisce clan will defeat all other Antediluvians and usher in a reign of flesh and spirit. It also believes

that the Tzimisce Eldest will not consume its childer, except for the traitors, but instead infuse them with its essence, making them more than mere vampires. In the end, the Eldest will be a god and its followers will be like angels. Duality supports the creation of the ritual because it believes that defeating the Curse of Caine will be one more step on the way to bringing about Gehenna. The members of Duality's cult, The Cult of the Revelation, work on digs and in finding occult artifacts and tomes that might be helpful. The Cainite members also help Percival in gathering test subjects. The cult has about 10 Cainite members and roughly three times that in mortal and ghoulish followers.

Finally, Philippe de Marseilles is a Toreador elder and member of the primogen of Marseilles. He is somewhat known among Europe's elders as a seeker of Golconda and this was the reason Ambrogino approached him in the first place. Philippe seemed quite interested in the possibility of restoring humanity to a vampire, and when Ambrogino explained further, Philippe instantly volunteered. In fact, Philippe has offered to be the first person upon whom the ritual is used, once it has been suitably tested. In addition to being the first real subject, Philippe is another financier, drawing upon the influence he has built up over the centuries in one of France's premiere ports.

Philippe is one of the few members of the conspiracy motivated not by a lust for power or morbid curiosity, but rather by a genuine desire to become mortal again. For more than four centuries, Philippe has sought a release from the curse inflicted upon him. He has spent a fortune seeking out clues about Golconda and has personally gone in search of places, people and items said to be able to restore a vampire's mortal life. Philippe is Christian, but he has no idea why God would curse him and he is determined to make amends. He believes that once he is mortal again, he can gain absolution and save his soul.

The conspiracy has a few other core members, mostly powerful or influential members of the Sabbat or Camarilla. Ambrogino has been careful not to involve any other Giovanni (except for Benedict, who was involved against Ambrogino's will) and he does not trust the Followers of Set or the remaining Ravnos. The conspiracy also has a few ancillae and neonate members who are often given the grunt work of participating in digs, liaising with non-conspiratorial members of the race of Caine or traveling around the world in search of artifacts and tomes of occult lore. All in all, the conspiracy has maybe 45-55 members who are fully aware of what the end goal is, though even Ambrogino is not entirely certain of the number.

Many of the members of the conspiracy are motivated by a lust for power. As is typical for vampires, they

ignore the peril in which they place their souls by tampering with God's will in the name of ambition. Like Ambrogino, they care only for whatever power that the ritual might give them. This is the greatest weakness of the conspiracy: that many of its members are determined to sell-out the rest once the ritual is completed. Interestingly enough, most of these ambitious vampires have only a vague idea of how the ritual would bring them power. They simply assume that anything that has the ability to undo something as fundamental as the Embrace must be a source of great power. Also, they seem to ignore that the mages who are involved will be central to repeating the ritual. Most of them assume that they will be able to bully or manipulate the mages into doing their bidding.

Curiosity is another strong motivator. Several Kindred of a scientific or occult bent consider this whole process deeply fascinating. In the manner of true seekers of wisdom, few of them stop to consider whether or not they should be doing what they are doing. The end justifies the means and to gain great insight, one must be willing to make great sacrifices. Most of those involved due to curiosity seek to learn more about the undead condition and the Curse of Caine. In fact, some of them seek to discover the very truths of Noddist lore. Surely, if a group of mortal mages can undo the Embrace, then it cannot be an act of God. Or so it is hoped.

Finally, some conspirators are involved because they truly seek redemption. These are Kindred who have not been able to reconcile themselves with their new existence and who are willing to risk potentially everything in order to become human again.

One thing that characterizes most of the members of the conspiracy is a tendency to be blind toward what the ritual is really supposed to do: cancel the curse God laid upon Caine and, by extension, all vampires. Most vampires have real trouble believing that Caine was truly cursed by God. Even elder vampires have to admit that the Biblical God seems less and less likely to exist in the face of the scientific evidence that seems to come along in these cynical times, and those Kindred Embraced in the last several decades have generally had a secularized upbringing. However, these Kindred ignore the fact that science also denies the existence of both magic and vampires — and that they are using magic on vampires.

A TRAITOR IN THE MIDS

Themistocles is an ancient Brujah scholar. He is known to a very few Kindred as an incredibly knowledgeable vampire who is in possession of one of the most expansive libraries in the world. Ambrogino was quite interested in bringing Themistocles into the conspiracy, in order to add the knowledge contained in his mind and library to that of the conspiracy (as well as getting

a chance to read some of the volumes himself). He approached Themistocles openly and was quite frank about what he was up to. He hoped to pique the scholar's curiosity and desire for knowledge and knew that Themistocles, being an autarkis, would have trouble exposing the conspiracy should he so desire. It seemed that Ambrogino's gamble paid off, as Themistocles, after due consideration, joined the conspiracy and put his library and expertise at its disposal.

In reality, Themistocles joined with one thing in mind: stopping the conspiracy and preventing the ritual. A deeply religious man, Themistocles believes that the Curse of Caine is laid on the physical body, which is the realm of the Demiurge or Satan, but that it cannot touch the soul, which is under the protection of God, who rules only spiritual affairs. Themistocles is horrified by the thought of developing a ritual that can reverse the Embrace. Men, and vampires, are not meant to mingle in the affairs of the Rulers of Creation. The only way a vampire can earn redemption is to remain pure in spirit, no matter how corrupt her flesh becomes. To turn a vampire back into a mortal is worse than a simple shortcut to redemption. It is to deny that vampire an opportunity to redeem herself by denying the corruption of the flesh.

Themistocles is not certain how he is going to stop the conspiracy. He searches for allies within the conspiracy, others who might have joined in order to stop it, as well as among those few contacts he has. As time grows short, he becomes more and more desperate and willing to take chances in order to prevent the ritual from being completed. In the end, Themistocles is willing to attack Ambrogino, the mages involved or any other he believes might be crucial to the success of the ritual, even if it means his own demise.

METHODS AND RESOURCES

The conspiracy crosses boundaries of both clan and sect, claiming members from the Camarilla, Sabbat, independent clans and even one or two from the anarchs. As such, communication and secrecy are especially vital. A lot of communications between members take the form of messages delivered by ghoulish couriers or relayed by independent vampires. Face-to-face talks are rare, except between conspiracy members of the same sect and even then, security is tight. Ambrogino has graciously offered the services of a few wraiths, but many members are uncomfortable with using ghosts as messengers (or who don't trust Ambrogino that much). Andrew Stuart has taught Rutor and those who work with him a ritual of communication that uses enchanted mirrors. What no one else knows is that Etrius and his servants are able to listen in on any communication done with these mirrors. Sometimes, the conspirators talk over scrambled phone

lines, using code phrases, but this is kept to a minimum for fear of exposure.

The resources that the conspiracy commands are quite impressive and not just monetary. Several Kindred (and a few Cainites) with influence in mortal society support the conspiracy. Much of the money and influence goes toward helping the mages, who are generally not as well connected as their undead partners-in-conspiracy. The rest goes toward funding the vampires' own projects.

Manpower (or neonate- and ghoulishpower) is another resource. Several of the conspiracy members have brought their childer into the conspiracy as well, or command said childer without explaining why. A large number of ghouls are also available, as many of the members are of potent enough generation to maintain a large stable. In this regard, it is primarily the Camarilla Kindred who supply the conspiracy, though Duality and its fellow Tzimisce have been able to offer the services of a handful of revenants (a few Bratovitches as guards and some Obertus researchers).

The conspiracy also has access to quite an astounding amount of books and artifacts. Themistocles' library has scrolls that are said to have been rescued from the Library of Alexandria. Ambrogino's collection of occult tomes is one of the finest outside a Tremere chantry. Andrew Stuart has managed to "borrow" some interesting books and the conspiracy has enough funds to acquire any book that can be bought. Of course, the mages involved are no slouches when it comes to tomes of magic and hidden secrets. As for artifacts, Percival has managed to unearth a small collection of ritual items from Teotihuacán and several of those conspiracy members interested in the occult donated items from their personal collection. However, the conspiracy is still organizing a number of more or less archaeological digs, expeditions and outright treasure hunts and thefts in order to procure items they feel might be of some use.

The magical resources of the conspiracy come mainly from Ambrogino, Duality and Rutor and his people. Some of the other members are blood sorcerers of some kind, including an Indian Ventrue and a Serpent of the Light with knowledge of blood magics. The conspiracy has also contracted outside help, in the form of the Setite Ankh-sen-Sutekh and the Assamite Gülcan Ostadasadli (see below).

Finally, influence in Kindred and Cainite society is a major resource for the conspiracy. Before joining the conspiracy, Natacha had cultivated a large network of contacts among high-profile Kindred, including archons, European princes and primogen, servants of the Inner Circle and even a justicar or two. She expanded this network after she joined the conspiracy and managed to bring in a few new members through it. Such a network is

a great boon for those members of the conspiracy who need to travel a lot or who are engaged in activity that might draw interest. Even more importantly, these contacts allow Natacha to procure research subjects.

Experimentation on vampires is one of the cornerstones of the conspiracy. This experimentation is mainly done on thin-blooded vampires, or on vampires whom few will miss (such as Caitiff). A few older and more powerful Kindred have also been used. These were either Autarkis or convicted of some crime against the Traditions in their city and condemned to Final Death. Natacha has used her contacts to tell a number of princes that she is willing to pay quite handsomely for any thin-blooded that their scourges are able to capture, as well as any criminal Kindred sentenced to death. Of course, thin-blooded, clanless and criminal vampires from Natacha's own domain frequently end up as research subjects. And the conspiracy numbers more than one prince and scourge among its members.

Percival, with the help of Duality, has facilitated contacts among the movers and shakers of the Sabbat. While Percival is not as influential in his sect as Natacha is in hers, he is nonetheless respected and considered a worthy member of the Sword of Caine. As such, he has been able to bring in a number of influential Cainites and deflect inquiries away from the conspiracy.

Percival is also involved in securing test subjects. He has an easier time than Natacha, since the big cities of Mexico teem with young vampires, many of them thin-blooded, Pander or both. With the help of Duality and its sect and a few members of the conspiracy who serve as templars or as members of border guard packs, Percival has been able to collect several Cainites for experimentation.

Vampires captured for tests are either handed over to the mages or to Rutor and his people. Most are given to the mages, as they are the ones who will develop the final ritual. However, Rutor and the other blood sorcerers involved in the conspiracy, sometimes including Ambrogino, are quite interested in performing magical experiments on vampires. As the Tremere found out nearly a thousand years ago, mortal magic and undead blood sorcery don't really mix, but many of the results that Rutor and his team uncover have helped the mages to better understand vampires, especially on a metaphysical level.

The conspiracy is also involved in capturing Cathayans, especially those described as Yang-imbalanced, though this is much more difficult and dangerous than snatching thin-blooded vampires. Luckily, clashes between Western vampires and Cathayans in India and, especially, the West Coast of the United States has granted the conspiracy several opportunities to kidnap a few of the Kuei-jin. Natacha has used her



contacts among the archons to be handed over to her a few prisoners of war who are no longer of any interest. In addition, the conspiracy actually has two archons as members and they have managed to secure a few assignments in Cathayan territory. Percival has it even easier — it is well known that his templar is a Tzimisce, so he has simply asked to have some captured Cathayans handed over as test subjects for Duality.

As mentioned earlier, the conspiracy is also involved in various ventures to procure artifacts and books. Some of these ventures involve the excavation of sites rumored to contain magical artifacts, some are quests to locate mystic places (such as the Well of Mirth mentioned above), while others are criminal in nature, involving looting museums and breaking into private collections. The mages get first right of refusal on any books and artifacts collected. If they don't think they will be useful, they are handed over to Ambrogino, Themistocles or Rutor.

QUESTERS AND ASSOCIATES

Although the conspiracy has a number of powerful members, it has found it necessary to recruit outside help. In addition, some vampires have become aware of the conspiracy and possibly its ultimate goal and seek to learn more.

As mentioned, Benedict Giovanni has been assigned as a bodyguard to Ambrogino by the "concerned" elders of Venice. Benedict's mission is, quite obviously, to spy on Ambrogino. He has also been instructed that he might be required to kill Ambrogino, though this is only to be attempted on direct orders. For now, Benedict merely observes and passes along names and descriptions of everyone Ambrogino meets.

Ambrogino is, of course, furious at this arrangement. However, he would be even more furious and scared were he to know the truth. Benedict is, in reality, a decoy. While Ambrogino's attention is directed toward his unwanted bodyguard, ghosts sent by Benedict's superiors spy on him. These ghosts have collected far more information than Benedict and have allowed the Giovanni to form a halfway-coherent picture of the conspiracy.

On the magical side of things, it quickly became apparent that diversity would be preferable. As mentioned, some of the members of the conspiracy supply magical techniques different from Rutor and Andrew's hermetic style (most notably Duality's Koldunic Sorcery), it was deemed necessary to include more blood magicians. Overriding Ambrogino's sharp protests, members of the conspiracy approached Ankh-sen-Sutekh, an old and powerful Follower of Set. A mercenary by trade, Ankh-sen-Sutekh is known to sell her magical skills to the highest bidder. Initially, she was merely

required to give a different perspective on the magical experiments, using her Setite sorcery. However, Rutor became impressed with her skills and put her on retainer. Although not privy to what the end result of the experiments will be, Ankh-sen-Sutekh grew curious and, using a spy network of ghouls, childer and loyal Setites, she began investigation the conspiracy. What she learned horrified her. While she cares nothing for the fates of other vampires, she is horrified at the thought of mere mortals holding the power to strip her of Set's dark destiny. For now, Ankh-sen-Sutekh seeks to learn more about the conspiracy, especially the mages involved. Once she feels she has enough information, she will act, though she is not yet sure what she will do.

Despite efforts at secrecy, the conspiracy has been discovered by someone who has the potential to cause it great harm. The Mouse is a Nosferatu antiquarian and information broker. Sitting in London in the middle of a web of contacts and informants, The Mouse learned of the conspiracy mainly by chance, when he began studying reports of archaeological expeditions by vampires, thefts from museums and the kidnapping of several neonates. Sometimes, the same names or faces popped up and the Mouse decided to learn more. Calling in favors among Nosferatu in both the Sabbat and the Camarilla, as well as sending out his own agents, the Mouse assembled a hazy picture of a group of vampires that worked together with mages toward some mutual goal. Apart from knowing that the group crosses sect boundaries and seems quite interested in maintaining secrecy, all the Mouse knows is a few names and faces. He is, however, in an excellent position to learn more and has taken steps to having one of his childer infiltrate the conspiracy. Should he learn more, he just might decide it is information worth selling.

In the first stages of the magical experimentation, Rutor brought in an acquaintance of his, a Turkish Assamite sorceress named Gülcan Ostadasadli. Rutor believed that Gülcan's particular brand of magic might be of help to the project. As it turned out, Gülcan was unable to add much to the experiments and she never became part of the conspiracy. Rutor paid her handsomely to keep his experiments a secret and then sent her on her way.

Unknown to Rutor, Gülcan has an extremely powerful spirit being as her mentor. She was contacted by this entity shortly after her Embrace and it offered to teach her the secrets of magic. Gülcan accepted and has since been advised by this being (though outside observers might say that she is being possessed by it). Apparently, this spirit has taken a great interest in the doings of the conspiracy (and knows a surprising amount about these doings) and so has ordered Gülcan to try to

reclaim Rutor's good graces. The spirit entity has taught Gülcan some rituals that might be of help and all it asks in return is that Gülcan ensures that she is present when the final ritual is being performed.

A few other vampires are either involved with the conspiracy or have learned a great deal about what they are up to and pursue investigations. Those involved are in general mercenary Kindred brought in to supply the conspiracy with talents lacked by other members, or vampires manipulated by certain members of the conspiracy, such as those scourges and sheriff who remand captive Kindred to their princes, not knowing what is to become of those Kindred.

INVESTIGATORS

With a project of such a scale, it is impossible for the conspiracy to maintain absolute secrecy. Several individuals have caught word of *something*. None of them knows any hard facts, but several people, independently of each other, are investigating the conspiracy or events caused by it.

Martin Green, a Brujah, and Janet Trenton, a Malkavian, are both archons under Anastasz di Zagreb, the Tremere justicar. They are assigned to E branch, the Camarilla equivalent of a supernatural affairs investigation unit. Here, they study occult and mystical events that defy normal explanation. While on assignment in Germany, Martin came across an escaped experiment, a neonate Caitiff who had managed to flee. This poor Kindred met with Final Death soon after, but not before Martin had managed to examine the wretched creature both physically and with Auspex, as well as listen to its ramblings. Martin investigated the local area and found an abandoned house with remnants of an occult ceremony (the conspirators had wisely abandoned the site as soon as they realized an experiment had escaped). He called upon the help of Janet Trenton, a sometime partner of his, and she was able to form a hazy psychic impression. When Martin reported his findings to his superiors, he was ordered to continue this line of investigation, along with Janet.

Martin and Janet quickly became aware of several kidnappings of predominantly young, weak-blooded Kindred with few or no ties to others. Their working theory is that someone or something is kidnapping Kindred and experimenting on them, though they have no idea why.

Their investigation goes slowly, but they have the potential to become a real threat to the conspiracy.

On the Sabbat side of things, the decentralized organization of the sect works to the conspiracy's advantage. However, a Harbinger of Skulls by the name of Mordechai Ben-Nun has taken an interest in the doings of Percival and his templar. Mordechai is himself something of an occult researcher, performing a number of experiments on both Cainites and Cathayans. He first became aware of Percival when two captured Cathayans were sent to Guadalajara instead of Detroit, where Mordechai currently makes his haven. Inquiries were made and Mordechai came to realize that Percival was up to something. He just wasn't sure what.

Although Mordechai holds no official rank in the Sabbat, he is quite respected and several Cainites are willing to do favors for him in return for instruction in occult secrets, Necromancy or the taste of Mordechai's incredibly potent blood. So far, Mordechai is merely investigating. He has, however, learned that Percival is apparently conspiring with a Giovanni, something that has made the usually cool and calm Harbinger quite hostile.

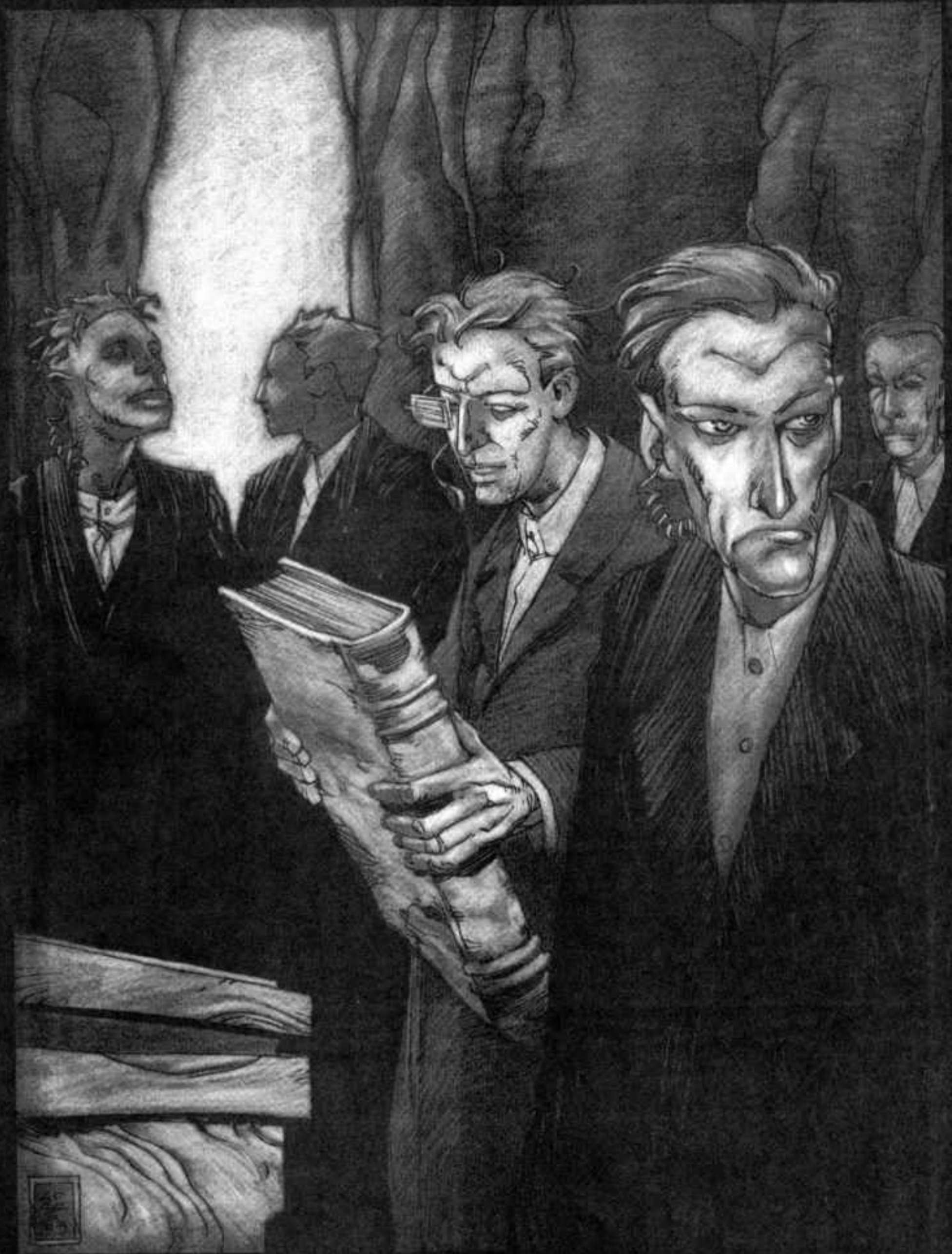
THOSE WHO WATCH

There are eyes that the conspiracy cannot hide from. Mighty vampires who sleep in the deathlike state of torpor, yet do not lie idle but observe the world through their powers. Vampires who are ancient beyond belief. Undead masters who have played the Jyhad for millennia, moving vampires like chess pieces.

Without all the fancy talk: Antediluvians.

Yes, some of the Antediluvians have taken an interest in the conspiracy's project. The possibility that anyone, be they mages or vampires, can break the Curse of Caine is an event on par with the death of the Ravnos Antediluvian — it is just as improbable that more mortals can defeat the will of God as it is that an Antediluvian would fall before anything but another vampire. Yet the Ravnos eldest has fallen and now mages tamper with the very essence of vampiric existence.

And so, some of the Antediluvians stretch out their minds and slowly manipulate events, some to prevent the success of the project, some to speed it along. Should the whole project succeed, it is a very real possibility that it would become a red sign of Gehenna, as the Antediluvians stir in their deathlike trances, feeling the ramifications of God's curse denied.





CHAPTER TWO: THE WILL AND THE WAY (MAGES)

Here is the test to find whether your mission on Earth is finished: If you're alive, it isn't.

— Richard Bach

FROM THE JOURNAL OF AGENT MANDEL

In 1978, a guy in a trenchcoat jabbed a Bulgarian playwright named Georgy Markov with the tip of his umbrella in London. Blunt as it was, that black umbrella carried a payload of death in the form of a tiny metal ball-bearing with a hole bored through it filled with a batch of ricin poison cooked up in Laboratory 12 of the Russian KGB. Before you could say "Karl Marx," Bulgaria's disco-era Shakespeare was dead on a London subway platform. Pretty absurd really. A guy writes a play, gets declared an enemy of the state because his political views don't make El Comunista happy and an international spy operation executes him with what passed for the height of technology at the time.

That's nothing. In 1978, I was coordinating special groups across half of Europe whose sole purpose was to find figures of the occult whose successes were beyond what normal people might consider possible, and to silence them. Permanently. I tried the ricin trick a few times, though I have never quite understood why some people insist that a bullet to the head in the wrong alley doesn't do the trick just as well. Me, I figured you used the fancy stuff so the general public doesn't clue in, but the experts knew to be scared. Control disagreed. Keep it quiet, they said. You mean like Georgy Markov? Control didn't like people proving them wrong, I don't think.

In 1978, my deep-felt suspicion that I knew more than any of the technicians in white lab jackets or basement politician provocateurs of intelligence services found new strength. Waiting for a train halfway across the city from Markov's final fare, I was busy trying to make a rendezvous with some Cockney lads I'd recruited to break up a ring of freaks in the Whitechapel district. Normally, I'd quietly turn something like this over to the London bobbies, via anonymous tip, but some things just aren't meant for normal people to see.

WARNING SIGNS

Since time immemorial, mankind has spawned seers and sorcerers possessed of occult wisdom and incredible power. Humanity's fear of what it does not understand has ironically forced most of these willworkers to remain as carefully hidden from view as the Kindred do. With influential sources such as the Bible proclaiming "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:18), it has long been dangerous for mages to reveal themselves to mundane society. Before the forces of Paradox grew strong, the stones and knives of the fearful and angry mob compelled the Awakened to act subtly or face reprisals. While master magicians have occasionally made great changes to the world, even they must recognize that there

are other forces at work whose attentions could prove deadly. Like the Theory of Relativity or the Theory of Gravity, many of the most significant discoveries are introductions of ideas whose concepts show others how to alter reality rather than personal efforts to directly manipulate Creation. Inspirations are not restricted to mages, of course, and it is difficult to discern which historical actions are of supernatural origin and which might spring from mortals. The fact that the willworkers often conceal their presence from the mundane world only increases the murky lack of distinction between human endeavor and magical feat.

Imagine my surprise when Mick and Paul showed up at the platform, seeing as how I'm supposed to meet the two of them in Whitechapel, two miles away. A glance told me they were under extreme stress, as both of them were pale and tense. They don't say this to agents during training, but this is when you cut your losses and run. "Hey, Mick. Hey, Paul," I greeted them, but I was pulling the plastic tip from my umbrella while I was calling out to the pair. They met me halfway across the platform, and Mick took a shot of ricin that should have stopped a herd of elephants but punched me in the jaw anyway. Didn't I tell you that sometimes a bullet to the head is better than any fancy laboratory toy? Ten seconds later, both of them were laid out on the subway platform, a fresh red eye in the center of the forehead and another opening in the chest, meanwhile I'm on the Soho west train while some terrified commuters are trying to dial the police.

Everything seemed right in the clandestine world of Operation Red-Four. Except both of those bastards showed up to bother me later. Back then, I didn't have any fancy cloak and dagger tricks for walking dead guys, but it seemed like the time to learn some.

Even if they are often shunned and their works generally unrecognized, more than a few mages have nevertheless acted as protectors of the mortals around them. Gifted with supernatural awareness, such magicians might see the spirits who reach across the Gauntlet to toy with the real world, or they might pierce the arcane camouflage of monstrous predators hiding among the herd of humanity. Possessed of control over the forces of the world, some sorcerers take action on their own. For some mages, the horror of seeing their fellow man hunted by inhuman creatures is too much to bear silently and Awakening is akin to entering a nightmare. There is nothing like catching a blood sucking fiend preying upon a helpless victim in a dark alley to jar one into righteous action against the offender. Tales of Celestial Choristers striking down devilish beasts of the night with holy fire, Sons of Ether disintegrating alien infectors with rayguns and Hermetic magi weaving powerful wards against the fallen children of Enoch are hardly unknown to the halls of Tradition chancies. Whether they truly understand what they are fighting or merely pigeonhole such threats into their own paradigm, these crusaders pit their talent with magic against the depredations of the curse of Caine.

For other mages, the certain discovery of different supernatural powers in the world is just one more step upon the road to power. If enchanted beings from past ages yet remain in the world, mages intent upon recreating the Mythic Age reason that perhaps such beings may be key to invoking the past. Those magi who crave omnipotence find that each secret they master gives them that much more control over the rest of the world. The desire for understanding goes hand in hand with the acquisition of temporal or spiritual might. Willworkers intent upon ridding the universe of elements antithetical to their paradigms seize upon examples of or knowledge about these living — or unliving — relics in order to better eradicate them. Of course any attempt to capture or control an intelligent being, particularly one with supernatural powers, is destined to cause conflict.

The Red Sign engages your players in one of those conflicts. From the time of the Inquisition, when vampires became painfully aware they were being hunted, to the Cold War era, when those Kindred near the Iron Curtain bore the brunt of attacks by armed hunters, certain mages have waged war against the Damned. In these Final Nights, the secret wars unseen by mankind have made for strange bedfellows. Never before have so many vampires joined so many mages in conspiracy against their

own kind. This book proceeds primarily from the point of view of **Vampire: The Masquerade**, yet unabashedly crosses over into full-fledged **Mage: The Ascension** territory. If you are running a **Vampire** chronicle, then you should keep themes related to **Vampire** preeminent in mind. On the other hand, if you happen to be using this book to introduce a vampire-induced apocalypse to your **Mage** chronicle, then you have come to the right place. Whichever of the games is the origin of your troupe's characters, **The Red Sign** offers a potentially uncomfortable look into the world of another supernatural being.

The *Book of Nod* predicts the Final Nights, when the Antediluvians will rise up and devour the children of Caine and bring about the end of the world. For thousands of years, this dark bible has served as a dire warning of Gehenna. Much of modern vampire society refuses to acknowledge the book as anything more than fables, but they remain victims of the fear it has engendered. Each time terrible things have befallen the world, Kindred have wondered if they might join their mortal herds in tragedy. The fall of the Second City, said to be Babylon by some, ended any real hope of Kindred and mortals dwelling together in peace. The sack of Rome demonstrated that the mass of humanity had grown beyond vampires' control. The Inquisition proved that the Damned were not safe should mortals be provoked. Renaissance achievements showed that mankind could challenge supernatural might with Science. A pillar of fire rising over a desert of western America announced that a new order would consume the world. The warning signs of the end times sprang from the very herds upon which the Kindred feed, and such signs cannot be ignored.

A NEW WORLD ORDER

Vampires have been around since Biblical times. Many Kindred consider themselves the height of the food chain, like the common mortal conception of themselves. With years turning into decades and centuries of feeding upon mankind, it is easy to come to think of the teeming masses of humanity as nothing more than witless cattle. Yet, the creative spirit of Man has not rested and the firepower that the mortal herd could bring to bear should Kindred reveal their presence has become apocalyptic in scope. With the blinding revelation of nuclear potential, only the foolish and the mad can ignore the growing threat of the most dangerous prey. Unfortunately, Kindred society has no shortage of fools and madmen.

As the fear of atomic destruction gripped the world's population, tensions rose higher and higher, yet were accompanied with a fatalistic understanding that the most dangerous enemies could no longer be conquered upon the battlefield. Instead of exchanging mortar rounds, the great world powers began to trade diplomatic ploys. Rather than overrun antagonistic armies in massed formations, clandestine intelligence organizations mastered sophisticated games of seduction, lies, bribery and secrets. Unable to bayonet an opponent squarely in battle, they turned to the silencer in an unlit alley. Harnessing the power of gods, humanity ironically turned to the same strategies as their undead predators. The Masquerade. The Cold War.

The world quietly, and sometimes not so quietly, reorganized according to back room deals, mutual defense agreements, treaties of convenience and warring ideals. Cryptic names emerged as the leaders of a new era: UN, CIA, KGB, NATO, NSA and the Warsaw Pact. Aligned according to powerful beliefs as to the best method of governing mankind and immense efforts to demonstrate cultural superiority, the nations and people of the Earth were manipulated as though they were pieces upon a chessboard. Although the primary champion of republican democracy, the United States, and the predominant proponent of communism, the Soviet Union, never engaged directly in warfare, many of the policies and practices of the world twisted around their conflict. While there are no significant parallels between the ideologies of the contenders, scholars of Kindred can certainly see the parallels between humanity's Cold War and the polarization of Kindred society by the struggle between the sects of the Camarilla and the Sabbat. In both cases, political entities relatively young to the world managed to capture so much global dominance that only their counterpart seemed to present a solid threat.

One of the most dangerous features of this new world order, for the Kindred, was the paranoid desire to unearth every secret buried in another land, which put veritable legions of spies into circulation. With satellites scanning the corners of the Earth and mini-cameras recording illicit activities on dark streets in every major city, the world powers seemed intent upon turning over every stone. For a creature of the night, clinging to the underbelly of those stones, the Cold War was not a welcome time. Scavenging for blackmail and hidden pasts, unprecedented tracking of border-crossings and ceaseless surveillance of those in power served to combat an enemy's position in the



world. For the Kindred it threatened to tear the Masquerade away and reveal their secret existence to a herd possessing the power to destroy the world. Princes and justicars of the Camarilla soon declared the long-dominated domain of high government employees off-limits to their kind, hoping to preserve the Masquerade against critical discovery. For the most part their plan succeeded, but elements within Kindred society have long fought against the authority of their elders and thumbed their nose at rules, even rules made with good reason. Eventually certain forces took notice.

THE WALL COMES DOWN

Vampires are not the only mythical creatures to ride invisibly on the coattails of history. For millennia, willworkers defied the confines of mortal existence and achieved miraculous feats beyond the ken of their fellow man. From shamans calling upon godlike spirits to magicians evoking ancient Egyptian sorcery, those with the ability to command the forces of the universe put their mark upon the world. Magic greater than the Disciplines vampires derived from their founder's curse flowed from the lips and fingers of generations of sorcerers. Such power cannot be wielded without striking fear among common men, and mages ultimately faced the same difficulties their Kindred counterparts did. As populations grew in size, ostracism and persecution posed greater dangers to willworkers around the world. Unlike vampires, however, mages faced a more direct threat from the evolution of human thought. While science suggested that supernatural beings like vampires shouldn't exist, and therefore need not be believed, science calcified the will of the world against the ways of the willworkers. As science contested each ancient belief, it wore away those ideas and laid its own truth bare for all to see.

Enlightenment is a source of power, whether one becomes innately familiar with the formulas of physics or the formulas of Hermetic spells. As the stones of the ancient world were turned over and torn down, so the foundation of the modern world was laid. Clad in coats of white and armed with instruments of precision, the mages of a new era embraced the arcane secrets of science and revealed their power to the world. Composed of like-minded conventions of methodology, this Order of Reason (which would become the Technocratic Union) espoused the ascension of the scientific principle and the Grand Unification Theory. In 1325, their symposium of leadership in the White Tower declared war upon the supernatural. Dedicated to the principle of

putting science above all other disciplines, the Union sought to eradicate the artifacts of a supernatural past, and certainly this included ancient predators such as vampires.

Humanity had been the prey of terrible monsters for ages beyond reckoning, and the time had come for this to end. Although many of their number held this noble goal close to the heart, the Union did not set upon this course entirely with altruistic designs. Their principles threatened those of other mages, whose primordial or mythic ways clashed with the scientific method, and they were in danger of being destroyed by those factions. Survival is a great motivator among mortals, and mortals armed with magic are no exception. Nevertheless, the idealists who most fervently espoused the truth of science during the 14th century hoped to rid humanity of uncertainty, fear and superstition. "No one should have to face the possibility of a bloodsucking beast attacking him in the night," they reasoned. "Especially us."

The Renaissance assured the ascendance of the Union to the forefront of mage society. From the voyage of Columbus to prove the world was round to the ghoulish dissection of da Vinci's drawings of human anatomy, man and the universe around him seemingly took new form. With each new discovery, the superstitions and practices of the mythic past were summarily questioned and hopefully banished to memory, or perhaps forgotten. As time raced onward, some vampires even took delight in this phenomenon and played to the part. Figuring that people won't seek what they don't believe, certain Kindred encouraged the depiction of vampires as nothing but make-believe. Armed with the inertia of evolving science, tales of fancy such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* helped turn the nightly predations of a deadly horror into a figment of imagination beneath the dignity of educated minds. Penny dreadfuls became more feared for their poor writing quality than for the truths they (knowingly or unknowingly) mirrored.

As a matter of self-defense, the methods of science discounted the myths of the ancient world. If the people of the world accepted science as the true faith, then what power could abandoned gods and shadow-bound creatures of the night possess? Hidden behind a wall of disbelief, Kindred spread further than ever before, concealed within the masses of humanity who invaded Africa, the New World, Australia and Asia. Rendered a fairy tale, the Kindred could move among the herd without fear, and they accepted the rise of radio, airplanes, machine

guns, mustard gas and more without concern. But ultimately, the mastery of the atom combined with the runaway freight train of worldwide media to threaten Kindred once again. Faced with weapons not even the eldest could easily withstand, and the risk that at any time the curtain might lift to reveal their secret existence, the Camarilla in particular demanded that Kindred avoid detection at all cost. Whether one believed that the elders concocted the *Book of Nod* for convenience or that it was real, the Tradition of the Masquerade certainly became the core tenet of Kindred society.

Eventually, though, somebody somewhere was bound to notice the truth. Those somebodies were the membership of certain factions within the Technocracy. So successful were the propaganda campaigns in favor of pure and untainted science that even the Awakened members of the Technocracy commonly believed their own party line so strongly that the existence of things like vampires came as a severe shock. Nonetheless, faced with irrefutable personal experiences, those agents who continued to enforce the Pogrom against deviant beliefs could not ignore the facts. They had been deceived by their own leadership. The enemy was powerful and defied the accepted principles of science. Many agents in the field handled innumerable deviant factors and soon enough found their targets were as interesting to them as their employers. If somebody is important enough to kill, then surely they must have something critical to say. Of course Control swiftly purged anyone tainted by contact with deviants, but the holes in the wall were already there, and it seemed awfully late to stick a finger in the dam.

THE RED OPERATIONS

Not exactly a one-of-a-kind setup, Operations Red I – VI (or Red-One to Red-Six) were just one example of the steps taken by the Technocracy to continue the Pogrom during Cold War. Alerted to unnerving levels of deviant activity by the previously unknown levels of surveillance, Control ordered agents into the field to suppress and eliminate anomalous factors from society. Given the atmosphere among un-Awakened mortals, many of these mandates were disguised as nationalistic actions against opposing political parties. Posing as operatives for intelligence networks like the CIA and NSA, Operation Red agents had access to secrets beyond even the ken of the American President. They could act with impunity, expect lethal but discretionary force

to be applied on their behalf and disguise even the most preposterous accident as a "Red Scare." Demonized by McCarthy, targeted by Reaganomics and consigned to rest by the Bush Administration, the Communists presented an incredibly easy target. Nothing was more evil to the eye of the brainwashed American citizen or ally, and even the suggestion of paranormal, unscientific studies into psychic activity was taken seriously enough to garner Congressional funding.

As its designation suggests, Operation Red VI followed five earlier projects which failed miserably. Operation Red I, alternately called Red-One and Red-Eye, was designed by the New World Order as a secret United States military intelligence brainchild with the express purpose of discovering whether the Soviet Union's experiments with cultural artifacts taken from the fallen German Third Reich were serious. When the KGB destroyed the cell in 1953, the intelligence community's fears heightened, despite the lack of a single lead provided by Red-Eye agents. Of course the spies and counterspies of the superpowers were merely concerned with national security. The Technocratic Union strove toward its own vision of a supernaturally sterile world where Science ruled all. Stalin died the same year, though claims of Technocratic involvement are regarded with derision by all but the most conspiracy theory-minded mages.

Unknown even to mortal agents on either side of the conflict, the fate of the first Operation Red provoked bitter arguments in Control symposiums. Iteration X and the Void Engineers were particularly upset that such investigations were drawing the attentions of bright, skilled people to the symbolic remnants of the past. Invoking mythic resonance could do nothing but disrupt the Time Table for the future, they argued. The Progenitors argued in favor of the operation, though other conventions continued to suspect that this was at least in part due to their efforts to recoup the medical advances achieved at the price of atrocity. The New World Order convention, of course, was a strong advocate of Operation Red I for its heightening of the NWO paradigm as well as the potential for breakthroughs that might recapture some of the secret society mystique of their ancient crusaders. Ultimately the two Conventions with the most mercenary attitude settled the issue. The Difference Engineers delighted in the progressive move toward their access to information becoming immensely important. The Syndicate rec-

ognized opportunities to tap previously unknown human fears for untold reservoirs of cash.

Multimillion-dollar programs kicked into full overdrive, deploying vast black-ops funds reserved for just such an occasion by a Congress empowered by the continuing anti-Communism voter mandate. Armed with ever-increasing resources and almost religiously inspired field operatives, the illicit actions of the Technocracy expanded in scope. With the NSA and CIA conducting activities beyond sight or knowledge of their own government, it was an easy matter for Technocratic mages steeped in the international intrigue to carry out Control's directives without breaking their cover as spies.

Within the New World Order, however, disorganization found new purchase. Already enamored of the power of ideas over the mind, some NWO agents embraced Communism with open arms. The concept of society working in perfect union, according to its individual needs and personal abilities, resonated strongly particularly with techno-mages whose past included ties to the militant strength of the order. Technicians of Iteration X also found that some members appreciated the human attempt to create a perfectly functioning system. Concerned that these divisions over mortal politics would splinter the Union as surely as World War II had, Control determined that the Technocracy must support one side of the conflict. Again, the Syndicate and the Difference Engineers managed to turn the vote even though they acted completely out of self-interest. Capitalism certainly fit the Syndicate goals more readily than Communism, and the American pretense of calling its republic a "democracy" appealed to the elitist anarchist pioneers of the Engineers.

Although mortal society had arguably made the decision for them already, the Technocratic Union turned its support to the West, particularly the young and vibrant superpower of the United States. Factions of the Technocracy that did not toe the party line were deemed part of the opposition. Returning to the mission with increased fervor, the agents of Red-Two, also codenamed "Iredi," spent as much time turning spy networks against the assets of rogue Technocracy elements as they did against bastions of supernatural antiquity or the Traditions. Operation Red II ended in 1959 when elements within the Technocracy reached an agreement to settle their differences peacefully within Union symposiums. Time would show that such promises were empty, and those seemingly insurmountable differences re-

mained, but for a couple of years Operation Red was closed down.

Over the next few years, the imperial dreams of ancient Russia would combine with the Old World rebellion against New World domination. Painted in terms of modern ideals of Marxism, post-Stalin Russia achieved a worldwide supremacy challenged only by the United States and its allies. Technocratic mages tied to nationalistic concepts continued to support the Soviet Union. Like children dividing a pie over which they have only questionable authority, the two superpowers drew lines across the face of Europe and massed troops and ideologies behind them. In 1961, the construction of the Berlin Wall clearly marked the less tangible construction of the Iron Curtain.

Red Three was arguably the most mundanely oriented of the operations. Convinced that their counterparts across the line would not honor agreements to settle factional conflicts over the political question, Technocratic agents directly encouraged — and carried out personally — attacks upon every icon of the opposite side's sociological culture. In October of 1962, the world sat upon the edge of its seat while President Kennedy had the United States Navy blockade Cuba due to the presence of Soviet missiles. In quiet moves throughout Europe, the mages and mortal agents of Red Three moved against opposition targets. The clandestine murders and counterstrikes were not as embarrassing as the Bay of Pigs incident in April of the prior year, but were equal if more widespread in their bloodiness.

The uninspired violence and gross attempts by politically oriented factions of the Technocracy to purge their counterparts among the population of the other world powers continued for nearly a decade. Meanwhile, Kindred elements within the Soviet Union took advantage of the times to raise a mystical barrier of their own, in the shadow of the political intangibility of the Iron Curtain. For the world at large, this barrier would last more than a quarter of a century, but the Technocracy saw the first signs of the Curtain's downfall in the revolutionary change of the Difference Engineers into the Virtual Adepts according to the principles of Alan Turing in 1971. Favoring the elitism and freedom of the New World, the Virtual Adepts rebelled against Technocratic leadership and joined the mystical Traditions. Control purged constructs around the world, and Red III came to a screeching halt in the face of rampant self-destruction.

With the idealistic neopagan revolutions of the 60's behind them, the Technocrats sought to strengthen their grip upon reality. The renewed effort, Red Four, stuttered at every turn, however, as its agents continued to be stymied by internal purges, paralyzing paranoia and economic disaster. Whether any supernatural faction encouraged the political and financial setbacks of the era remains a subject of argument among mage historians. The fact remains that fuel crises, international hostage situations and the United States recovery from the previously unknown cultural shock of failing to win a war against Communists in Viet Nam weakened the operation immensely. In 1980, the field chiefs in charge of Red Four were reassigned, and the strategies changed.

Star Wars movie entertainment soon turned to discussions of *Star Wars* defenses against enemy missiles, and possibly less "scientific" thoughts. Seeking to conquer a relatively unclaimed slice of the human paradigm, Operation Red Five was directly ordered to gather solid documentation of psychic activity and potential Russian successes in harnessing it. Not surprisingly, Red Five found no absolute proof of psychic advances anywhere in the Soviet Union. Remarkably, it did find evidence of unexplained paranormal capacities among the citizens of Eastern European nations generally considered part of the Soviet Bloc. Operation Red Five agents declared they had seized command of more than a dozen subjects displaying psychic ability. Unfortunately, for them, none of these subjects survived transfers to facilities recommended by Control and operatives were increasingly pulled from the field to inexplicably retire. Certain agents, including the New World Order's veteran ex-Red Four operative Geary Mandel came to question Control's motives. Pulling strings with regional construct leaders, Mandel and a handful of his compatriots managed to split the field department, shuffling promising but ultimately unimportant captures on to the newly formed Operation Red-Six network. Meanwhile, he arranged for supposedly mundane subjects to divert to antiquated Red Five facilities.

When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the promises and debts of the past decades came home to roost. President Reagan had declared that the United States would outspend the Soviet Union, and drive them into bankruptcy. Certainly most people familiar with the broken economy of the Russian Republic would suggest that his vision succeeded. Unfortunately, his tactics nearly drained American coffers as

well, raising a two-century aggregate debt of less than one trillion dollars to over three trillion in a scant eight years. With an open declaration of victory over the second world power, and, by extension, its political vision, support for overarching Big Brother organizations unsurprisingly evaporated. Operation Red Six buried itself deep in black-ops money and secrecy, and gradually the Pogrom became an artifact of the past. Technically, Operation Red Six was never completely mothballed, and the newborn convention Panopticon has breathed fresh life into the project. Meanwhile, Mandel and other operatives rendered irrelevant under the single superpower world remain trained spies and killers with no mandate beyond newly forming directives from the Homeland Security Department. With terrorism presenting an even more vague and shadowy foe than Communism ever did, Red Five agents manage to continue their old projects under the guise of conducting fresh operations. Should Panopticon and Red Six discover the truth of Red Five, however, they would surely do their best to bring an end to Agent Mandel, the Red Five camps and the illicit experiments conducted there.

THE FIVE

Although the conspirators could just as easily be named for the Red Operation bearing the same number, The Five are in fact five pivotal individuals in a plot uniting mages and vampires in a blasphemous project. Clearly the vampire Ambrogino Giovanni must be acknowledged as one of the five primary schemers involved, but that elder Kindred actually decided to build his network of experimenters and accomplices after discovering the tactics and advances made by a quartet of loosely allied mages.

Geary Mandel, New World Order

For some people, nationalism becomes its own religion; for others, science is the one true God. American-born Geary embodied both extremes, officially leaving the Navy in 1971 to accept an offer from the National Security Agency while secretly training as an operative of the New World Order. Convention leaders didn't keep Lieutenant Mandel holed up in NSA headquarters in Fort Meade, Maryland for long. Already well-traveled, fluent in multiple European languages and steady under pressure, Geary was deployed in Europe throughout the 70's as part of Operation Red Four. Technically responsible for ensuring secure exchanges of classified information, Agent Mandel generally wielded considerable clout among Red Four field operatives. Control was pleased

with the fact that more than once he managed to destroy deviant mages without exposing Technocratic secrets to mundane intelligence scrutiny.

Nevertheless, the Cold War was not a pleasant diversion, and the dirty tricks of the trade slowly chipped away at the idealistic devotion that Geary held for his homeland. New World Order superiors sensed this during routine screenings, but considered this change an asset rather than a liability. If Lieutenant Mandel held the New World Order above his mortal heritage, was that not an excellent achievement on their part? It is not a good thing for a man to lose his faith, however, and their pride in this was ill placed. In 1978, Agent Mandel's efforts to find, contain and purge Tradition chantries, while pretending that his strikes were part of an anti-Communist intelligence agenda, turned him on to an aspect of reality that his superiors had intentionally left in the dark: In a London subway, the lieutenant encountered and barely escaped two vampires. Worse yet, having apparently killed them, he faced them again a couple of nights later.

Faced with evidence that the world contained things that could not be merely explained away as psychic activity, mass paranoia about UFOs or secret ultratech, Geary felt his surety in the absoluteness of science slip. For the first time, Agent Mandel filed an incomplete report, fearing that spreading word of his discovery might spell the end of his chance to find the truth. Suddenly he was curious about the potential veracity of beliefs among the victims of his own efforts to enforce the Technocracy's Pogrom. Other agents in the field, possibly discovering similar things but handling them far less quietly, ultimately disturbed Control so greatly that Operation Red Four was shut down in 1980 and extensively purged before the remaining agents were reorganized and put back in the field as part of Red Five. Ironically, Red Five broadened the operation to include gathering actual proof of psychic activity rather than merely suppressing mythic mages. Lieutenant Mandel put this new latitude to use and created his own personal underground railroad, whereby deviant mages willing to work with him were shielded from Control while those who proved troublesome or intractable were turned over to ensure it looked like he was still doing his job. Particularly of interest to Mandel was discovering the extent of vampirism in the human population and understanding the condition, and he was convinced that deviant methodologies were at least as likely to discern the truth as scientific conventions. Clearly the most dangerous disease known

to man, Mandel wanted to know precisely why it wasn't known, and how he could get rid of it.

Master Jean-Paul Joreau

In the mid-80s, Mandel's team caught word of a Hermetic lodge somewhere in northeastern France. Known as the Red Temple, the lodge happened to be a chantry of the Order of Hermes' House Tylalus that had been active since the Massasa War in the late 13th century. During the century-long conflict between the Order of Hermes and Tremere vampires, the leaders of the chantry, known as the Circle of Red, made contact with Tzimisce who shared their hatred for the upstart clan. In later years, this contact would be the source of the rumored alliance between the mages of the Circle of Red and the Sabbat. Of course the nightly activities of a few Tzimisce scholars of the occult and a handful of eccentric Tylalus Hermetics does not make an alliance of sects, and most of the Sabbat and Order of Hermes membership remained ignorant of the other's existence. Perhaps the occasional unhealthy interest in vampirism might have remained harmless were it not for the corruption of the chantry.

Jean-Paul Joreau is the Master of an order built upon terrible secrets. Sitting atop ancient caves containing prehistoric symbols painted upon their walls and unnamed creatures of darkness, the Red Temple was an infamous locale before the march of Christianity burned its inhabitants and cast down the stones where bloody rites once echoed. During the Dark Ages, House Tylalus of the Order of Hermes seized the powerful node and rebuilt the temple as a stone manor. Apprentices complained of nightmares in which a terrible beast from beneath the earth devoured them. Investigation by House Quaesitor revealed infernal taint among the Masters of the chantry, and Hermetic justice was swift.

As the new leaders of the chantry distinguished themselves in the Massasa War, probably in no small part due to their links with Tzimisce vampires, the Red Temple was left to its own devices after the conflict. Surviving acolytes of the infernal conspiracy, combined with the tainted resonance of the chantry, soon reclaimed their dark masters' favor. *Widderslaintes* were drawn to the site, and unsuspecting Hermetic apprentices became foul *barabbi* or were quietly dismissed. Jean-Paul Joreau was already a powerful Hermetic when the tanks of the Third Reich rolled through the Rhineland. Unknown to the Order of Hermes, he was also the Nephandus leader of the Red Temple. Joreau greeted the carnage of the war with glee, and sorrowed that the human

spirit managed to survive millions of deaths and untold atrocities. Master Joreau desired nothing less than to see the world plunge into darkness.

The Master of the Red Temple watched the rise of atomic potential with interest, balanced between the Nephandus factions craving utter nihilism and those that wanted complete corruption of the world. When Agent Mandel's Red Five cell tried to capture Joreau, the Master let it happen, sensing that the lieutenant's faith was weak and confident that he could escape if the occasion required it. Numerous discussions with vampires, albeit Tzimisce connected with the Sabbat, has left Joreau believing that the vampirism is indeed a curse placed upon Caine by the Creator. When discussion with Mandel revealed that one of the agent's goals included discovering a cure for the Curse of Caine, a bold idea occurred to Joreau. Perhaps if they could defeat the Divine Will, they could achieve what the angels of Lucifer Morningstar could not. Denied of an infallible Creator, the world might be grasped like an apple plucked from a tree. Of course the crafty old Master mentioned no such plan to Lieutenant Mandel, and merely volunteered his help and that of certain compatriots he would not name. Mandel released the Hermetic *widderslainte*, under continued surveillance.

Master Joreau is a walking example of how deep over his head Mandel has really gotten himself. He could potentially survive a pitched battle against Mandel's entire Technocratic cell. Nonetheless, the dark mage truly desires success in the endeavor to overcome the Creator's curse, and sees the immense utility of Mandel's access to Technocratic and Tradition knowledge combined with his resources for concealing the capture of subjects and safehouses for experimentation. Joreau has members of the Circle of Red working toward his new goal, though most of them are not fully aware of their project's ultimate end. He is also familiar with the Tzimisce vampire Duality, and more comfortable with the Sabbat involved in the conspiracy than with Ambrogino or any Camarilla Kindred. Although other mages may contribute the various breakthroughs in the manipulation of Entropy, Matter and Life necessary to reverse the Embrace, Joreau may be the only conspirator to possess the required mastery of Prime. This bolsters his confidence that whatever happens he will manage to be at the center of it.

AMBROGINO GIOVANNI

Mandel's first meeting with Ambrogino happened in a small restaurant in Yugoslavia. Frustrated

THE TEMPLE OF RED

What lies beneath the Red Temple? That is a secret best left to the devices of the Storyteller. Storytellers of *Vampire* may decide that the caverns below once contained the protoplasmic mass of the Tzimisce Antediluvian (now reputedly lurking beneath New York City) or perhaps the shapeless form of a Methuselah who follows its sire's lead. Perhaps an ancient Toreador, Brujah or Setite rests here with its unwholesome children. A less epic answer might be that the caves are home to an underground cult of Kindred who have turned their face from He who cursed Caine. Alternatively, servants of Kupala, or even another earthbound demon of similar power might lurk beneath the poisoned soil, and this might explain the ties to *koldunic* sorcerers within the Sabbat.

Mage Storytellers might prefer that the entities beneath the Red Temple be corrupt spirits trapped by the ancient signs painted upon the cave walls. On the other hand, the glistening red symbols might merely be the bloody marks of an unholy Nephandi Caul, wherein the Awakened undergo the Dark Rebirth and swear fealty to the Outer Darkness. Potentially, the twisted tunnels are the mouths (or less pleasant orifices) of one or more of the demonic Things That Should Not Be, and wanderers below are lucky if they don't emerge in some hellish other place, or deliver their souls as nourishment to the Nephandi Lords. Whatever your choice might be, it is clear that the Red Temple is an unwholesome place.

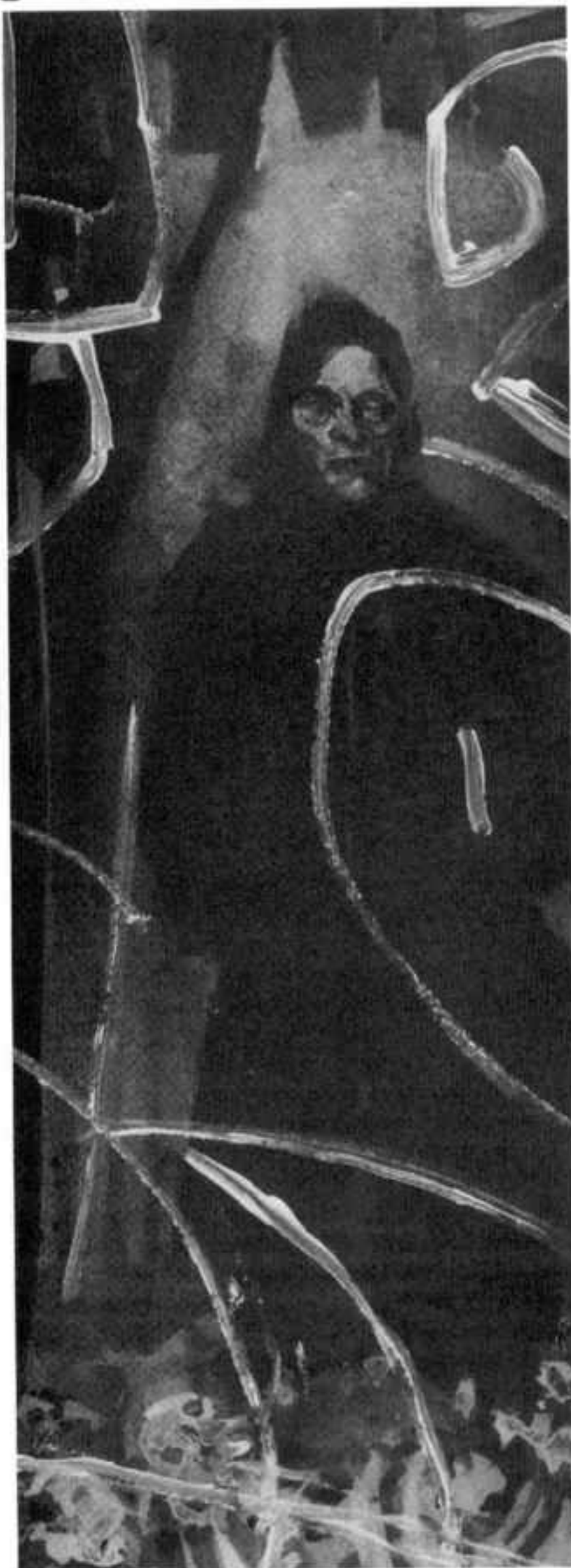
with his attempts to capture the wily vampire, Mandel left a message asking for a parlay with the creature. Angry at the presumptuous mortal who seized one of his havens and left such an absurd request behind, the old Giovanni determined to take advantage of the meeting to kill the interloper. To his surprise, Ambrogino changed his mind after the Red Five agent explained his desire to understand and discover a cure for the vampiric condition. Intrigued by the possibility and recognizing the occult power of mages as a potentially useful tool, Ambrogino agreed to bring his resources and expertise to bear, and the conspiracy truly was born. With vampires and mages working together toward a cure for the Curse of Caine, who knows how soon they might succeed?

PIERRE DE CALICE

When the Tremere used stolen blood to change themselves into vampires in the 11th century, not every member of the Hermetic House was Embraced. Indeed, initially only Tremere and his inner circle were included in the ritual, and the need for secrecy ensured that the Embrace of the rest of the House was done carefully and quietly. The discovery of the Tremere's blasphemous experiment by the Order of Hermes, and the resulting Massasa War, certainly demonstrated that the desire for care had been wise. Nevertheless, once the leaders of the Order knew their secret, and thus that delay could only weaken their position, the Tremere moved quickly to complete the transformation of their House into a powerful Kindred clan. The conversion of the entire House was never completed. Unknown except perhaps to Tremere himself, and whatever close advisors he may have informed, the mortal Pontifex Mathieu de Calice, once an apprentice to Goratrix, fled before his one-time mentor's experiments reached fruition. Cut off from House Tremere and unwilling to risk contacting the Order of Hermes, the Pontifex's Maison Liban chantry weathered the Massasa War by remaining strictly neutral and completely concealed. De Calice's apprentices inherited a wealth of lore surrounding powerful wards and seals, protections from scrying efforts and defensive magics.

Members of Maison Liban have survived to the modern day, though they are certainly a very small order with little influence in the affairs of mages. Students of the craft are taught to avoid other practitioners of magic, and absolutely to avoid vampires. The writings of Maison Liban's founder clearly describe the horror of watching a man die and rise again as a hungry beast. His texts also note that becoming a vampire seemed to inexplicably destroy the ability of a mage to properly invoke the Will. (Storytellers may assume that Maison Liban willworkers are an obscure offshoot of the Order of Hermes whose magic works similarly. Those with **Sorcerer Revised Edition** may appreciate the linear Paths of the sorcerer when running crossover games with vampires.)

Pierre de Calice is, of course, one of the descendants of the founder of Maison Liban. Frankly, it is amazing that no one in the sorcerous society has taken his path before, but perhaps the warnings of the Liban's teachings were sufficient to dissuade those who came before him. Pierre is an accomplished sorcerer, adept at the rites and rituals of his house. Nonetheless, he has become enamored with the idea of rescuing the Hermetic ancestors of



Maison Liban and those they have Embraced from Damnation. Despite being a practicing sorcerer, de Calice is a devout Catholic, and believes that the Tremere might be redeemed if they could become mortal again.

Although Pierre practically memorized the extensive writings of the founding Pontifex, he was not availed of a ready supply of vampires begging to be redeemed. Thus Pierre conducted numerous divinations, searching for signs of how he should proceed. Foreseeing a hopeful path, the young sorcerer moved to Marseilles and continued his hunt for a vampire with whom he might discuss the possibility of seeking a cure for the curse. Luckily for Pierre, or perhaps because of his glimpses of the future, he discovered the vampire Philippe de Marseilles. After some discussion, the Kindred agreed to participate in the Liban's rituals, and Pierre de Calice attempted to reverse the Embrace. His miserable failure to do so disheartened de Calice, but after further thought, the two decided it was possible that his methods only failed because they were based upon the idea that the Tremere conversion was a magical ritual. While de Calice worked to craft some new ritual which might affect Philippe, the primogen of Marseilles set his sights upon finding a Tremere who might agree to de Calice's sorcery without following the young mage's path back to his family and mentors. Although he did not mention the fact, Philippe's powerful *Auspex* saw into the mage's mind, and de Marseilles feared that an unscrupulous Tremere might discover de Calice's secret as well and prey upon the remnants of their own ancient House. Careful inquiries ultimately brought Philippe de Marseilles to the attention of Ambrogino long before he discovered any "safe" Tremere. Philippe and Pierre readily joined the conspiracy, though they both remain careful to conceal Maison Liban's existence.

Although he remains firm in his conviction, and determined to redeem House Tremere and the dauntless Philippe, Pierre de Calice is becoming concerned. On the rare occasion he has had opportunity to try his rituals upon a Tremere subject, it has not worked, though he continues to make adjustments. Further divinations suggest that things may not go well, although he cannot see anything specific and only garners vague warnings. Sometimes his sleep is interrupted by terrible dreams of a burning sigil in the sky, and he awakes screaming of "the red sign." De Calice attributes some of this to the fact that he has drastically altered his natural schedule, sleeping during the day and working with

de Marseilles late into the night. Sometimes he thinks he actually sees the red sign of his dreams glimmering in the night sky. Private studies, conducted when Philippe is busy elsewhere, suggest that the sign is a symbol for a mystic eye, and de Calice wonders what sinister force spies upon his efforts. He has redoubled protective wards against scrying, and carefully wards every ritual and experiment against ill intent. This creeping paranoia is probably the main reason that none of the Tremere conspirators have yet realized Pierre's origin.

DR. EMMA DODD

Neither the fascism of Nazi Germany nor the totalitarian Communist regime of Eastern Germany dispelled the primordial practices of magic. The danger of being caught in a police state didn't necessarily exceed that of ancient feudal lords, and many traditional practitioners inherited centuries of wisdom along with the heritage of forbidden power. For the Verbena priestess Emma Dodd, it was easy to hide behind the stethoscope and white coat of a doctor. Respected in her community, and adored by happy — and healthy — patients, she was free to practice the old ways in private. Although she commonly retreated to a cabin in the wilds of Eastern Germany, Dr. Dodd always returned to Berlin, where she felt she could do the greatest good as a healer.

Now in her early 50's, Emma was part of the crowd cheering the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Within the past few years, she noticed a strange trend of odd blood diseases and drastic loss of blood in her patients. Unable to explain the problem with modern medicine or traditional hearth wisdom, the doctor turned to her countryside coven for aid. Working together, the Verbena coven traced the blood of the victims to roving creatures of the night who could only be what myth called "vampires." Further divinations showed that the blood-drinking fiends were engaged in a clandestine war over the city itself, apparently reignited by the reunification of once-divided territories.

Returning to Berlin, Emma undertook her own measures against the vampires molesting her patients. Unwilling to contend directly against mythic creatures of unknown might, she turned the blood of those she treated into a weapon against their would-be predators. Those unlucky Kindred who fed upon mortals who visited her clinic found their own blood inexplicably rendered inert and sickening. Fear and rumor spread among the Kindred community of Berlin. The city's rival leaders carefully tried to discover



the source of the problem without letting word of the panic spread. Neither could be sure that the blood curse was not a trick of his opponent, nor did the two want the Camarilla directly interfering in their squabble. They were not entirely successful.

Drawn by rumors of some sort of disturbance, Mandel and Ambrogino turned their attention to the Kindred of Berlin. Although clever and careful, Dodd failed to completely cover her tracks, and eventually computer searches of medical records led Mandel to the doctor. Confronted with the possibility of actually curing the vampires of their condition rather than simply driving off the parasites, Emma agreed to dedicate her efforts to work that would hopefully prove more beneficial to everyone in the long run. Dr. Dodd did not reveal the presence of her rural coven, and indeed her contact with them has grown scarce as she goes to absurd lengths to protect them from discovery. They are concerned for her safety, but have thus far honored her request that they only aid her from afar.

Although Emma Dodd no longer makes a habit of poisoning vampires, the memories of the outbreak have not yet faded in Kindred society. The princes of Berlin still want to know why Kindred in their

city were suddenly developing strange blood sicknesses, and at least one justicar has sent archons to investigate. Such is the danger of arousing the suspicions of ageless beings — it is possible that the scrutiny will never die. At Ambrogino's suggestion, the primogen Natacha has extended some help in trying to misdirect inquiries. Playing a bit of a dangerous game, her factors have primarily tried to point evidence toward Gustav, Prince of East Berlin, because she favors the western city's Prince Wilhelm. Should Dodd become a liability to the conspiracy in some way, Natacha plans to tie the Verbena's actions to Gustav somehow, or perhaps just remove the doctor and leave as many vague hints pointed at the eastern prince as possible.

(If this plotline becomes important to your troupe's exploits, you should probably assign the archons to whatever justicar is most connected to the history of your troupe — provided they are vampires, of course. Where no obvious answer suggests itself, you might choose the Justicar Lucinde. Consider the story opportunities provided by a many-hued conflict arising from Clan Ventrue's archons risking cries of favoritism from other clans only to step between two Ventrue princes fighting over the

same city while chasing false clues left by a primogen from another city. For ready-made stories and details of the princes of Berlin, see *Cities of Darkness, Volume 2* or the original *Berlin by Night*. Lucinde is detailed in *Children of the Night*.)

A CONSPIRACY OF AWAKENED

Mandel, Dodd, Joreau and de Calice are but four of the most prominent mage members of the conspiracy. Chapter Four details other plotters, and of course your own troupe may decide to join the effort. If your troupe instead works against the Red Five underground railroad and Ambrogino's league of interested Kindred, then these personalities will often serve as foils or even outright antagonists for your troupe. Even if the characters of your chronicle choose to support the conspiracy detailed in this book, there are certain to be factors whose motives will provoke concern and possibly lead to conflict. Characters who somehow learn of Joreau's plans, at the very least, should hopefully be upset. If they learn or suspect that he could be right, then the very foundation of Creation could be at risk. Consider the conspirators detailed here and in Chapter Four, and try to plan for how your troupe might interact with them. In particular you will need to decide how the characters discover the Red Sign conspiracy.

FILM THE OPERATION

If the characters are a squad of Technocrats, then they are most likely to join the story according to their relationship with Lieutenant Mandel and Operation Red Five and Six. Panopticon has co-opted operatives within Red Six, and would certainly deploy any agent characters in their command to reignite the Pogrom. Such a move could be as simple as being ordered to grab some vampire — or "hemophagic anthromorph" — who happens to be connected with the conspiracy, or perhaps is merely one of their test subjects. Alternatively they could be the unfortunate agents sent against one of the monstrously powerful Kindred like Ambrogino. With the tables turned, and the hunters becoming the hunted, might the characters agree to aid the conspiracy simply to survive? Although many players would not appreciate the idea, a mature troupe might even explore the fate of mages whose wills are Dominated by a potent elder in order to ensure loyalty to the cause.

More intrigue-oriented troupes might enjoy being asked to investigate the supposedly defunct field stations of Red Five. Mandel manages to conceal his underground use of old Red Five sites behind his

shows of apparent continued service as an agent of Red Six. Control would be alarmed to discover the extent of his misappropriation of Technocratic resources, ongoing treachery and systematic deception of his superiors. On the other hand, the characters may unmask one of his sites only to be as angrily surprised by what they find as Mandel was in 1978. If their clearance has never authorized them to know about greater reality deviants such as vampires, then how will they react to the knowledge that Control has intentionally left them in the dark? Technocrats deciding to join Mandel may even have to try to cover up evidence against him that they have revealed themselves. However seamless the mirrorshades of the Technocracy may appear to its foes, things are not as smooth as they appear on the surface. What if the characters have gone so far as to kill Mandel? Will the conspirators cut their losses or will they try to eliminate foes who could potentially threaten them as well?

Alternatively, Technocratic mages might be assigned to Mandel's team. It could be some time before he trusts them enough to do more than use them to soften up Tradition or vampire foes. Of course they might discover his activities on their own, whether due to paranoid spying on their commander or sheer accident. Should the Lieutenant put the characters on the trail of a vampire, he will pay special attention to their reactions. Squads that destroy or capture Kindred opponents without flinching will not willingly be brought into Mandel's confidence. Those who seem genuinely disturbed by the experience will be probed to gauge their receptiveness to operating beyond Control's official parameters. Is it better to shoot and ask questions later? Or might there be something to learn from the enemy? Do we not employ the same bacteria and viruses that can kill us to create the vaccine — or antidote? The directness of questions that he or his underlings pose will rapidly change depending upon the characters' reactions.

Tradition mages or Kindred characters are likely to encounter Mandel on the receiving end of a Red Five operation, unless he is introduced to them via some other factor already connected to the cause. Characters are often loath to work with a captor, no matter how benevolent he may appear, and Red Five isn't particularly kind in demeanor. Nonetheless, the lieutenant will try to ascertain whether the deviant mages would be amenable to a joint venture, or whether the vampires are willing to provide direct aid. In either case, should the answer be negative,

Red Five agents will deliver the prisoners to one of the conspiracy's experimental sites. Mages who are clearly extremely antagonistic are delivered to Red Six superiors as proof that Mandel's team is doing its job, and the real purposes of the underground operation are never mentioned for fear the captives might reveal such information under interrogation.

JOREAU'S GAME

Jean-Paul Joreau has one of the darkest motives of all the conspirators. He means to ruin Creation. Toward that end he is willing and able to maim or murder anyone without compunction. Of course no devil incarnate would be complete without the winsome smile and silver tongue of an inveterate liar. Master Joreau will happily speak to anyone who encounters him, judging whether they pose a threat to his plans or might serve as a potential pawn to be shoved down the proper path. The more threatening a foe might be, the more Joreau will try to trick him into turning against some other target. If there is apparent danger that Tradition characters may sense his fallen Avatar, for example, the Nephandus is likely to distract them with details of Red Six field camps unrelated to the Red Five sites maintained by conspirators. Such a move weakens his Technocratic foes while providing a greater smokescreen for Mandel's operations, and hopefully rids him of troublesome meddlers.

Joreau and the Circle of Red have contact with certain *koldunic* sorcerers of the Tzimisce clan within the Sabbat. Characters following the Sword of Caine might be brought into the conspiracy initially with valuable information about a Camarilla target for the price of delivering over one of the victims. Curious characters might inquire about the final fate of their captured foes. Joreau will not be shy about telling relatively trustworthy Sabbat contacts about the efforts to turn vampires into mortals again, but he will certainly exhort the value of such research as a weapon against the Sword's enemies. The Master of the Red Temple is familiar with the basic concept of Antediluvians, though he entertains the possibility that they are actually powerful Nephandi Lords who have managed to deceive the Damned children of Caine. Whatever their true nature, they are certain to be suggested as the ultimate potential target of resulting rituals of mortality, should such tantalizing promises be required to bend the Sabbat pack's ear.

Cabals with at least one Hermetic member likely discover that Joreau was apparently actively involved

in the Second Massasa War. If such things appear to interest them, the *widderslainte* hints that he is possibly the last remaining Master of House Tylalus still on the earthly side of the Gauntlet. Impressionable young mages may even receive an offer to act as their mentor. Militant mages will be told that experiments are underway to reverse vampirism in order to win the Massasa War for all time. Cabals of a more benevolent bent will be told that Joreau's allies seek a cure for the curse that plagues vampires. In this situation, Joreau will likely point the cabal toward a vampire target or two, requesting that the blood-sucking fiends be captured for study. Those characters showing the power to seize a creature of the night and the tact to avoid creating a ruckus doing so may be offered a chance to participate directly in the studies of the conspiracy. Messy cabals may be turned against foes that the conspiracy currently considers too dangerous to use in any way, such as Gustav of Berlin. If the conspirators have fallen to infighting, Joreau will instead send anyone who falls under the spell of his stories to destroy those to whom he has revealed his presence.

Master Joreau's offer to serve as a mentor is no lie, though it is a trick. Characters accepting tutelage in the Red Temple are going to be tempted to join the Fallen. Offers of power are but the beginning. Sanity-wracking nightmares will test the virtue and resolve of apprentices to the Circle of Red. Initiation ceremonies may even end with the victim entering the caves beneath the temple and becoming *barabbi*. Tainted by temptation or by entrapment, a character is likely to find it difficult to return to mage society again. Of course Joreau would be happy to teach them *rotes* to conceal the corruption of their Avatars, but accepting his help at that point would only be further condemning one's soul. Storytellers who desire to explore this sort of chronicle may wish to consult **The Book of Madness** for inspiration in handling Nephandi characters. If the conspiracy seems destined to fail, Joreau may make it a priority to attempt to corrupt mage characters, deeming it a greater wound to Creation to birth future Nephandi than to pursue an unachievable goal.

PIERRE'S DREAMS

Pierre de Calice is a good point of contact for Storytellers who wish to peacefully introduce vampires to at least one mage genuinely concerned for their welfare. The Liban especially wants to test his technique upon willing Tremere because he retains his belief that the Tremere variety of vampirism is the result of a ritual and can be broken with

JUST A REMINDER

When one is engrossed in a book that unabashedly leaps back and forth between games, happily engaging in crossover theories and clashes of supernatural culture, it is easy to forget that this is absolutely *not* the norm. Most mages don't know jack about vampires except for the same clichés that we all see in movies and read in books. Many mages don't even know that vampires actually exist. Some may assume that such is the case based upon the logical assumption that if the magic of legend exists, then perhaps other aspects of legend do as well. That sort of assumption would naturally lead one to suspect that giants, dragons, goblins, Norse gods and beast-headed Egyptians exist as well. Of course, mages with advanced knowledge of cosmology realize that all of those (and more) probably exist within the infinite reaches of the Umbra, but that's not the same as positing that such creatures walk the Earth, and it is certainly not the same as *knowing*.

Mages who have encountered vampires are the minority. Generally even these willworkers don't associate the word "Kindred" with vampires, don't know which vampire legends are true or false (such as that of Caine) and might think a clan is something with three K's that wears white hoods and burns crosses. Mages who understand basic vampire politics are rare and rarer still are those steeped in the ways of the Kindred. Storytellers who want a concise guideline for gauging the degree of knowledge a mage might possess may consult the Vampire Lore Ability from the **Mage Storytellers Handbook**. The same book gives guidelines for the lore that vampires might possess about mages.

countermagic, but now feels that success requires the subject's unwavering desire to be free of the curse. He is almost certainly mistaken, but one can never know for sure without trying, and in a sense the existence of Golconda suggests that he may be right about the importance of the will, however wrong his view of the Embrace's effects may be. Kindred familiar with Philippe de Marseilles may accept the Toreador elder's word that Pierre means well, or the young mage's own words may convince them. Religious characters may also discover they have much in common with de Calice, provided their personal

faith is not antagonistic to Catholicism. Of course Pierre has much to fear from the Tremere and he will take great pains to protect Maison Liban's existence from discovery, even if it means pretending that all of his skills derive from others within the conspiracy. If the characters somehow learn de Calice's origin, he will react with tremendous alarm that can be discharged only by immediate and strong assurances that his secret will remain safe. Otherwise, he will do his best to suddenly disappear, and rapidly grows unwilling to visit his own family or mentors for fear of leading enemies to their door. He will warn them from afar via sorcery.

Pierre does not share his past with mage cabals either, though he is significantly less concerned that they might automatically mean him harm. The Liban is happy to share theories about the reversal of vampirism with characters who seem interested and display what seems to be genuine desire to redeem its victims. Ultimately a skilled cabal may discover that they bring more mystic lore to bear on the issue than he does, but that only heightens Pierre's hopes that they will help him solve the puzzle. As noted above, Pierre is a good point of contact for faith-oriented characters, including Celestial Choristers. Although his paradigm is Hermetic, Pierre's beliefs are highly compatible with those of tolerant-minded monotheistic theologians.

One of the strongest benefits to using Pierre as an introductory factor is the fact that, in tandem with Philippe, he can quickly draw a vague picture of the conspiracy's goals for vampire or mage groups that wish to help or manage to successfully pretend to. If necessary, Philippe's presence can keep the characters from pushing Pierre too far, as his *Auspex* is sure to eventually pierce the deceptions of dishonest schemers. On the other hand, Pierre could be used to give vampires a basic primer of mage dynamics or Philippe might reveal the general state of Kindred affairs. Care should be taken to avoid this becoming Supernatural Buddy Primer 101, but it can be a valuable tool for filling story-halting gaps in characters' lore.

Another important difference between Pierre and the other prominent mages involved in the conspiracy is his desire to repair the Tremere ability to wield dynamic magic in addition to restoring their humanity. Joreau couldn't care less if conquering the Creator's curse restores the Avatar, and Mandel would probably prefer that it not do so if he thought of it in those terms. Dodd's experience thus far hasn't included opportunities to study Tremere or mage

subjects who have been Embraced by other clans. Although the writings of Mathieu de Calice date back to the 11th and 12th centuries, and therefore predate modern Tradition concepts of the Avatar, Pierre has verified the observations of his ancestor and added some theories of his own. Clearly mages who are turned into vampires are no longer able to wield the dynamic magic common to mages. There is a distinct change in the spiritual makeup of a mage who becomes a creature of the night. The conspiracy's studies into the matter suggest that the Avatar disintegrates or shatters at the moment of the Embrace. It seems reasonable to Pierre that the shards of the Avatar simply slip into the Gauntlet and join the maelstrom of the Avatar Storm. He doubts that successfully countering the Tremere ritual of vampirism will automatically repair the Avatar. There is also the confusing fact that the Tremere version of vampirism seems equally as able to affect un-Awakened mortals as any other variety of the affliction. Mathieu's descriptions of Goratrix's experiments certainly point to magical origins, but what if these

paths of study ultimately proved fruitless and something else occurred? If there is truly no difference between Tremere vampires and those of other clans, then what terrible vampire might have killed and raised Tremere and his inner circle? Might this fearsome fiend be the factor behind the red sign that haunts Pierre's sleep?

Should the Red Sign conspiracy go awry without realizing Master Joreau's ambitions, one of the greatest tragedies just might be the destruction of Maison Liban. Pierre's secret has already accidentally been revealed to de Marseilles, and a random search of Red Five databases could always connect heretofore-unrelated dots at any time. Background checks are not exactly a rare occurrence when dealing with Technocrats and the young mage's mundane origins may occupy neatly typed sheets of paper in innumerable files buried in various civil services. Worse yet, the Red Temple and Maison Liban are both located in France, and an alerted Joreau could easily paint the sorcerers as a renegade Hermetic faction on the wrong side of the Massasa War. Such a fate is by no



means certain, however. Maison Liban has survived more than 800 years of hiding from the likes of the godlike Antediluvian of House Tremere. For all of his power, Joreau is virtually a child in comparison to the clan founder. The fact that the Red Temple has its own dirty secrets makes it risky for Joreau to contact the Quaesitors of the Order. Finally, there is every possibility that the current Pontifex of Maison Liban may have foreseen the upcoming danger and urged his people to escape before the threat every materialized. Abandoning Pierre may seem harsh, but the young mage did ignore centuries of his elder's wisdom after all.

THE BLOOD CURSE

Before being discovered by Mandel's dragnet, Emma Dodd tried to reach Tradition leaders to ask for help. The doctor was never particularly connected to mage society, except for her strong ties to her coven. In a world beset by threats on every side, a missive about strange blood diseases in Berlin isn't necessarily going to command attention. Many cabals are too busy playing hide and seek with the Technocracy to keep in touch with other Tradition chantries. The most powerful chantries are often locked in vicious political infighting. Thus it was no great surprise to Dr. Dodd when she received no immediate response.

The players' cabal of mages could learn of a Verbena doctor complaining of mysterious blood-related illnesses in Germany and decide to investigate on their own without waiting for sanction from on high. Alternatively, a superior in their home chantry or in the hierarchy of the Traditions might specifically request that the cabal come to Dodd's aid. The latter approach works particularly well if the cabal owes any debts, but it could similarly be used as an excuse for them to earn favors. If any of the troupe's characters is a Verbena, then a member of Dodd's coven might be an old mentor of the character (or her mentor's mentor...) if the timing and locale fit with her backstory.

The advantage to using Dr. Dodd as an initial contact is that she represents a purely Tradition, non-vampire approach. While Mandel's team did uncover her whereabouts, she is free to act on her own and is already unhappy with the way she was brought into the conspiracy. Her knowledge of vampires comes from a mage perspective as well, albeit one with a record of limited successes against their kind. Emma wants to cure vampires in order to set the balance of life in order, but if the process fails

she will swiftly return to her old methods. The Verbena has no delusions about the way of the predator and treats vampires with the same carefulness she would a venomous serpent. The old story in which a woman nurses a snake back to health only to be bitten is not lost on the doctor. A cabal that joins Dodd's efforts may prove pivotal in the success of the conspiracy or may be the faction that realizes that everything is about to go terribly wrong just in time to try to stop it.

For vampire characters, Dodd represents an opportunity to introduce the conspiracy with a mystery. The characters may be Kindred who reside in Berlin or may be directed there by those who hold sway over them. If they are locals, perhaps the characters suffer a disastrous feeding, otherwise they hear rumors of the blood curse that affects the city. If the coterie unravels origin of the mysterious blood curse, then they will have found Dr. Dodd. Obviously her reaction depends upon the coterie's approach. Peaceful contact may lead her to believe the characters are part of the Red Sign conspiracy, and even lead to her inadvertently revealing its existence to them. Violence will be met with magical force, though the doctor is certainly not above retreating in the face of superior foes. Living or dead, the Verbena may provide valuable lessons about the importance of the Masquerade. Her efforts to poison the herd against Kindred stem directly from the high pressure of a city divided between warring princes and the inevitable sloppiness that occasionally results from that state. Victims of the Verbena's blood curse only further demonstrate the fragility of the Masquerade as stories circulate about the Kindred vomiting blood or profusely sweating blood. Ultimately even the fact that her actions resulted in her own capture by the Technocracy is a warning of the dangers inherent in playing with the unknown.

In the event that Kindred characters need guidance or stymieing, it is a simple matter to have agents of the primogen Natacha point them in the right (or wrong) direction. If characters, mage or vampire, should destroy Dodd without discovering the conspiracy, then a member or two of her coven might enter Berlin in search of her. This readily gives Storytellers a second chance to kick-start any stalled progression of the story. It should be noted that Dr. Dodd does not possess knowledge of things like clans or the Camarilla, and she still assumes that many of the myths about vampires are true. Given that blood is a primary focus in her magic, the fact that she managed to manipulate its properties is not an indi-

cation of mastery of Kindred. Of course, for creatures for whom blood is survival, her natural talents are a considerable threat.

REACTIONS TO VAMPIRES AND THE CURSE

While most Kindred who research methods of reversing the vampiric condition do so with at least a vague desire to remove their own curse, mages who seek the same knowledge are ultimately meddlers. Some may desire to cure vampires of their terrible curse, while others simply quest for knowledge. No mage feels the unrelenting hunger and spiritual vacuum of those who have fallen prey to Caine's curse, and without that experience there can never be true understanding. A mage trying to change a vampire back into a mortal is screwing with things of which she has an incomplete conception.

Although mages with more than a modicum of lore about vampires are rare, those who spring from similar backgrounds often share comparable views. Not every mage will share the stereotypical mindset of those who practice the same magical paradigm, but it remains a useful tool in guessing how a particular willworker might react. The individual Traditions vary greatly in their stance as regards to vampires and their potential reaction, should they discover the activities of the conspiracy of the Red Sign. Technocratic Conventions often are similar in theory but the differences of scientific method still create variety in practice.

AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD

Akashic teachings encourage the realization that the mind supercedes the material in all things. Some Eastern sects even teach that the material world is ultimately an illusion created by the mind. Akashics who know of vampires often feel that their condition could theoretically be mastered, but that the refusal of the consciousness to fetter its base impulses renders it unable to escape the physical. Convinced they share the sickness of their fellow vampires, these broken minds become so static that they are trapped in an ever-repeating nightmare of existence that is simultaneously unsatisfying and unchanging. Drahma represents a way for all creatures to advance beyond the chains of their own beliefs and desires, but most Akashics are unsure what the Drahma of vampires might be given that they seemingly have no natural place. Should an Akashic learn of Golconda, the idea of accepting the Beast and the Man would at least sound like a step in the right direction. Con-

vinced of the eternal quality of the soul, many Akashics feel that most vampires would be better off if they were released from the trap that is their physical form. On the other hand, the Brotherhood does not believe that simply returning to wheel of Drahma will place one upon the proper Way.

CELESTIAL CHORUS

Choristers are more offended by the existence of vampires than possibly any other magical tradition in the World of Darkness. By their very nature, vampires are depraved sinners who routinely assault others to feed their hungers. Choristers who believe in a force antagonistic to the One naturally associate vampires with the Adversary. Adherents of Christianity, Judaism or Islam who learn of Kindred's own legends are scarcely surprised. The idea that an angry God's punishment upon Caine might take such a form is readily conceivable to many Choristers. Others argue that the One would not curse Caine's innocent victims as well and suggest that Caine's form is not the work of the One, or that perhaps Lilith or Lucifer have given the children of the night unholy powers to ensure their Damnation. Presented with the conspirators' plans to remove the curse of vampirism, the Chorus is not likely to be as united as one might believe. Those who feel that vampirism is the Curse of Caine may stand against those who would undo the work of the One. Those who see the plight of the vampire as a curse that might have been thrust upon the undeserving will react according to whether they believe that redemption is possible. For Choristers who believe in redemption, any hope of restoring the mortal form is a step toward giving the sinner another chance. If terrible acts, such as most vampires inevitably commit, are unforgivable, then the Chorister may believe that reversing the vampiric condition is a waste of time and that the unholy creature should be consigned to Final Death as soon as possible.

CULT OF ECSTASY

Some people may be surprised to discover that the Ecstatics are nearly as angered by vampirism as the Choristers. This lack of understanding often comes from a mistaken belief that the Cult of Ecstasy is just a consortium of like-minded drug fiends. In truth the ultimate desire of the Ecstatic is complete freedom from all barriers, and becoming a vampire is a heinous prison. The Cultists do not generally believe that any action is irreversible, because when all barriers of space and time are removed then everyone is free to improve his condi-

tion without limit. It concerns the Cultists that apparently no one has yet achieved this level of enlightenment, for such a being's efforts would have reached forward and backward throughout all time. Nevertheless, they remain convinced that it is imperative that pushing the envelope continue as even a single complete success in transcending reality will bring freedom for everyone. The Ecstatics disapprove of the tactics of the conspiracy, once they discover its existence, but consider its ultimate goals admirable. Freedom should not include restricting the freedom of others, however, and so the Cultists may seek to liberate anyone held captive by the conspirators and gather the breakthroughs for all who wish to have them.

DREAMSPEAKERS

Few Dreamspeakers are likely to accept the Noddist punishment-of-Caine claim of origin for vampires. Depending upon her regional heritage, a Dreamspeaker might believe that vampires are supernatural predators created by spirits to punish mankind or that they sprang from individuals whose crimes rendered them so spiritually void that they became blood-maddened beasts trapped in human skins. Of course the second theory might not sound so dissimilar to Caine's reputed curse, except that it suggests a personal choice to set oneself aside from the pulse of the world and denies a singular root of vampiric evil. Neither pathway to becoming a vampire necessarily suggests that it cannot be reversed, though some Dreamspeakers believe that the nature of spirits is immutable. Given that vampires often seem spiritually devoid, Dreamspeakers learning of the conspiracy's plans may believe them to be a good thing. Should they learn of the systematic experimentation, however, few Dreamspeakers will hesitate to condemn the practices. Dreamspeakers have been aware of a strange Red Star that appeared in the Umbra in 1999, and the discovery of connections between the conspiracy and the baleful spiritual beacon also proves damning.

EUTHANATOS

Sharing the Eastern origins of the Akashic Brotherhood, the Euthanatos also believe that the wheel of reincarnation is vastly important. Unlike the Akashics, the mages of the Euthanatos Tradition readily seek to ensure that others cycle through the Wheel according to the most beneficial time of passing. Vampires clearly are stuck between turns of the Wheel and therefore are often targets of those Euthanatos aware of their presence. Any responsible

Euthanatos makes sure to weigh the merits and disadvantages to administering the Good Death. In the case of vampires, there are rare occasions wherein all indications are that the current state of existence is more beneficial to the soul than forcing it onward to its next incarnation. However the ageless state of a vampire means that she must be watched lest things change and no one be able to consign her to true death at the right time. In general, Euthanatos mages might favor the goals of the conspiracy but deplore the means employed to gain them. Perhaps the most interesting thing to the Euthanatos would be the idea that Avatars could be repaired, as a fair number of the death mages believe that the Avatar must travel the Wheel as surely as the soul does.

ORDER OF HERMES

The mere subject of vampires is likely to be an incendiary topic among Hermetics who are aware of them. For many of those mages of the Order, their experiences with the Kindred have been nothing but bad. The Order has waged two separate wars against vampires and lost an entire House to the Embrace. In theory the ability to remove vampirism would be greeted as a good idea, but most Hermetics are likely to be quick on the draw where vampires are concerned and no less hasty should it appear that other mages collude with the Kindred. Joreau is respected as a veteran of the Massasa War, but even he could be deemed treacherous should other Hermetic veterans learn of the Red Sign.

SONS OF ETHER

The Etherites are inveterate experimenters and yet united by little else. Initial reactions to the discovery of vampires depend upon the particular brand of weird science dear to the Etherite in question. Provided there is an allowance for blood-sucking humanoids, theories as to how to deal with such will abound. Presented with evidence that the condition was reversible would intrigue most Sons, and many would readily join if they could somehow be convinced that Mandel was no longer loyal to the Technocrats. The Sons of Ether are extraordinarily bitter toward the Union due to its discarding of their pet theory, from which their name derives, and that isn't about to change anytime soon (hard-won advances in quantum physics notwithstanding). Unfortunately, Agent Mandel's behavior as a sort of double agent isn't likely to earn their trust, and thus it remains unlikely that the Etherites will join the study. Nevertheless, many of these mad scientists are highly adventurous, and more than a few might take

it upon themselves to hijack the conspiracy's laboratories or experimental subjects and carry out their own scientific studies. Perhaps they would even brag about them in future issues of *Paradigma*.

VERBENA

As the penultimate practitioners of Life magic, the Verbena are unfriendly to vampires whenever they are aware of them. This does not stem from any belief that the Kindred are necessarily evil, but it arises as naturally as the deadly enmity between the mongoose and the cobra. Vampires are tied deeply to the mythic threads over which the Verbena consider themselves guardians. Yet vampires are the weeds in the garden, or the mad dogs that are driven from the pack. They will plague mankind so long as there is blood to drink, yet they do not share the force of life as other predators do. Presented with the possibility that vampires might be removed creates a bit of a quandary: Who wouldn't want a garden with no weeds or a world with no mad dogs? Yet, what if the mythic threads of the fiends of the night are important to the tapestry of spirit? When given the opportunity to uproot the stealers of blood, most Verbena will take it. Many practitioners of the Tradition would pause before intentionally eradicating all Kindred, however.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS

The paradigm of computer technology does not strongly support the idea of vampirism. Those Adepts made aware of the Kindred are likely to consider them one of the many things that will thankfully be left behind when Reality 2.0 goes online. Arguably, Virtual Adepts are the most likely to discover the conspiracy if only because they once participated in the Red Operations. Add their mastery of ciphers and Correspondence-based surveillance, and the Tradition is poised to catch wind of the Red Sign. Like the Sons of Ether, few Adepts are likely to trust the Technocratic Union. On the other hand, the hacker mages strongly sympathize with agents who feel the urge to rebel against Control, and Mandel certainly fits the bill. Adepts are unlikely to offer much assistance to the conspiracy's goals, primarily because they are ill equipped to actually solve the riddle of vampirism or the reconstruction of the Avatar. Should the experiments succeed, however, they will happily steal its secrets and distribute them across the Digital Web.

HOLLOW ONES

The world is dying, and most Hollow Ones mire themselves in the nihilism this promises. As such,

they are unlikely to bother to involve themselves in the conspiracy even if they became aware of it. Hollow Ones who are aware that vampires actually exist sometimes consider them a decadent epitome of Gothic culture, and aren't necessarily going to go out of their way to destroy an ageless icon. If an individual vampire causes problems, most Hollow One cliques will handle it as a group and then return to their passive rebellions and their eclectic tastes.

THE TECHNOCRACY

Control refuses to admit the existence of the mythic past even to its own agents. Everything passes through the polarized lens of Science before being disseminated to the public. This approach simultaneously ensures the strength of Control's own paradigm, the weakening of that of its opponents and the secrecy of classified information. If the conspiracy's attempts to reverse vampirism were conducted in a proper medical laboratory under the clinical care of the Progenitors, the Conventions might approve. Should they discover Lieutenant Mandel's treachery in its current form, he will be immediately removed from the field and permanently debriefed. Potentially he might return to duty, but he would not be the same person anymore. Brainwashing, cloning techniques or behavioral-modification devices would ensure that the new and improved Mandel did not make the same mistakes.

Iteration X: The machines of the artificer Convention are inherently incompatible with the ageless Kindred. It is ironic that the lifeless limbs of the cyborg cannot join with the lifeless bodies of the undead. The idea of vampires is as alien to the Iterator's Time Table as it is to their Virtual Adept cousins. The typical reaction of a HitMark V would be to engage and destroy. If there is no soul to lose to the Machine then there is nothing to fall to Damnation either.

New World Order: The NWO is concerned with the control and evolution of information and ideas. It has long been the ideological heart of the Pogrom, and many take comfort in Panopticon's efforts to reactivate it. Vampires are not vampires; they are "hemophagic anthromorphs" or more likely, merely the inheritors of a rare skin allergy to sunlight. If they are not physically eradicated first, then eventually vampires will no longer even believe in themselves and they will truly disappear.

Progenitors: The uber-doctors are actually fascinated when presented with vampire specimens. They immediately set to dissecting and classifying

their characteristics. Genetic and tissue studies potentially lead to future medical breakthroughs while the strangely addictive nature of Kindred blood sparks new drug research. In a sense, the Progenitors give flesh to the New World Order's version of the story.

Syndicate: The wizards of finance don't really care about the finer points of technology so long as the numbers all come out right. Certainly the technomages of the Syndicate are firm believers in the principles of science, but one has to wonder whether, if they had predicted the Traditions' victory, if the old Guild would have followed the principles of magic.

Void Engineers: The Technocratic Convention with the single greatest involvement in offworld and otherworldly exploration, Void Engineers faced with vampires readily explain their presence as alien incursions. Aliens are usually handled best with a powerful gun. You do not cure aliens. You do not allow them to loiter about in secret camps where they might escape into Earth's ecosystem.

NEPHANDI

Joreau's viewpoints straddle the line in Nephandic thought. The Fallen Ones generally fall into two camps: those who seek the nihilistic end to all Creation, and those who serve the infernal Nephandi Lords. Some members of the former group act as though they belong to the latter while they pass the time trying to bring about the End. Most Nephandi encourage vampires to thrive and prey upon humanity, convinced of the damage this must ultimately cause. A few insist that the Antediluvian masters of the clans are actually earthbound Nephandi Lords or the avatars of Those Who Rest in the Outer Darkness. Joreau's idea that revoking the Curse of the Creator might sabotage the underpinnings of Creation is gaining popularity, but this may merely reflect his current power and leadership of the Circle of Red.

STRANGERS AND STRANGE LANDS

It is beyond the scope of **The Red Sign** to assign motives and reactions to every magical faction within the World of Darkness, but a few bear special, if brief, mention here. The Hem-Ka Sobekh were a small but strong Craft that fell prey to what appears to be a vampire. They might secretly share the desire of some Tremere to escape the Curse of Caine or they might serve a master who fights against the conspiracy tooth and nail. Both the Children of Osiris and the Cult

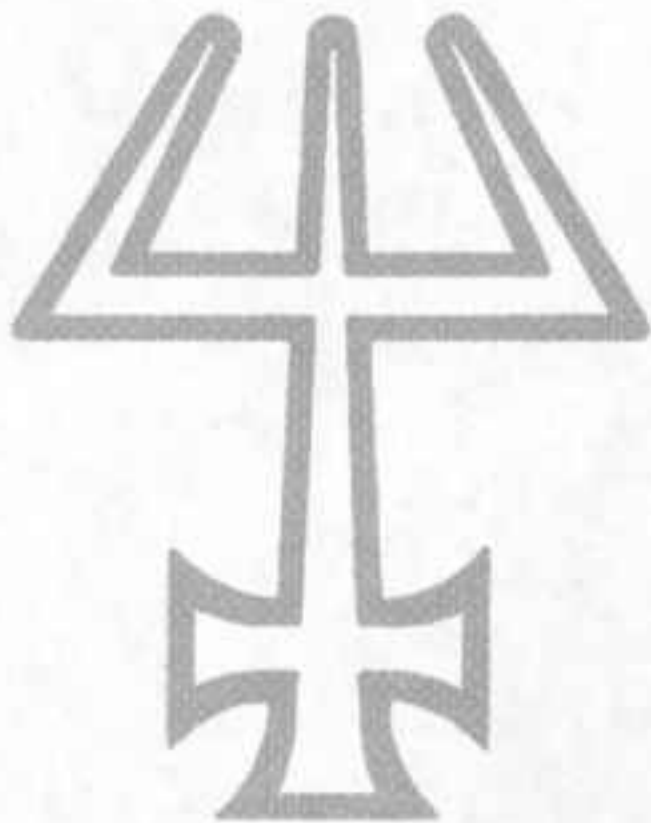


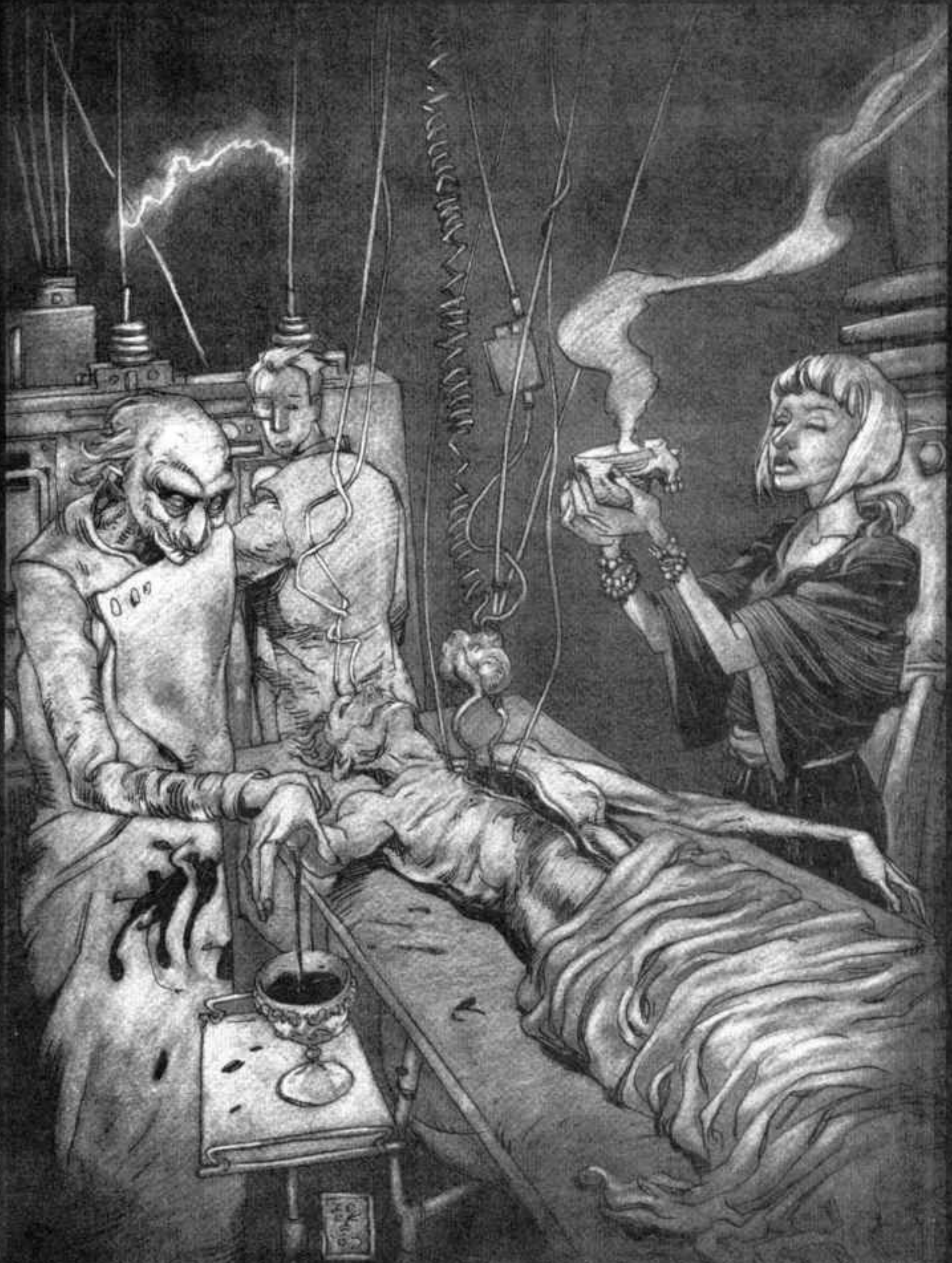
of Isis are rabidly anti-vampire due to their connections with the life-giving Egyptian god Osiris and the immortal mummies who follow him.

TREMERE AND GORATRIX

Should the conspirators succeed in reversing the Embrace and restoring the Avatar, you will need to decide how, and if, this will ever apply to Tremere and the erstwhile Goratrix. Tremere is

no longer even in his correct body, indeed possessing that of the latter vampire. Will the body inherit the Avatar of Tremere or of Goratrix? If Goratrix's body is returned to life will it be with the mind and soul of Tremere, or will the preeminent Tremere *antitribu* ultimately win over his Master? What of those Tremere who are not restored? Will the continued existence of Saulot change the nature of their blood?







CHAPTER THREE: RITUALS AND SCHEMES

Safely ensconced in his sanctum sanctorum, a scholar of the occult scrutinizes an obscure tome of vampiric lore. Some of the allusions are obvious. On one page, he finds a reference to Cain and Abel, with a rather sinister reference to the story of Lilith. As the prose progresses, an almost Biblical narrative gives way to Cainite history. The authors make veiled references to Japheth and a conspiracy of Giovanni who aspired to be more than God. That fragment in Aramaic — did the author intend to take it directly from third Via Ossis rite? It may be an older Cappadocian reference, perhaps, comparing the difference in their philosophies. How academic, he thinks. How droll. How do I adapt this into my next ritual?

REDEMPTION AND DAMNATION

In this chapter, we will shatter thousands of years of vampiric history and tradition. We will return the dead to life and restore shattered souls. We will offer mages power over life and death... placing it just outside their grasp before we damn them for reaching for it. In the Final Nights of the World of Darkness, nothing will be forbidden. Everything will be true. The impossible becomes real; you need only awaken to the truth.

UNRAVELING THE TRUTH

Vast webs of intrigue stretch around the world, some far more twisted than others. One coterie of vampires or cabal of mages cannot hope to ever fully unravel this tangled skein. In the same way, this humble

book offers far more lore than you probably ever want to use in a single chronicle. Several conspiracies are working to change the world; as the Storyteller, you'll need to decide which conspiracy is closest to the truth — and which version of truth you prefer. Along the way, you'll have plenty of other choices to make and questions to ask. The lore in this chapter not only offers answers to the mysteries of Redemption, but also empowers you to ask more questions.

While untangling these threads, we'll lead you from ancient vampiric lore to modern possibilities. The first threads are wrapped around the vampiric myths that have lead up to the Rituals of the Red Sign. "What Has Come Before" describes similar ritae that allow the undead to change their bodies, minds, and souls.

Follow those leads and you'll uncover the rare tomes that offer deeper insights into those forbidden rites. You've read countless times of the teachings of

occultists and loremasters. This book offers another way to disseminate occult knowledge — including some facts even mages were not meant to know. Studiously assembling this knowledge allows a mage to create his own personal ritual of Redemption.

As with the gossamer threads of a spider's web, their vibrations converge upon one central point. At the heart of this chapter, in a section called "Quantifying the Impossible" you'll find the game mechanics for the Ritual of the Red Sign — several in fact. Since performing impossible feats is one of the themes of this book, we'll also address the topic in your game.

Once you understand how the ritual is performed, you will understand several different possibilities for its outcome. The last segment of this book, "The Shape of Things to Come," addresses what may happen to the Redeemed if the ritual succeeds... or fails. Appropriately enough, these fates lie somewhere between ecstasy of redemption and the agony of eternal damnation.

LEGENDS AND PROPHECY

We're about to cross the boundaries of reality; the barriers between worlds. Before we can do that, we'll have to at least show you where those boundaries are drawn. Before we defy everything that's ever been written for **Vampire**, we should at least instruct our brethren **Mage** players on the salient facts, bestowing them sufficient Cainite and Kindred lore to understand what's going on. Even vampires, especially neonates, may need to do some research to piece together the mystery at the heart of this story.

Whether living or dead, the characters of your chronicle may learn a vast amount of vampiric lore as part of the story, so the first part of this chapter is designed to further that research. Perhaps they're racing to complete the rituals of redemption themselves before their rivals can stop it; maybe they'll learn enough that they'll want to stop it before drastic consequences ensue. A conspiracy of mages is about to perform a legendary feat, so we should first place this new legend in context.

Every legend, it is said, has some basis in fact. The true origins of all vampires, Kindred and Cainites alike, are so distant from our modern world as to be almost mythical. For those who exist outside vampiric societies, uncovering the truth behind such stories can be perilous; for vampires protect their secrets as vigilantly as they protect themselves. Not all of the following information that follows is common knowledge, even among vampires. Hiding their existence from all other

supernatural creatures, they have had little reason to bestow their darkest secrets upon others... until now.

Masters of forgotten lore have heard tales of aspirants who have overcome the curse of vampirism. Such tales are nearly impossible to verify. Some are as prosaic as urban legends, stories of a "friend of a friend of a friend" who regained a blessing, for one night, to walk in sunlight, savor mortal experiences, or even create living offspring. Names and places are never defined, for there are rarely accurate accounts or records of such occurrences... again, until now.

Fifteen generations removed from Caine, a few rare vampires have begun to manifest such abilities. Accordingly, they have faced persecution or execution for revealing them. It is a sign that the final generation of vampires now walks the night, unable to Embrace other vampires, but still existing within the human world. Thousands of years ago, they are told, the first of all vampires was created — some say cursed by God Himself. Caine was cursed for all eternity with the damnation of vampirism, madness (prophecy tells us) that would be passed on to his descendants unto the Fifteenth Generation. Now his lineage has come to an end, and his descendants wait to see what will happen next. The Redeemed may very well lead the path to their future, if they have one. To understand that future — what is left of it — we must first look to the past.

WHAT HAS BEEN BEFORE

Rumors speak of a sacred few who have escaped the Curse of Caine and become mortal again. Such stories of Redemption have existed for centuries, as have tales of eternal Damnation. If it seems outrageous that a vampire can permanently change his state of being through magical ritual, vampiric history offers many precedents. Researching any one of them may be a first step to seeking Redemption. In fact, they are all (in different ways) relevant to the hidden knowledge that awaits all those who seek to escape from the shadows.

LEGENDS OF GOLCONDA

Golconda offers redemption, at least from the bestial urges that surge within a vampire's soul. A humane initiate achieves this state through a ritual called the Suspire. The conclusion of this ceremony does not return the undead to life; rather, it is the culmination of a quest for lost humanity. All vampires are predators, driven by the need to hunt, feed, and sometimes kill. The Beast Within drives such creatures to commit atrocities, indulging in their basest urges and desires. A disciple of Golconda seeks to silence this ravenous

hunger. If she succeeds, she will never surrender to frenzy, rarely feeds, and never gives in to rage.

Some legends suggest that attaining Golconda isn't the "destination" of this quest, but merely the first step in a longer journey... perhaps one that allows the initiate to ultimately overcome the curse of Caine entirely. Such thoughts are heretical, but that doesn't mean they aren't spoken and shared. Some are even mentioned when the Red Sign is discussed, suggesting that an aspirant's true nature or *humanitas* may influence the outcome of the ritual.

THE MYTH OF THE CRIMSON POOL

During the Dark Ages, legends spoke of a hidden pool of "sanguineous humour" that could return the vampire who drank from it to a state of grace, if only for a few nights. The initiate who entered the pool would leave it cloaked in living flesh, able to experience sunlight, breathe fresh air, nourish the soul with human love, and walk among humans as one of them. The legend inspired aspirants who craved a surcease to their suffering as well as madmen who believed such a false promise of hope should be destroyed. At the turn of the millennium, the legend resurfaced. Indeed, a few cognoscenti hinted that they had found clues to its locale, yet none who sought this legendary place ever returned.

Some speculate that the rumor was released by one of the Inconnu, an ancient vampire who lured certain victims to that locale to exploit them in ways only the willing could truly accept. Others tell stories of a Methuselah who wept oceans of blood into the pool, tainting it so thoroughly that all who foolishly drank from this "vitae" became instantly enslaved to him.

Urban legends become more vicious when one spends countless nights perfecting them — no one has survived to find any truth to these legends and lies. Certainly, it would not have been the first time that a legend of Redemption, even a temporary one, would lead to the destruction of foolishly romantic idealists. In the same way, when the Red Sign is discussed, some elders reject such dangerous notions utterly while others are too tempted to resist learning more. Many believe the Inconnu use such rumors to lead fools astray, but it is just as possible that lesser vampires may exploit them for their own benefit.

THE TALE OF TREMERE

Vampirism does not merely kill the flesh, some say — it shatters the soul. The Tale of Tremere has been offered up as proof of this concept. Centuries ago, the treacherous sorcerer Tremere attempted to steal the secrets of immortality. Because his rituals required the



blood of a vampire, he led his chantry of magi to the torpid form of Saulot, an Antediluvian who many believed actually possessed many of the secrets of Golconda. Performing the ritual of Amaranth, they drained his body and consumed his soul, but the results took a sinister turn. The magi's rituals failed (for what reason, modern mages dare not guess). They gained the "immortality" they sought, but also inherited Caine's curse, becoming vampires themselves.

Elder Tremere do not like to acknowledge the effects this adapted ritual of Amaranth had on these magi. Perhaps they failed to perform the ritual properly... or perhaps Saulot was not so helpless as he seemed. In a heartbeat (or the absence of one), the near-limitless possibilities of magic vanished, replaced by the limited abilities of Thaumaturgy. By one interpretation, the magi's Avatars — that is, whatever fragment of divinity allowed them to perform Awakened magic — shattered and died. Each living magus became an animate, undead shell that could only attain a fraction of the host's former potential.

Some believe that a mortal who survives the Embrace is also spiritually diminished. Long ago, some sorcerers in the original Orders of Hermes debated whether every mortal could gain the gift of magic. In more recent years, willworkers have discussed whether it is possible for any human to Awaken. Every person does have a fragment of magical energy when he or she is alive — a shard of what mages call Quintessence — but a victim who is turned into a vampire no longer burns with that inner light. By some interpretations, a vampire who longs to become mortal must not only redeem his flesh, but gather what fragments remain of his damned and enduring soul.

APOTHEOSIS

When the Giovanni were a family of mortal necromancers, and not yet an outcast, independent clan of vampires, they did more than use their power to command the spirits of the dead. Unlike the vampires who first Embraced them, they claimed to hold power over life *and* death. Their diablerie of their parent Antediluvian was more than a crude grab for power — some documents suggest it was part of a much larger ideal: to transcend the limitations separating the quick and the dead, becoming more than human. In a sense, each act of diablerie brings the diablerist closer to Caine, but for those who believe that God condemned vampires to an eternity of damnation, it also means an ascent toward divinity. The next step is apotheosis.

Apotheosis isn't the process of becoming mortal; it involves rituals that ascend an initiate to godhead

(however that concept may be defined). Just as mortal Giovanni necromancers seized power by receiving the Embrace and diablerizing their progenitor, a small conspiracy of Giovanni vampires attempted to exceed Caine's power, achieving immortality while conquering the tyranny of the Beast Within. Of course, there are no (recorded) instances of anyone achieving this feat, but the documentation for these rituals is out there... somewhere... possibly scattered around the world.

The rituals to achieve this feat involved the acquisition of a completed ritual; the largest piece was allegedly detailed in an infamous archeological find called the *Sargon Fragment*. Without the complete body of knowledge — which vampiric scholars refer to as the *Anexhexeton* — the rituals could not be completed. The ideal was not to merely become mortal, but more than human. Some believe that this transcendent knowledge may have some bearing on the quest for lost humanity. Rest assured that Augustus Giovanni, the nominal leader of the largest conspiracy searching for Redemption, is quite familiar with this concept. Whether he himself seeks humanity, or a way to transcend its limitations and achieve apotheosis, is a matter of speculation and debate.

AMARANTH

The very thought of a vampire changing his very essence through ritual may seem fantastic, but lesser rituals are performed continually in the shadows. One that bears mention in this chapter is the Ritual of Amaranth, an act commonly known as diablerie. Tremere performed a variant of this rite over the Saulot's torpid body; those who hate the Warlocks claim they actually perfected it.

The ritual is performed as a vampire is dying; his killer (or a cohort of the killer) drains the victim completely of blood as it dies. In the process of drinking the victim dry, the diablerist consumes not only the victim's strength, but also his very soul. When a vampire performs diablerie on an older vampire (or more precisely, a vampire of a lower generation), the diablerist effectively and permanently lowers his own generation. In other words, through an act of murder, the diablerist becomes closer to the mythical figure of Caine — who, appropriately enough, was also a murderer.

The spiritual component of this ritual has its own associated mysteries. For instance, what happens to the victim's soul when it is devoured? Does the diablerist gain power by consuming it utterly, or does it merge in some way with that of the diablerist? That very question would be considered heresy among Tremere. It would suggest that when Tremere diablerized Saulot, a portion of that

Antediluvian survived in the diablerist. Rituals, especially truly visionary ones, carry consequences when they are not performed properly. The consequences of a soul altered through the ritual have a direct bearing on the outcome of our Ritual of the Red Sign. Like the ritual of Amaranth, the Red Sign may have spiritual consequences of which those who enact it may not be aware, especially if they are unfamiliar with spiritual lore.

DAMNATION AND DIVINITY

The very possibility that redemption is possible for the Damned challenges the way many vampires see the world. Vampirism is not a blessing of immortality; it is damnation. Mortals have told tales of faithless creatures who have sold their souls for false immortality. These vampires (allegedly) ensured that their souls would be cast into Hell when their deathless flesh is finally destroyed. They had forsaken the grace of God for temporal power, and must suffer for that ambition for all eternity. As melodramatic as this tale may seem, like many bits of folklore, it holds a grain of truth.

An individual Embraced doesn't easily abandon all the beliefs he had in life. A poor soul who was religious in life will likely have his faith sorely tested when he is undead. The legend of Caine allows some faithful to put the horror of their existence in context. If God cursed Caine, is it His will that every victim of a vampire share that damnation? When a vampire condemns his child to his same fate, that victim may wonder how his relationship with the divine has changed. Some come to accept that their God has forsaken them; others consider their curse to be a test of faith and humanity. When the Ritual of the Red Sign is described to these lost souls, it may not merely come to represent a return to humanity, but a way to make peace with God.

Many Camarilla neonates hear the sacred tale of God's condemnation of Caine, but not all of them accept it. The most blasphemous iconoclasts suggest that the story is a lie, a bedtime story meant to keep enslaved herds of Kindred obedient to their elders. The story sounds as though all of this is part of God's plan, attributing the same grand significance echoed in false accounts of how vampires have helped build civilizations, shaped the course of human history, and pulled the strings of everyone from Julius Caesar to George W. Bush. It is yet another conspiracy theory, they claim, one that invokes a higher power to explain why the world is rife with corruption and despair.

If someone did not believe in God in life, why should he believe such things in undeath? Attributing the creation of all vampires to a divine force elevates the significance of the Antediluvians, and fear of these An-

cient Ones props up the oppression meted by Caine and Kindred elders. If one does not fear a false god, they say, one should not fear elders, either. Skeptics may simply view the Ritual of the Red Sign as a ritual devoid of religion. Some even attempt to reconstruct by scientifically mechanistic means, not superstitious or spiritual methods. They may completely ignore the spiritual significance of the ritual — and may do so at their own peril.

For cultists who serve darker powers, the thought of the divine creating such evil is a more heretical concept. If Caine did exist, was it really God who ensured his damnation? Or was it some more diabolical force? Such heresies are not welcome in certain Camarilla coteries, or in the eyes of the Sabbat Inquisition. If a diabolic force created all vampires, perhaps it is even more crucial to find redemption through the preservation of humanity. More bestial cults, including some within the Setite Clan and the Sword of Caine, may believe the early stages of the Red Sign ritual involve the destruction of humanity, overcoming enslavement by delving the depths of one's soul and conquering all weakness. Some vampires have attempted to make pacts with demonic forces — and there may be horrific results when one tries to escape consequences with the Red Sign.

Within the Sabbat, some devout (and devolved) vampires look for a reason behind the religious structure of the Sabbat. It is a mockery of the Catholic Church, resplendent with its own hierarchy of priests and cardinals. Even the most jaded Sabbat packs object to callous attempts to malign their campaigns against the Ancients. If a vampire holds some measure of faith, it's said that every act of diablerie is an act of revenge, an act of catharsis that brings the murderer — or more precisely, the diablerist — closer to a Cainite who rebelled against God Himself.

By these deviant views, a vampire who becomes mortal not only defies reality, but the powers that created it. Each act of diablerie, each blasphemous rite, each time a vampire recoils in horror from a manifestation of True Faith — do such reactions prove a divine power behind the origin of all vampires? Those who seek redemption must contend with such questions. When perverted, the Ritual of the Red Sign may not bestow redemption, but instead concentrate corruption, creating the very antithesis of humanity.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Mages have their own secrets, especially the most traditional willworkers, those who have pledged to walk the Path of Shade. Even common folk have heard tales of impossible feats that the sorcerers and wizards of

legend have attempted to perform. The alchemy of transmuting lead to gold, the creation of homunculi, the moment of illumination achieved by a resting Boddhisatva, the reanimation of Frankenstein's monster — all these achievements are mythical, but the truths behind them are kept hidden behind a veil of secrecy. Paradox and madness afflict those who peer behind it.

The Red Sign is at the heart of another legend of life and death. It is the culminating movement of a communal ritual, one that can return the undead to life. Like other legends of those who have overcome the horrors of vampirism — whether by taming the Beast, walking in sunlight for one blessed day, or simply escaping the madness and persecution of vampiric society — such achievements are mythical, unsubstantiated, and ephemeral. No one has ever proven that the Red Sign has been used to redeem the damned soul of a vampire... but it is only a matter of time.

According to learned masters of lore, the ritual is more than a mere gesture or chant. It is High Ritual. Several participants are involved, and they must assume various roles and guises when they perform the ceremony. One person cannot perform the ritual alone. By speaking the proper dialogues, enacting the right dramatic scenes, and integrating many subtle inflections, words, and gestures, the ritualists briefly become more than the sum of their parts. Different versions of the ritual require the participants to assume different roles; one may involve Cain and Abel, while another may center around Lilith, or Japheth, or possibly even an atonement for Tremere's act of diablerie.

The High Ritual recreates this drama and reinterprets it. The words the participants speak are cautiously composed, often drawing on allusions and allegories as the ritualists speak them. The "drama," if the word is appropriate, surrounds one individual: the aspirant or initiate. One "player" in the High Ritual is the vampire who seeks to transcend his curse. According to some legends of the Red Sign, the aspirant does not need to know the ritual itself: He must react to the Enlightened willworkers surrounding him as a symbolic test of his worthiness. By other accounts, the aspirant says nothing throughout the ceremony until the final moment, when he utters one fateful word and makes the proper sacred sign, traced in his own blood. If the Enlightened performing this ceremony are correct in their words, deeds and emotions, the aspirant is transformed.

Even in the most clinical sense, performing this kind of ritual upon a vampire is more than merely the physical matter of returning dead flesh to life — though that in itself is a feat that borders on the impossible. It is a spiritual



transformation as well. Thus, it depends on the very soul of the vampire who awaits transformation. Some ignore this at their peril. By one retelling of the legend of Tremere, that story suggests that a mortal soul is shattered when it is subjected to the Embrace. Mages who have attempted to reconstruct the ritual often argue that it will fail if the vampire's soul is recovered as well.

Further legends of Golconda suggest the *humanitas* possessed by the initiate may influence the outcome of such a ritual. Just as the ritual of Amaranth seizes the power of another's soul, the ritual of the Red Sign must restore what has been shattered — bringing Redemption to mind, body and spirit. Just as Tremere's ritual failed, it may be possible for the Ritual of the Red Sign to fail. If so, the results could be monstrous. An initiate who seeks to return to a previous state of being faces perilous dangers.

FALSE PRIDE

Why would anyone do such a thing? And why hasn't it been done before? While it may seem theoretically possible to perform this rite, mages are not limitless in their power. They may defy the very boundaries of reality, but they cannot completely overcome them. The impossible almost lies within their grasp, but every act that redefines the limits of possibility comes with a price.

Ambition risks retribution, not merely from any concept as nebulous and relative as "reality," but from the combined will of the six billion humans on the planet who define it. This force manifests as Paradox. Returning a vampire to life and bringing redemption to his very soul is impossible... unless a visionary risks everything, least of all Paradox, to perform the act for a first time and forge it in the realm of possibility. Once redemption is possible for vampires, the world changes, so it is not a choice made lightly.

Why would a mage attempt an impossible feat such as returning a vampire to her mortal state? The easy answer is hubris: false pride. The truth is a bit more complex. While it is tempting to categorize and classify willworkers into various distinctions of Traditions and philosophy, they are first and foremost individuals. Enlightened individuals who push the boundaries are not limited by such pedestrian conventions as stereotypes. Some may think a mage would attempt such a feat simply "because he can," but that way lies folly. Each participant in the ritual must have a reason to take such risks.

Again, the implications of the Ritual of the Red Sign challenge the philosophies of the mages who research it. For example:

Akashic Brothers don't merely seek to perfect their bodies, but their minds as well. The most powerful achieve

a unity of mind, body, and spirit. It may be that the Redeemed may help other mages achieve this unity, too.

Celestial Choristers develop a strong understanding of divinity, the many reflections of the One. The very existence of vampires might be an offense to a faithful Chorister's perception of original and inherited sin. When approached by a lost soul that has heard of a chance at redemption, a Chorister may find the concept comforting. On the other hand, he may find the notion heretical enough that he believes the ritual must be stopped and the initiate destroyed.

Ecstatics don't just exist for the sake of hedonistic pleasure; they are masters of Time. Granted, this may be developed by learning to experience the pleasure of a single moment, or recapture memories of past times and past pleasures, but their magic can grant visions of the future as well. With so many possibilities spawned from one ritual, the future is uncertain. A mage in this situation has little choice but to help define that future, if only for the benefit of his own philosophy.

Euthanatoi have a profound awareness of the boundary between life and death. Just as one of these mages might want to help a ghost or wraith transcend the limitations of its curse, she may see redemption as a similar way to bring justice to a lost soul. Or does such meddling tamper with karmic destiny?

Hermetics are masters of esoteric lore, studying far more than the elemental forces. Now that the Technocracy's 20th-century "witch hunt" has lessened in intensity, they have been able to focus on more outré subjects, such as the cosmology of the spirit world, the forces struggling to enter our world, and cults that would dare open themselves up to them. A few have found Marauders willing to serve such forces again... but evidence points to other supernatural creatures involved, including vampires. The Ritual of the Red Sign, if performed incorrectly, could throw others' forces out of balance.

Hollow Ones are rumored to be far more likely to encounter ghosts and vampires than any other Tradition. Their involvement in a Red Sign conspiracy may be simply a matter of becoming entangled in a vampiric conspiracy and being unable to escape it unless they can help the initiate escape as well.

Sons of Ether often give their lives to pursue outrageous theories. If Frankenstein worked so hard to reanimate a dead body, what scientific principles could be advanced by restoring the undead to life? Aside from spiritual considerations, this ritual plays with the concepts of life, death and immortality. It is thus best left to a scientist with a deeper understanding of these forces.

Verbena are often deeply spiritual, with an understanding of life few can equal. Conquering not just death, but the curse of the undead, could be the culmination of her healing and restorative powers. Then again, just as the Celtic Cauldron of Rebirth could animate the dead, such dark powers could corrupt as well.

Virtual Adepts love a challenge, and some of them fail to fully consider the moral outcomes of their obsessions. The chance to hack reality and rewrite the program that creates vampires is unprecedented. The Adept who pulls off such a stunt would be renowned across the Web. However, vampires don't fit into their usual areas of expertise; a willing Adept's chutzpah might outstrip his actual abilities.

A mage may have a more personal reason for researching the ritual. The initiate might be a loved one who was victimized by a vampire, a powerful and influential elder who can offer wealth, security, or fulfillment of avarice, or a tortured and faithful soul who wants to make peace with God. As seekers of redemption piece together what they must know to attempt the Ritual of the Red Sign, mages must learn what motivates the vampires who would help them. The Masquerade that conceals the existence of all vampires may fall in the process, if the conspirators are incautious.

We will explore other possible reasons more in the next chapter, where we'll show many conspirators who aspire to grab such power. For now, don't think of these mages as merely performing this ritual for the sake of doing it. Each ritualist in the conspiracy must have a reason for risking the Paradox of performing an impossible feat. And every rival that mage has will have a reason to seize that opportunity first... or prevent it from occurring at all.

FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

For mages of any Tradition, a remote possibility exists of having heard of the ritual before, or perhaps similar ceremonies. The Order of Hermes once kept meticulous records of such legends and rumors, even if they were difficult to verify. Some tales suggest that one particularly innovative cabal of Hermetics actually attempted to quantify and document what they have fathomed about the Ritual of the Red Sign. Most of their research concerned second-hand accounts of a lost book in Renaissance France called *Concerning the Red Sign*. In their attempt to capture the theories and ceremonies of this rite in mere words and diagrams, they composed entire treatises about the subject, reconstructing the pieces they have found. Some offer insights into perfecting the ritual, but in true Hermetic fashion, the deepest insights are hidden in allegory, mysticism and symbolism.

These esoteric tomes make for an interesting contrast to an even more unusual book: a "fictional" work from an obscure story. In the bookshops of Paris at the turn of the last century, cognoscenti hinted that seekers of rare tomes should seek out an... inspired... play called the *Yellow Sign*. Skeptics insisted that it was merely the invention of a romantic horror writer, but visionaries insisted that they knew the contents of this legendary tome.

Although the play is set in the fictional kingdom of Ytll, it speaks to its readers of a messenger from outside the world we know. The characters in this play are fictional, but its message was so powerful that readers always found reasons to sympathize with at least one of them — a sympathy that grows to madness, as the reader inevitably begins to confuse the fantasy with his real world. The lone reader becomes like the participant in a High Ritual, but he is usually the sole participant.

As his madness grows, he cannot distinguish between reality and the play's fantasy. The culmination of this drama is the same: the arrival of the messenger, who brings complete and unconquerable madness (the parallels to *Paradox*, *Hobgoblins*, and *Quiet* should be obvious to the casual reader of mage manifestos). The reader then questions all of reality around him, and supplants it with the mythos of the drama. Some suggest that the madmen who read this play actually summon the ephemeral messenger, the Man in the Pallid Mask, and the insanity he bestows gives the answers they seek.

Drawing from these deviant insights, a degenerate circle of Parisian scribes allegedly penned a similar work, their own chapbook entitled the *Red Sign*. Drawing on occult lore, they quantified another supposedly mythical hierarchy: a society of vampires. This chapbook is also a play, one that recreates scenes from an extensive (and some believe entirely fabricated) vampire history. Some claim the chapbook was merely a reconstruction of an earlier Hermetic text, perhaps assembled by a cabal of mages with insights into vampire lore, while others claim it is authentic reproduction of sections from the original French version. Contrary accounts attribute the work to a coterie of demented Malkavians, who found a way to concentrate their madness in print. The most common conclusion researchers draw is that the whole thing is a hoax.

More holistic researchers claim that many variant copies of the book exist, all reflections of the same drama — perhaps there is some master drama that contains all of vampiric history, and all these variants are excerpts and reworkings of that parent work. Regardless of whatever its true incarnation may be, it is one of the most notable attempts, and epic failures, to chronicle the mysteries of

vampires, and it has become an infamous work. When the subject of transcending Caine's curse is raised, learned masters of lore speak of it with respect. The mere mention of this book is sufficient to draw a variety of Cainite scholars... and ambitious types who hope to profit from exploiting them.

QUANTIFYING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Lore speaks of grand events and horrible fates that have occurred before; now we must define the shape of things to come. These stories suggest what really exists in the game world, but for Storytellers, rules define how the world works. Whether God plays dice with the universe is irrelevant. In this game, we use dice as random elements in our story. To tell our tale, we'll need to overcome an inherent contradiction: figuring the probability of a seemingly impossible event. Just as you must decide for yourself which conspirators to enlist in your troupe's particular storyline, this section presents several ways to use game mechanics to describe the Ritual of the Red Sign. All are permutations and reflections of this larger work.

A BRIEF DIGRESSION ON RULES

Some things man was not meant to know lie outside the definable boundaries of human reason. Merely encountering these truths can drive one mad. After all, once you believe in one impossible truth, challenging the rest of reality becomes progressively easier — until the very foundations sanity depends on have been swept aside.

This may sound like mere rhetoric, but it's critical to the ideas that follow. Consider: If you were to learn that vampires were real, could you really question someone who believed in other supernatural phenomena, like ghosts or werewolves? After you discovered that someone had crossed the boundary between life and death once, would you be skeptical that someone could cross it again? The very idea of a vampire returning to a state of grace — escaping the Curse of Caine to become mortal again — is just as dangerous. Once you introduce an impossible idea into the World of Darkness, it threatens to unravel the fabric of creation. More importantly, if you're a Storyteller, it may even threaten to unravel your chronicle as well.

If these truly are the End Times, and mages now attempt rituals like the Red Sign, then more questions bear asking: Outside the context of the game, how can we possibly define the impossible with game mechanics? How do we assign a probability to a task like making

a vampire mortal again? And after it's been done once, what's to stop other aspirants from accomplishing the same feat again and again? As part of the Final Nights, a group of mages may find a way to do just that, but even the most enlightened practitioner of magic does not have limitless power. That's part of the reason Paradox exists: to punish those with the hubris to challenge the workings of the world.

If we allow them to do this one impossible task, however, what should you do as a Storyteller the next time a character wants to perform something even more impossible? What will they want next? A deceased character brought back from the grave? Vampire werewolves? A Kinfolk mage who survives the Embrace...and then undergoes his First Change and becomes a werewolf? That way lies madness, not to mention an increasingly improbable chronicle. Like the unspeakable tomes of Lovecraftian fiction, this book can bring great suffering if it's used carelessly — at least for the characters in your chronicle.

There are three possible ways to temper that power:

- By rejecting the restraints of mere rules,
- By adapting previous mechanics for "impossible" die rolls, or
- By finding an approach in-between, one that marries mechanics to your story.

THE FIRST SOLUTION: REJECT THE RESTRAINTS OF MERE RULES

One possible answer to the question of "impossible mechanics" starts like this: You don't actually *need* game mechanics for the Ritual of the Red Sign at all. Since you're the Storyteller, you have the right to accept or reject any rules in the game, including the ones in this book. This philosophy depends on the idea that if you document rules for doing the impossible, the players will find a way to exploit it to bring other drastic events in your game.

For instance, suppose the players in your **Mage** chronicle ask what Spheres you think would be necessary for them to raise the dead, returning a human to life. If you give them a straight, mechanistic answer, they may try to shuffle the Spheres around to cast variants of the spell, using the same ritual on a ghost, or the Walking Dead, or the next vampire they meet. If you allow them to attempt the impossible once, you open up the door for them to try progressively more dangerous — and game-breaking — escapades.

This has some precedent in **Vampire**. For instance, there are no hard-and-fast rules for a vampire to achieve a state of Golconda, at least not in the current version of the tabletop game. Some would argue there never

should be rules for this sort of thing. Keeping a Humanity above 7 and all Virtues at 4 or higher is only the start of the path to Golconda. Beyond that point, whether a vampire achieves redemption should be a matter of story and roleplaying; where the dice fall are inconsequential if the story and transformation are not believable.

In some groups, an accomplishment like achieving Golconda depends entirely on roleplaying. A vampire who has lead a humane unlife for many years (possibly over several years of play) may conclude a chronicle by finding the stimulus of the Suspire and attempt to conquer the Beast Within. The pinnacle of the chronicle might be a supreme sacrifice the character has made, followed by a humane mentor (perhaps a Salubri or Inconnu) telling the aspirant that she is ready to make the last leap of faith. After a bit of dramatic roleplaying, the Storyteller decides whether the Suspire succeeds or fails — it's the Storyteller's ultimate decision.

In *Mage*, there have always been limits on what mages can do, even among the most powerful. Since the Avatar Storm, those paragons of magic have passed from the realms we know. The same world in which this ritual is possible has recently undergone other profound cosmological shifts. The most powerful mages in all creation have become almost powerless to effect events on Earth: not long ago, the barriers surrounding creation shut out vast realms of the spirit world, trapping nearly all of the world's Masters and Oracles outside Earthly reality. In other words, if such a feat is possible, it may be that the only individuals who could perform it are now trapped in the Umbra, and cannot return. Any such events are merely the fluctuation of the boundaries of reality, like the dividing line between coincidental and vulgar magic.

In the absence of any complicated die roll, the first approach is to simply say that at some point someone has successfully performed the ritual for the first time, and leave it at that. For a coterie or cabal that's trying to stop the ritual, they may be rushing to reach the ritualist before a more specific event takes place (such as a full moon or an astrological event). A better approach would be to say that preparing the ritual takes many weeks (the Storyteller knows the specific quantity beforehand) of preparations while studying the book. That means that once it's confirmed that someone has the book, it's a race against the clock to stop him.

If no one intercedes, the ritual succeeds. The initiate who succeeded is at large, and the fact that he's walking around as a mortal spurs all sorts of interesting ramifications (which are best left to things like the

Storytelling chapter). An entire chronicle could be made out of tracking down the conspiracy that's performed this ritual, but whether they can perform such a feat again is left to the dramatic sensibilities of the Storyteller.

THE SECOND SOLUTION: ALLOW IMPOSSIBLE DIE ROLLS

Proponents of the second solution would find the ideas in the last few paragraphs offensive. If there are no rules, after all, is there really a game? The chronicle doesn't really have a sense of accomplishment if it depends wholly on whether the Storyteller arbitrarily decides that a character succeeds or fails. Characters have to make rolls to succeed at difficult tasks, after all; why should some Storyteller character succeed at something far more difficult just because the "Story Tyrant" says so?

If we are to quantify the impossible, we'll have to build upon the rules as we know them so far. In the revised version of the Storyteller system, there are two ways to represent impossible tasks, or at least highly improbable ones: raising a difficulty over 10, or requiring an extremely high number of successes on a roll. The question isn't whether a feat is impossible; it's how impossible the feat may be. Before we defy the rules, let's quantify what we have so far.

Difficulties Over 10: Before the revised edition of *Mage*, the highest difficulty the Storyteller could assign to a dice roll was 10. (After all, there's no "11" on a ten-sided die.) The latest edition of that game, however, introduced the concept of a "difficulty threshold." If a roll is made against a difficulty of 11, the Storyteller treats the difficulty as 10, but then subtracts for each success after the first. When rolling against a difficulty of 12, the Storyteller subtracts the first two successes after the roll, and so on. Beyond that point, each time the difficulty is raised by one, the number of successes required increases by one.

Keep in mind that raising a difficulty for a roll over 10 won't always make that feat impossible. While the difficulty may be high, it's possible a character might find some way to lower that difficulty. Here are a few examples:

- For mages, the easiest way to do this is by burning Quintessence. Strictly by the rules, each point spent reduces the difficulty by 1, up to a limit of the character's Arete.

- Some Storytellers allow "complementary rolls," by which the result of one roll reduces the difficulty of the roll that follows it. For instance, the Storyteller may decide that a player who's using Entropy to find a fault

in an engine's electrical system should have a better chance if he also knows something about repairing cars. She asks the player to roll Dexterity + Repair to get a rough impression of what's wrong with the engine; for each success, she also decides to reduce the difficulty of the Arete roll that follows by 1.

- The Storyteller might allow multiple characters to work "communally" on the task, or make an "extended roll." Several die rolls are involved, and the successes on those dice rolls add up. If the roll has a difficulty threshold of 11, each roll needs to score at least two successes to count toward this effort. The higher this threshold is, the more probable it becomes that someone will eventually botch, ruining the attempt.

By the way, one common rule of thumb for these kinds of rolls is that modifiers shouldn't adjust the difficulty for an Arete roll by more than ± 3 . If you abide by this, a feat that's difficulty 11 (impossible) could be adjusted to difficulty 8 (possible) under the right circumstances.

The Storyteller then decides the (extremely high) number of success as the (unusually high) difficulty of the roll. And herein lies the problem: The number he picks is often arbitrarily defined, since there are few frames of reference for how impossible an impossible feat really is. This is complicated by another consideration: Even if we meticulously give examples of impossible feats, no list of rules can possibly cover every situation, and a rules lawyer can try to break this system by applying the rules to unusual circumstances the Storyteller never intended. The Storyteller system isn't designed for such function; it's designed to fade behind the interactions between players and Storytellers.

In a sense, the Storyteller who loves detailed rules is not all that different from the one who loves pure drama — one makes decisions based on story and the other one on math estimates. For the Ritual of the Red Sign, the solution to this dilemma lies somewhere in-between.

THE THIRD SOLUTION: THE MARRIAGE OF DICE AND STORY

Not everything has to be quantified in terms of absolute probability, of course. While we can quantify more hard, "crunchy" rules for impossible feats, the ability to raise or lower a difficulty may be based on "softer" events within the story, giving us some leeway for dramatic license. In that vein, the Ritual of the Red Sign includes examples of difficulty numbers and thresholds, but it also has guidelines that depend on events in



the story. Using our earlier guideline, the difficulty can't be adjusted by more than +/-3 by these modifiers.

For instance, it should be possible to give the ritual a -1 difficulty if the subject has a Humanity 10. This is a "crunchy" modifier, one that depends on a character Trait. Since this is a storytelling game, however, the Storyteller might also assign a -1 modifier if that same vampire has performed a "truly humane act" within the last year or an "act of atonement" for a sin he has committed. Such an achievement is difficult to quantify with numbers, but it's instead based on the Storyteller's ability to judge these "softer" events.

Extremists may find this notion distasteful. Players who like "soft" story-based modifiers may accuse players who argue for every quantified modifier of being "rules lawyers," while those who insist on absolute and irrefutable mechanics for their games sometimes consider story-based rules to be too subjective or "fluffy."

In the end, the challenge of gaining this edge, this modifier, is left to the discretion of the Storyteller, but it's done in the context of detailed mechanics. If the Storyteller makes getting "soft" modifiers too easy, there's no sense of accomplishment in gaining them. On the other hand, if she insists on impersonal and absolute rules, she becomes less of a "storyteller" and more of a statistician. Just as you must decide how to introduce the Ritual of the Red Sign into your campaign, you must decide whether you favor the "hard" approach over the "soft" approach, attaining something in-between.

When evaluating the rules in the next section of the book, you should examine them from these three points of view. The Golden Rule gives you the power to alter or amend the rules for the sake of your story; the optional rules below are the framework you must tinker with to defy reality in your game.

DEGREES OF IMPOSSIBILITY

Before a mage can learn the Ritual of the Red Sign, there are story-based goals he must fulfill. Most of them (described below) deal with the acquisition of forbidden knowledge. The same principle applies to the vampire who seeks redemption. Casting the ritual is an involved and dramatic process; unless you favor Option One, it culminates in an Arete roll. More precisely, since several individuals are involved, it is an extended and communal roll (as described on p. 150 of *Mage: The Ascension*).

If you don't want to contemplate the implications of this any further, the benchmark difficulty for the roll is difficulty 11 and it requires ten successes. This is the default level of difficulty we recommend. On the other

hand, if you're a Storyteller who prefers to play a more active role in the World of Darkness, you'll need to consider whether that's *difficult enough*. Just as the conspirators must deal with the consequences of casting this rite for the first time, you must deal with the consequences of deciding on this difficulty.

You may, for instance, decide to raise it to an insanely high level. Perhaps it requires 30 successes, or maybe the difficulty is over 15. In this case, the rumors of the Red Sign are probably a lie. Unless some freak outbreak of probability tweaks the die roll, everyone who seeks this truly impossible goal will fail. Rumors of redemption inspire humanity (and betrayal), but ultimately, there is no escape from the Curse of Cain. Despite this, many suffer pursuing it.

You may, on the other hand, lower the difficulty and grant more story-based modifiers. As an impossible feat, it may indeed require difficulty 11, but you're willing to grant up to a -3 modifier on the roll, and it only requires, say, five successes. You may then decide that the ritual succeeds only if the ritualist has performed a truly humane act, atoned for her sins, or similar subjective accomplishment, in which case, rolling the dice is a mere formality. In this "white light" version of the game, there is hope and salvation for those who seek it.

Every chronicle involving the Red Sign should be different; the Storyteller must decide on the rarity of redemption. In any case, before you make the final call, look at copies of your characters' sheets, pick up a handful of dice, and make a few trial rolls to play with the probability.

And here's one more option for you to consider: As Gehenna approaches, you must decide whether the difficulty raises, lowers or stays the same. Maybe the window of opportunity is closing, and each year, it increases by one. Perhaps you're even planning on leading into a chronicle *about* Gehenna or Ascension, and you want several of the Redeemed to play a major role at the end of your story. You've already decided how many vampires and mages are running around in your world, after all — the story is ultimately in your hands.

To prevent the entire world from becoming mortal again, we have set up one additional obstacle on the road to redemption: acquiring the knowledge required to perform it. Now that you understand the theory behind these rules, the next section describes a way to put them into practice.

RULES MAN WAS NOT MEANT TO KNOW

Imagine a world where truth has no boundaries, where the universe does not offer a reality we can

ultimately understand. Ordinary people cannot handle such absolute truths. It inevitably drives them mad, like the sight of a werewolf in its true form or the horror caused by the Walking Dead. Such powerful truths are best kept hidden, even from the wisest men, because power, like incautious use of magic, can corrupt absolutely. Blasphemous secrets do exist in this world; in fact, they're written down and passed on to other scholars of the occult.

During the Renaissance, mages needed a way to record these secrets without letting them fall into the wrong hands. Centuries before the advent of complex cryptography and encrypted data, Enlightened souls needed more effective means to hide their insights. Long before the Technocracy established security protocols, the Order of Reason had a way of containing such knowledge, keeping it from all but the most perspicacious and intellectually Enlightened souls. By the late 15th century, this secret society documented its scientific and technological practices by using methods that bordered on the mystical.

Visionaries kept hidden lore in craft tomes, works of genius that could only be deciphered by individuals with the potential to actually use such truths (in other words, only characters with Arete ratings could read them). A convention of Enlightened willworkers called the Craftmasons concealed the methods of their mystical arts in these lengthy works. Even the most insightful students of this age do not know that most of these works were gathered by another secret society, the Ksirifai, and assembled in a sacred library that was most likely destroyed. Most, that is, but not all.

Forbidden knowledge may be hidden in these and other rare tomes, concealed from the inquisitive eyes of those who would not understand. Such treatises are rarely straightforward: The truth within them is hidden in allegories, symbolism, allusions, cryptograms and misdirection. Learning a ritual isn't just a matter of memorizing words and gestures. When a tome is involved, the reader must actually achieve some measure of spiritual enlightenment (or damnation) to harness the power contained within.

OPENING TOMES

The Red Sign, like Chamber's *The King in Yellow*, isn't just a ritual; it's ritualistic knowledge concealed in a tome. The knowledge isn't just extracted from the tome; the tome is the knowledge. Who has the book isn't as important as who can read the book, whether he has enough time to decipher it, and what he will do with that knowledge. By accessing and studying the lore contained within, the reader gains the ability to per-

form the ritual. Exactly how this is done depends on the kind of mechanics you prefer for "impossible feats." All three approaches are valid; they all depend on the Storyteller's interpretation. Tomes defy the laws of man and god; they also break the rules of this game.

In game terms, deciphering the information in one of these tomes requires an Arete roll. Degrees of success allow the reader to uncover hidden meaning and messages in the work. Although many of them were hidden away in secretive libraries (allegedly assembled by shadowy Ksirifai assassins), the process of crafting these tomes has been handed down over generations to a select few, disseminated like a bounty of mythical Templar treasure kept hidden for centuries.

If you prefer a story-based game (like the first option described above), reading an occult tome merely takes time; no further dice rolls are required. If you want to keep impossible knowledge from falling into the wrong hands, be mindful who has one of these tomes. Each one has a description (and sometimes a simple die mechanic) for how long it takes to successfully study a tome. A character spends weeks or months studying it and gains the information he needs to advance in the knowledge. If someone wants to stop the owner from performing the rituals contained within, she'll need to find him and stop him before this period of study concludes.

A tome is more than a collection of words. Diagrams, handwriting, notes in the margins, physical dimensions — hidden aspects of the work may hold meaning as well. (For one approach to this idea, check out the movie *Ninth Gate* or the book it was based on, *El Club Dumas*.) Attempts to reproduce the book dilute its usefulness. For instance, a tome that is photocopied may lose some of these hidden clues; one that is excerpted may lose some vital references and allusions not contained in the ritual. For anyone who wants to copy and mass-produce tomes, remember that they are created with Mind magic. This obfuscating magic makes it difficult (if not impossible) to transcribe or copy the work without losing part of its meaning. Copy it down by hand, and you'll find that the writing is gibberish; code it into HTML, and the computer reading it may suffer strange crashes or simply not have the proper alphabet set to convey the information. Tomes have a supernatural component, like a mage's Wondrous Artifact or a werewolf's fetish; attempts at reproduction should be perilous.

For Storytellers who prefer more detailed rules for tomes (as in the second option described above), adding these clarifications can enhance this part of the story. Some knowledge may be concealed well enough that only someone with Arete can decipher it. For a start, the

owner of a tome must not only spend the requisite study time analyzing it, but also make an Arete roll; the difficulty is described below. A particularly complex tome may require multiple rolls.

As presented in *The Red Sign*, a tome may hold further possibilities:

- Reading a tome and making an Arete roll may allow a mage to learn one rote he couldn't otherwise attempt. He must have all of the appropriate Spheres for this rote, but all of his Spheres are treated as one higher than they actually are. For instance, a mage with Spirit 2 could learn to cross the Gauntlet, a rote that normally requires Spirit 3. This rote must be contained and detailed within the tome.

- Studying a tome may lower the difficulty of a specific rote. For instance, a mage with Spirit 3 might learn rituals that give him a -1 difficulty on any attempt to cross the Gauntlet, if the tome is specifically about accessing the spirit world.

- The knowledge in a tome might make it possible to learn an "impossible" rote; that is, one with a difficulty over 10. The mage must have all the appropriate Spheres, but he'll also receive a -1 difficulty to the roll. At the Storyteller's discretion (and this is pretty damn discrete), he may decide rituals with difficulties over 11 aren't possible without a tome or Talisman to explain the process.

In each of these cases, deciphering a tome takes at least a week of isolation and study. Each tome in your story should have a "study time" listed; we've provided three examples below. The reader makes an Arete roll at the end of this time. If he scores at least one success, he's gained enough knowledge to "unlock" the ritual contained in the tome.

Once the tome has been deciphered, the reader can attempt its ritual once within a month of reading the tome. At the end of that time, he can permanently learn the ritual by spending experience points. The cost is one point for each rank of each Sphere involved. For instance, a ritual that requires Spirit 3 would require three experience points to learn permanently.

If the difficulty for this ritual has a difficulty over 10, it is knowledge mortal man was not meant to know. It exists outside the sane laws of human civilization because it exists so far outside the realm of normal reality. The first time the mage casts the ritual within this tome, it is considered vulgar magic. If the mage spends experience to learn the ritual permanently, he has gained the ability to perform a rite that is normally impossible, even for other mages. Thus, he gains *one point of permanent Paradox* for learning forbidden lore.

Again, the knowledge contained in a tome is far more than simple words and gestures. The reader does not learn to merely change reality around him, for the very act of reading the tome can change the reader. Performing the ritual is not a mere matter of reading one salient photocopied page: The reader gains the knowledge necessary to attempt the ritual by the process of studying the tome. Such knowledge is almost unintelligible to ordinary men, contained within occult diagrams, long rambling sections of megalomaniacal

STORYTELLING TOMES

Putting a tome in your chronicle, such as the *Ritual of the Red Sign*, can help reduce the amount of damage forbidden knowledge can inflict on your chronicle. If you want to limit the amount of outrageous feats characters can perform, severely limit the number of tomes. Acquiring a tome becomes an adventure in itself — it's a McGuffin that can drive any number of stories. Once enough people have read the book and can perform the ritual without it, however, the book becomes irrelevant to the more dangerous stories that result. A limited number of people can then perform an "impossible" feat, and they will inevitably come into conflict because of it.

If a character wants to learn an impossible feat, he may find out about the tome while researching esoteric subjects or consulting with other occultists. When that same character needs to stop someone from performing an impossible feat, the easiest method is finding the tome involved before the study period has expired and stealing it. When a cabal has found a tome too easily, the Storyteller may set up an encounter in which a rival attempts to steal it... which then leads to further investigation to recover it, and so forth.

One of the easiest ways to begin a story involving a tome is to treat it as you would a mage's Wonder. It's similar to any other artifact that bestows great power. Someone (perhaps mentioned in a character's Backgrounds) has learned that a specific individual has acquired a dangerous artifact. The characters then set out to recover it before it's used for malefic purposes. Afterward, they must decide whether to destroy it, turn it over to someone they trust, or deal with the temptation of using it themselves. Instant stories result. For more complicated variants on this theme, see the Storytelling chapter.

text, words that resonate with the darkest corners of the reader's soul, or fragments of long-dead or imaginary languages. Think of the meanings hidden in pictures in *The Ninth Gate*, the transformation that occurs when someone reads *The King in Yellow*, or the soul-shattering truths we dare not repeat from the pages of the *Necronomicon* (in stories like H.P. Lovecraft's "The Dunwich Horror").

In rare cases, after performing the rite once, the mage risks eternal damnation, not in the spiritual sense, but in a more metaphysical one. If a mage permanently gains the ability to raise the dead or aid in the Ritual of the Red Sign, he comes to exist outside reality, and cosmic powers will act against the fact that he simply is. Perhaps in the Final Nights, these Outsiders may be accepted in the World of Darkness. Until then, they draw Paradox as surely as any insane Marauder.

STATISTICS FOR TOMES

Any tome has a few basic requirements for the scholars who study it. The most elemental is that the reader must have an Arete score. Even if it doesn't meet any of the other requirements, a mage can spend time skimming the book (with the player making Arete rolls to deduce what the book might be about and what information is contained within it). Of course, rolling

Arete has its risks, chief among them is the risk of attracting Paradox for trafficking with the forbidden. This is the source of stories about rare tomes that resulted in outbreaks of madness, delusions or even summoned spirits; they're the horror story equivalents of Quiet, Hobgoblins and Paradox Spirits.

A mage needs a minimum Arete to actually "learn" something from the book (that is, for him to learn a ritual he couldn't ordinarily perform, reduce the difficulty of a ritual he knows, or attempt an "impossible" ritual). Anyone who doesn't meet this requirement can skim the book, spending an hour for each attempt to glean secrets and hints of deeper content, but can't decipher its true meaning or learn the rituals within it.

The average tome takes from two to 20 (roll two dice and add the result) weeks to study. If it is complex enough to require more study time, that is listed in the description of the tome. At the end of that time, the reader makes an Arete roll (difficulty 6); with one success, he has deciphered enough of the text to gain a basic understanding of what rituals are in the book and roughly what their results may be. Deeper understanding of the rituals requires Intelligence + Occult rolls (difficulty 7).

It is possible that a tome may not contain any rituals at all. In cases like these, the reader gains knowledge,



presumably information relevant to the current story. It is just as possible that the tome has been altered by Mind magic to bring about some change in the reader. For instance, the reader might need to make a Willpower roll to resist developing a delusion planted in the text. He might gain a vision of a lost realm in the Deep Umbra, for instance, or realize how to put together the pieces in Doctor Aeon's Wonderwork Robot Contraption — that's a different story, though.

The rewards require some degree of risk. Yes, a botched Arete roll incurred while studying a tome does bestow Paradox. Unless more detailed information is given in the tome's description, deal with the reader as though he has performed coincidental magic: The highest Sphere involved is the minimum Arete rating of the tome. More dangerous tomes should summon more perilous manifestations of Paradox. Consider the possibility of having one of the personas or ideas representing within manifesting as a Paradox Spirit, for instance...

If the tome contains a ritual, this rating represents the minimum Spheres the reader needs to perform it. If the tome enables the reader to perform a ritual he couldn't ordinarily perform, the minimum Sphere rating is one less than the Sphere normally required for the rite.

Studying a tome takes from two to 20 weeks; longer treatises may require months of downtime (that is, the time that passes between stories in a chronicle). At the end of this study time, a scholar who meets the minimum Arete requirement can make an Arete roll to learn the knowledge contained within it. He can attempt the ritual once without spending experience to "permanently" learn it.

A word of warning: The Storyteller should introduce a tome to her chronicle at her own risk. Each tome is optional, so the final requirement is that the Storyteller wants it to exist in the game. The

TOMES AND GRIMOIRES

A tome is a type of Grimoire, a special form of Talisman that bears a portion of its creator's magical Will. Details on Grimoires can be found in **Forged by Dragon's Fire for Mage: The Ascension**. The differences between tomes and standard Grimoires are detailed in this chapter. Namely, tomes are encrypted, requiring some degree of contemplation (lots of time and a successful Arete roll) before their secrets can be unlocked, and they convey specific ritual secrets (rites) rather than enlightenment or Sphere knowledge.

very fact that this book exists challenges reality in the game and may ultimately break a chronicle if it falls into the wrong hands. In other words, don't give your players a tome unless you intend for them to use it. (If you create a tome that turns werewolves into housecats, or some foolishness like that, it's not our fault. You consciously decided to let that tome in the game, so you must deal with the consequences.)

THREE BLASPHEMOUS TOMES

Submitted for your consideration are three tomes that illustrate these new optional rules. Any one of them may appear in a Red Sign chronicle — in fact, studying any of these tomes can increase the reader's chance of successfully performing the Ritual of the Red Sign.

Ex Libris Necro, Greek Translation of the original Sumerian edition

Minimum Arete: 4

Minimum Spheres: Learning the ritual in this book requires Life 4, Matter 1, Prime 1, and Spirit 2.

Actual Spheres: The full version ritual requires Life 5, Matter 2, Prime 2, Time 2, Spirit 2. Note that if the ritual is performed communally, it is possible for five different mages to each contribute one of these Spheres to the ceremony. If the rite is performed without Time, its results are limited; if it does not include Spirit, they may be disastrous.

The pages have turned yellow with age, the spine is cracked, and the wrinkled cover is obviously skin of some kind (perhaps human?). The mandala design on the cover — does it perhaps resemble a human face, or is that merely your imagination? A feather quill scrawled words in red ink... or perhaps it was some more nefarious fluid. Archaic Sumerian poetry rambles about a "Hierarchy of the Dead" that predates the Roman Empire and the birth of Christ. Using stolen knowledge from ancient Greek "arcanoi" the ritualist can summon spirits of the dead, animate the bodies of the living, or using both rites, resurrect a lost soul to a reanimated body.

Scattered throughout the text are words that are hard to translate unless one sounds them out carefully. Pronounced correctly, they form the first stages of a ritual for raising the dead. Yet the ritual also requires bodily gestures and the trappings of a blasphemous ceremony, as implied by horrific illustrations throughout the body of the work. Returning a body to life requires the summoning of its lost soul, drawing it across the boundary between worlds. A ritualist can then heal the shattered soul, resurrect its dead flesh, and then bring a person back to life before her soul is lost for oblivion.

Mispronouncing the words of power can have catastrophic consequences, especially if one does not perform the correct gestures or ceremonies. For instance, merely playing the words back on a CD, mp3, or tape deck is grossly insufficient. The flesh is resurrected, but the soul cannot be retrieved, creating shambling, soulless dead. (If the device is activated by someone who has Arete, the resulting gibberish has no effect.) Some believe that these empty vessels may attract evil spirits that exploit them for their own base purposes, terrifying the living to sustain their own crude souls. The bodies must be hacked to pieces then, or better yet, mutilated beyond all recognition.

One brave scholar has managed to piece together enough fragments of the book to warn others of its contents. By his "white light" interpretation of the ritual within, he translates it as the *Invocation of Eternity*. Realizing the implications of its contents, he attempted to destroy the book, but he lacked the will to do so. Instead he gave it to a fellow scholar. Tempted by power, the new owner of *Ex Libris Necro* foolishly attempted to translate the tome in the safety of a cabin in the woods... and documented his failed translation in a tape recording... Let us hope no one finds it.

The Ritual: This tome contains the *Invocation of Eternity*, a ritual that can theoretically revive the recently dead (that is, someone who has died within the last hour). The mage (or group of mages acting in concert) must perform the ritual over the body, restore its shattered pattern, revivify the corpse, and summon the spirit back to its body. If the victim has not died within the last day, it is too late to summon the lost spirit. It may be possible to animate the body, but the soul is lost to eternity. The body must be intact for this ritual to work.

- Without Time, the ritual must be performed immediately after the subject's death.
- Without Spirit, the body is reanimated without a soul, leaving it open to possession by an evil entity.
- This ritual is difficulty 11, so without this tome, it cannot be attempted.

Because this feat is impossible, the ritual has a minimum difficulty of 11 and requires 20 successes. Finishing this rite, then, requires an extended roll. In theory, an entire cabal of mages could learn this rite, each one would have to study and decipher the tome to perform it once. Each one would have to spend 13 experience points to learn it permanently.

Once knowledge gets out that a cabal of mages can resurrect the dead, the ramifications are best left to the Storyteller. In the next chapter, however, we shall see that

there is a Nosferatu *antitribu* named Behemoth who will do anything to find someone who can perform this rite.

Optional Modifiers: Souls that have been damned or condemned, such as those belonging to individuals who have made pacts with demonic forces or traded them for supernatural power, should require 30 successes to resurrect with this ritual. Even then, the demonic forces that have been challenged will no doubt come for the resurrected to reclaim their prize.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the difficulty may be reduced by 1 for a subject who faces a great destiny or possesses great virtue, such as when:

- The deceased had performed a deed of great sacrifice or honor before dying,
- If one of the ritualists was truly in love with the dead man, or
- The deceased is destined to perform a valiant deed in the final time of the world.

The Yellow Sign, Parisian Edition

Minimum Arete: 3

Minimum Spheres: Mind 1

Actual Spheres: Spirit 3, Mind 5

According to fictional accounts, the original edition of *The Yellow Sign* was a chapbook printed in Paris in 1906. A rather unassuming title page announced the play's name in faded lettering. (By some variant accounts, the words were accompanied by an unusual sigil of cryptic design, which in itself was said to be innately disturbing.) The play within began somewhat innocuously, featuring the story of the court of a kingdom in a mythical realm. In the midst of a complex narrative of court intrigue, the courtiers await the coming of a messenger, the Man in the Pallid Mask, who either brings redemption or damnation for all. Some say that the outcome really depends on the reader's interpretation. Others insist it depends on the reader's mental state.

The play is so complex that the reader may sympathize with only one of the characters... but she sympathizes so thoroughly that the events of the play seem real. The reader is completely consumed by the story, believing that *she* is her chosen character. According to various accounts, any reader of this play begins to confuse fantasy and reality: a decrepit motel room can become a castle in a foreign land, a dime-store tiara can become a crown. By more sinister accounts, a reader who completely succumbs to the illusion believes she also awaits the Man in the Pallid Mask, who may bring redemption or utter annihilation, depending on your point of view.

The work first entered public consciousness within two short stories written by Robert Chambers, an En-

glish author living in Paris. Amid his prolific output of light romantic fiction, he produced occasional tales of the macabre and outré. "The Repairer of Reputations," set in a grim reflection of Paris in the near future, introduced *The King in Yellow* for the first time, masking its true nature behind the guise of fiction. Its sequel, with the eponymous title, further detailed the insanity this play could instill. Various authors have attempted to reproduce fictional versions of this book. None have equaled what is contained within an edition known only as *The Yellow Sign*.

Many acknowledge that the New England writer H.P. Lovecraft took Chamber's stories as part of the inspiration for the *Necronomicon*, a sanity-shattering tome mentioned in "The Dunwich Horror" and other tales; in fact, HPL admitted this freely. For decades afterwards, many demented and delusional individuals claimed that the *Necronomicon* was real, and that Lovecraft's fiction was either an attempt to warn the world or confuse those who sought The Truth.

Any claims that *The King of Yellow* actually exists will meet with similar outbreaks of skepticism. There is really no evidence that the book exists. The truly "insightful" insist that this is by design, claiming some supernatural force or entity covers up all encounters with the tome by infecting its readers with madness. One wonders what horrors it could unleash on an unsuspecting world if this last assertion was correct.

Skimming the book takes two hours; studying it takes between two and 20 hours.

The Ritual: No evidence exists to support the claim that this book is real. Yet repeatedly, in some shadowy corner of the world, some seeker after horror believes he has found it. Perhaps in a dusty attic or in the forgotten corner of a private library, the initiate into true knowledge picks up something that looks like this book, and if he is lucky, may even recall some vague allusion to Robert Chambers' stories. Upon reading one page, the reader's delusion becomes so real that it is all consuming. He believes that the book he has found is the *King in Yellow*. He reads what he thinks he sees in the book and immediately identifies with one of its characters. Others who share this delusion will also see the book as a copy of this play.

Once the reader has been consumed by the book's delusion, the book's appearance changes. He may even lose the book, and find some other book to take its place: a dictionary, perhaps, or a manual on transmission repair. He may attempt to show this book to others, but it is really a book the reader *believes* to be *The Yellow Sign*. The reader, through an outbreak of insanity, believes he has found a rare tome. The book cannot



photocopied or otherwise reproduced; scanning it electronically into a webpage, for instance, would yield gibberish (or in some cases, the pages of a dictionary, transmission-repair manual, etc.). Trying to reproduce the story later by repeating its contents is futile, as the reader cannot remember details that do not pertain to her chosen character.

Only a supreme act of will (or Willpower) can stop the reader from continuing to peruse the play. Skimming it takes about two hours; studying it takes between two and 20. If he lacks the Enlightenment to fully resist this delusion, it grows worse as he continues reading. Eventually, his former identity becomes a lie, and he becomes the character in the play, not in reality, but in his own thought and deed. The world around him changes for him, as he redefines it in terms of the play. No two readers interpret the book in quite the same way, though multiple readers can share the same communal delusion. Their actions may even feed off one another, as they act out separate parts of the drama.

In every interpretation, a few salient elements reoccur. The most critical bit of plot is this: that the Man in the Pallid Mask is coming. At some point, the reader or actor experiencing the play believes he is seeing the Pallid Mask, who then passes judgment on the play's new main character. According to legend, the outcome is redemption or damnation. The judged reader/actor/character then disappears without a trace. The book disappears along with him, until it is somehow found again.

Enlightened readers (that is, those with Arete) have a greater chance of resisting the book's lure. Instead of falling into the trap of identifying with one of the characters, the reader becomes obsessed with the Man in the Pallid Mask. If he is strong-willed enough to finish the book without becoming delusional, and he has the proper magical aptitude, he may summon this messenger, who brings great insight into the workings of the universe.

The successful reader, one who makes a simple Arete roll, may then perform one great act of magic he could not otherwise perform. According to whispered tales in the libraries of knowledgeable Hermetics, one commonly invoked request is to free another soul trapped by the delusion that the events of the play are real. Another common request is to free a lost soul, one trapped by circumstances more dire than the madness this book bestows. Some masters of obscure lore believe that one soul cannot be set free unless the book is passed on to "infect" a different reader, who then begins his own quest concerning the play.

It is theoretically possible to perform the play: Each actor studying a role would not recite the play by rote, however, but actually *become* the role as part of the performance. All observers would then, in turn, identify with various roles performed in the play, and perform it for someone else. Some claim that this is ridiculous, suggesting that the next step would be to perform the play on television, or recite it over the radio, and drive the world mad. Others say this sort of thing happens all the time, and manifestations of the Pallid Mask prevent anyone from remembering it.

Anyone who reads this book who is not a mage — that is, anyone who does not have the Arete Trait — risks insanity. For each hour of reading (not skimming), the reader's player makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 9). On a failed roll, the reader confuses the events in the book with the events of his life. He believes he is a character in the play, and he reinterprets everything he sees to fit that delusion. Furthermore, he is compelled to continue reading the book after failing this first roll. Once a day, the player must make another Willpower roll (difficulty 9). If the player fails this roll, the character must spend at least an hour that day reading the book.

At the Storyteller's option, the book does not actually exist and the reader merely *thinks* he's found the book and *thinks* he's reading it. If he tries to show it to someone else, it's a book he's mistaken for *The King in Yellow*. If someone takes this prop away, he finds another book and believes it to be his treasured tome. This prevents anyone from willingly giving the book to someone else to intentionally destroy that character. The delusion that the book exists is contracted like a disease, or an episode of insanity, which is propped up by the artifice of these game mechanics you're reading right now.

If a mage finds this book, he makes the same Willpower rolls, but his are against difficulty 6. In a way, the book is like a Grimoire created with a Mind 5 rote; its contents completely reconstruct the reader's philosophy, identity, and view of the world. A mage with Mind 1 can see through this sorcery: The events of the play are actually analogies and metaphors for subtle philosophical truths. A mage who succeeds at the aforementioned Willpower roll can make an Arete roll (difficulty 4 if he has Mind 1, difficulty 9 if he does not). With one success, he can deduce that the purpose of the book is summoning an entity known as the Man in the Pallid Mask to bestow knowledge.

A mage who succeeds at this Arete roll and spends at least two additional hours reading the book learns a ritual for summoning this entity. It works in most ways

like a summoning ritual, requiring an Arete roll (difficulty 6 if the ritualist has Spirit 3, difficulty 9 if he does not). The actual ritual involves reading aloud the last page of the play, in which the characters meet the cosmic messenger. Five successes are required on an extended roll. When these are attained, the Man in the Pallid Mask approaches the ritualist. Only the ritualist can see him; whether he is a Hobgoblin, manifestation of Quiet, Paradox Spirit, or Incarna is irrelevant. We'll get to the results of that success in a moment.

If the reader botches any of the aforementioned Willpower rolls, he meets the Man in the Pallid Mask, but in a very different way. He believes the messenger has come for him, but for the purpose of damnation, not redemption. The reader must make a Stamina + Survival roll (difficulty 9). On a failed roll, the reader dies; if there are no witnesses, he actually disappears without a trace. If the roll succeeds, the reader merely goes permanently insane. At the Storyteller's discretion, it may be possible to use Mind magic to cure this metaphysical insanity. The same sequence of events occurs if the mage in the last paragraph botches or fails the ritual.

If the mage succeeds at the aforementioned ritual and summons the Man in the Pallid Mask, the messenger brings redemption. The reader (or more precisely, the player representing him) chooses one Sphere. The messenger bestows the ability to cast any one ritual possible by that Sphere, as though the mage had an Arete 6 and rating of 6 in that Sphere. However, the ritual can be cast only once. Some scholars are convinced (based on second-hand testimony) that this applies only to the Spirit Sphere; because of this, many requests center upon trapped souls.

For added drama, each success after the fifth success allows the caster to perform a single casting a more complex rote, one using multiple Spheres. Thus, with eight successes, the caster could learn to cast a rote requiring three Spheres (such as Mind 5, Spirit 5, Time 5). Again, the rote can be cast *once*, and the roll is made as though the caster had Arete 6 and a rating of 6 in each of the Spheres required. This means that if someone studies the next tome, *The Ritual of the Red Sign*, before finishing *The King in Yellow*, the path to Redemption may be easier to attain.

A mage cannot use this tome to learn a rote more than once, and the rote bestowed can be used only once. After the reader has learned a rote, vanished, died or gone permanently insane, the book vanishes as well... until the Storyteller decides that someone else has found it. If someone has learned which Spheres are necessary to perform the *Ritual of the Red Sign* (by the

mechanic listed below), it may be possible to learn to cast it once by successfully summoning the Man in the Pallid Mask with *The Yellow Sign*.

Ritual of the Red Sign, Sussex Edition

Minimum Arete: 3

Minimum Spheres: Learning the ritual in this book requires Life 4 and Spirit 2.

Actual Spheres: The ritual is actually a variant of the *Invocation of Eternity* mentioned above, but with a difficulty over 10. The Spheres are Life 5, Matter 2, Prime 2, Time 2, Spirit 2.

An Additional Consideration: Some readers have interpreted the ritual as requiring a Tenth Sphere, one that presumably passes judgment on the soul of the initiate and allows the reintegration of the initiate's shattered Avatar. If this is true, then reading the tome allows the ritualist to perform an impossible task. We won't tell you what this Tenth Sphere is; suffice to say that this tome may allow you to access it.

Due to the numerous legends of this book's origins, there are many (often contradictory) details about its appearance. Some attest:

- It is a thick tome bound in crimson leather, with yellowed pages upon which the text is written in blood.
- Its essential elements are carved in five separate stones, translated into five different languages by the five conspirators of a forgotten cabal. Realizing the dangerous contents of this forbidden knowledge, they made sure that each of them lacked the complete knowledge of the ritual, and hid each stone in a distant corner of the Earth. The original was destroyed (in whatever form it was), and only a single undead, vampiric conspirator knows the location of all five stones.
- It has been encrypted on a computer disk, which can only be read with a particular cypher of numerological significance. Any attempt to copy, erase or alter the contents of the disk fails, though the physical disk itself can be destroyed.
- The book is blank; a spirit trapped within it has knowledge of the ritual. Even the most powerful willworker cannot break this binding and free the spirit without destroying its knowledge of the ritual. The spirit cannot be compelled to speak unless the reader writes what he has learned within the book, answering the spirit's questions into the nature of life and death, the true meaning of the legend of Caine, and so forth.
- The book is a crudely assembled sheaf of papers filled with line after line of rapidly typed text shot out from the ink ribbon of an archaic typewriter. The writing is rambling and occasionally nonsensical, filled with grammatical and typographical errors. The tran-

scriber purports in a brief introduction to know all he needs to know to attempt the ritual, and he offers what he knows to other Enlightened souls who would choose to follow his path should he fail.

- The least plausible legend is that the book is a rare publication by a tiny independent publisher with a print run of only a few hundred copies before the company's untimely demise. Written by a quartet of authors, it is often contradictory, as though the visionaries had four entirely different interpretations of its events and meaning. It hints at the nature of reality, but couches its insights in the esoteric terms of an overly complex series of metaphysical exercises, as though explaining the ritual in terms of probabilities and personal dramatics.

Normally a tome takes a variable number of weeks to study. This one requires 20 weeks. That's 20 weeks in which it can be stolen or destroyed, in which the scholar can be killed and permanently silenced. If the characters' coterie or cabal wants to stop the ritual, the clock is ticking.

The Ritual: No matter what the tome itself may look like, all versions of it are variation on a theme. They are all guidelines to a High Ritual: a ceremony in which the participants assume the roles of various historical or mythical figures. In the many different versions of this tome, different casts of characters are featured. The tome suggests which words and gestures are necessary for the completion of the ritual, but the ritualist must deduce what they are. These components are integrated into a scene in which the actors, in a sense, become the characters they portray. One participant does not need to have studied the book: He is the aspirant or initiate, the vampire who is the center of this ceremony.

As a benchmark level of difficulty, assume that the ritual is difficulty 11 and requires ten successes. That's an extended roll, and since several mages are involved, it's a communal roll. Whether the Storyteller wants to raise or lower that difficulty is entirely her call, and she must deal with the ramifications. We've methodically gone over that point in the rules theory section above, and the story-based ramifications are in the Storytelling chapter, along with several possible plot lines for this chronicle.

Let us suppose someone actually succeeds at this rite: acquires the tome, lives long enough to cast it, completes other story-based goals in the game, and rolls successfully. Many possibilities exist for the successful aspirant, and all of them lead to further complications in the chronicle.

MORTALS AND THE REDEEMED

Once the Ritual of the Red Sign is performed successfully, you'll need to decide what happens to the survivor. The most likely solution is that the initiate is merely mortal again, able to resolve his life (at least biologically) where it left off. Attaining more successes on the ritual may have even greater effects. This last section adds one more complication to the chronicle: What happens if the Redeemed is actually *more* than human. Someone who makes a spiritual journey of death (or undeath) and rebirth may return from the experience

By this interpretation, he might become a paragon of humanity, so much so that he can't cope with the horrors that still surround him. Or is it possible that he's beyond "good and evil" (whatever that may mean)? How good is he at concealing his new identity from vampires who want to hunt him down? After all, Kindred and Cainites alike may want to rip the knowledge of the experience from his head with psychic Disciplines, recruit him to their own designs, or simply slaughter him before he threatens the very fabric of vampiric society. Three options are presented here; the fourth is at the end of this chapter. The Storytelling chapter includes examples of four Redeemed individuals who can be added to an existing problem — again, the story should only be as complex as you want it to be.

The Paragon: Some believe that Golconda can be achieved only by a vampire who has atoned for his sins by undertaking a truly humane existence. (In mechanical terms, we'd call this Humanity 10, but it should actually encompass much more.) If that's true, then perhaps the Ritual of the Red Sign also requires atonement and enlightenment to achieve. You can argue how many truly humane people exist in our world, if you like, but however you figure that number, there are far fewer of them in the World of Darkness.

The Paragon cannot help but stand out in human society, which makes his existence somewhat problematic. Perhaps his purity shields him in some way from the horrors of the occult. For example, it may raise the difficulty for certain supernatural Disciplines to affect him, or make him immune to phenomena like the Delirium. He may see the world with the clarity the innocent allegedly possess, whether that means witnessing true forms, ghosts all around us, or even the true faces of other vampires.

The Widderslainte: Another possibility is that the soul is reassembled, but because of the taint of the Beast, is "inverted." The Beast is no longer hidden, but instead, is integrated into the mortal's personality. The

survivor looks normal, but his impulses remain monstrous. In mechanical terms, the character must roll for Frenzy whenever he is exposed to the same stimuli that enrage vampires. He cannot enter this state because of hunger for blood, but other temptations may overpower his restraint. The *Widderslainte* should have at least one type of "temptation" that overrides that impulse.

To further this, the *widderslainte* retains the Virtues she had as a vampire. The easiest option is to convert those three principles to Conscience, Courage and Self-Control. The Storyteller must devise at least one circumstance for each of those virtues that necessitates a roll; the soul is still controlled by the Beast, but he's found other drives.

If you're a complete and utter bastard, and the vampire followed a Path other than Humanity, you may continue to keep track of the *widderslainte's* progress along that path. A Setite *widderslainte* may still serve Set, for instance, or a Ravnos may still uphold the Path of Paradox. Ignore all urges for blood; replace them with another vice the *widderslainte* cannot master. Diabolical forces have then tainted the Ritual of the Red Sign, discouraging all but the most debased from following the one path that may lead to spiritual peace of mind.

The Soulless: The Ritual of the Red Sign isn't just words and gestures; there's something spiritual at the heart of this quest. In a failed ritual, the flesh may be resurrected, but the soul of the aspirant may be lost. If you're feeling devious, and the conspiracy of mages didn't include someone with the Spirit Sphere, this is an obvious outcome. The aspirant can walk and speak and think just as the vampire did, and it functions as a mortal does, but such responses are entirely by rote. The soul has been lost to Oblivion. The reanimated flesh merely masquerades as a human being; any ability similar to Spirit Sight will impart this (though few with Spirit Sight or Aura Perception will be familiar with this sort of thing and must discern what, exactly, seems "off" about the individual).

For those of you who use ghosts and other spirits in your chronicles, a soulless Redeemed is then utterly at the mercy of such forces. Without a soul, the Redeemed has no resistance against someone trying to possess the body, whether that's a Wyrmspirit, a wraith, or Spectre with Puppetry that has somehow survived the Maelstrom. It may even be the same kind of ghost that normally animates the Walking Dead in a game like *Hunter*. The Redeemed then continues to follow the normal routine of his or her life, but once a spirit takes over the character's body, it has a vast opportunity to exploit all who seek out the Redeemed for guidance.

The Storm Warden: The most complex resolution of this ritual relies on other concepts from *Mage*; for that reason, it is detailed at the very end of this chapter. Any result other than the Paragon may be the result of a botched ritual, or it may involve events that have happened leading up to the ritual. To follow this twisted path, consider some sinister reflections of our story.

CONSIDERATION OF THE STORY

You now know plenty of background to our tale, with permutations of conspiracies, cabals, and game mechanics. This chapter and the Storytelling chapter suggest many ways these stories can be combined. We can begin to assemble these shards of plot into a smooth surface and see what they reflect. Here's our story so far:

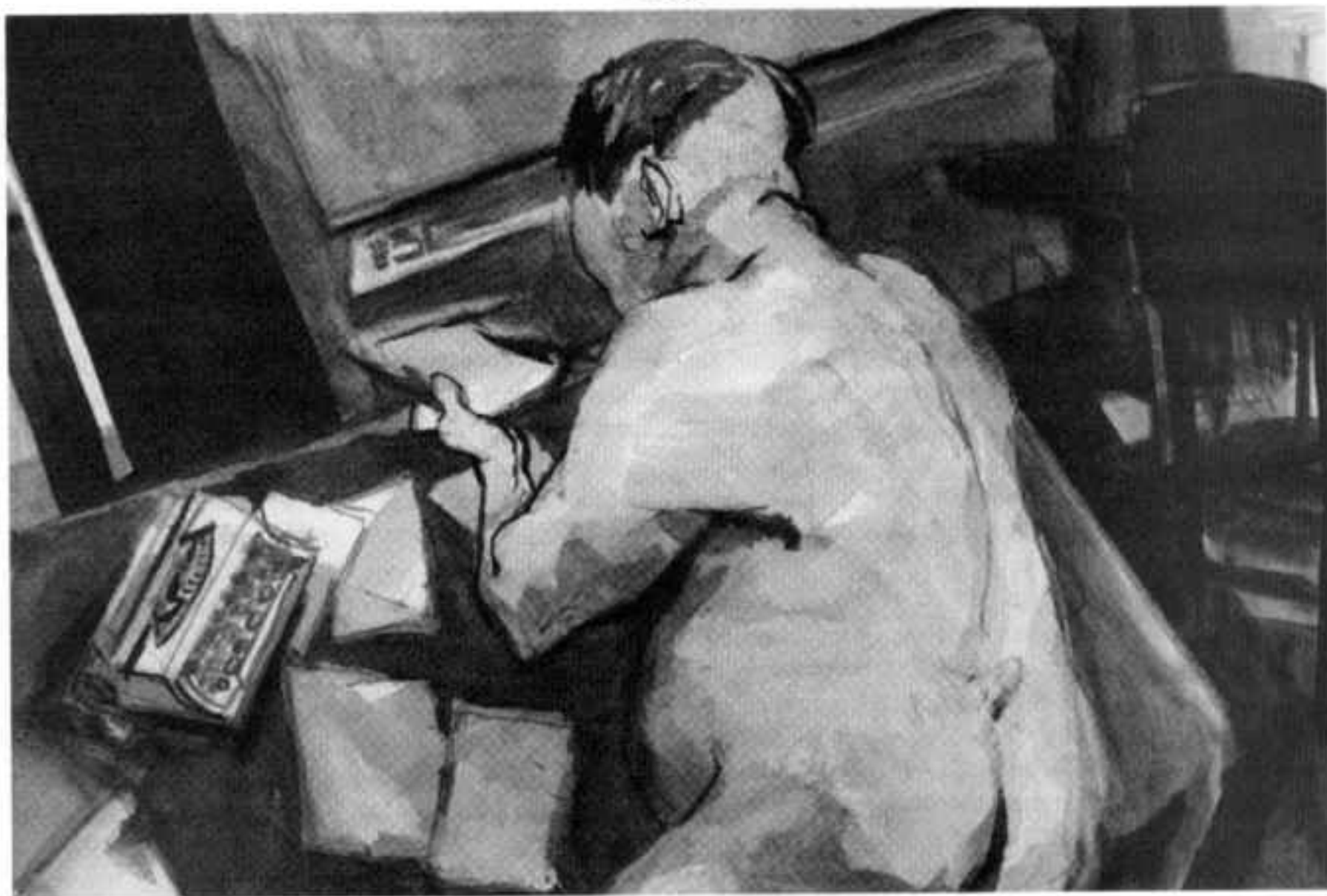
Until now, the act of returning a vampire to a state of mortal life has been little more than a myth. Rumors and legends have been told and retold, from the story of the Pool of Mirth to speculation about the true purpose of Golconda, but no one has actually proven that overcoming Caine's curse is possible.

One of these rumors concerns a cabal of Hermetic mages that almost succeeded at this task. The outcome of their rituals is uncertain, but it is believed they documented their rituals in the many elaborate notes and documents they took. It is also believed that a cabal of Craftmasons attempted to gather this information into a more permanent form in the 15th century; the result of their labors was a mythical book known as the *Ritual of the Red Sign*. Rumors of similar books have existed for centuries, from the blasphemous *Ex Mortem Vitam* to the heavily romanticized Parisian edition of *The Yellow Sign*. Collectors of arcane lore are wary when such tales resurface, but nonetheless dedicate some meager portion of their resources to acquiring these rare works.

Some of the tales of this tome's existence are false, while some are true. In the next chapter, we will see further examples of these liars and prophets, such as these:

- A Gangrel archaeologist has fabricated false tales of this book's existence to lure victims to his ancient master; however, in his studies, he has uncovered clues about its existence.
- A Malkavian prophet has confirmed that *The Yellow Sign* is real, seeing signs of the coming of the King in Yellow.
- A Nosferatu murderer follows voices to track down *Ex Libris Necro* at the bidding of an insane dead man.

That same archaeologist has purchased the *Red Sign* from the soldiers who found it, but once he realized that others would kill for it, he surrendered it quickly to save his unlife. Several conspiracies also seek that book,



while other cabals work to piece together the ritual. Once it is discovered that variants of the tome exist out there (cryptic tomes whose importance could not be deduced because they were craft tomes), all hell breaks loose. Characters may attempt to research these outbreaks of events, but really, the most critical question is who has read the book.

For a deeper version of this plot, the *Red Sign* tome may not be enough to perform the High Ritual. In fact, three tomes can aid conspirators in performing this impossible feat: *Ex Libris Necro*, *The Yellow Sign*, and *The Ritual of the Red Sign*. The knowledge in the third tome is the crucial component. With this one book, an Enlightened mage could piece together enough of the ritual to have a chance of success, provided that he had others to help him find the communal tome. All conspiracies working to create the Redeemed seek to find a copy of this tome.

The chances of a conspiracy succeeding increase if they have access to more than one of these books. Consider:

- The first book can bring the soul of a dead man back to the world of the living.
- The second book can free a trapped soul, restore a shattered avatar, or increase the chance of the High Ritual succeeding.

- The third book has the High Ritual components of the ritual, but if the avatar cannot be assembled or the soul returned, the formulae and chants are worthless.

Performing the High Ritual without the first two books can have drastic consequences.

- Without the first book, the Redeemed would be soulless. In theory, another spirit could inhabit his body.
- Without the second book, the soul would be monstrous. It is a *widderslainte*, surrendering to deviant urgings of the Beast Within.
- Without the third book, the "play" (which reconstructs mythical figures of vampiric lore into an historical context) cannot be performed.
- With all three tomes, and a successful performance of the ritual, the initiate becomes a Paragon, a Redeemed messiah who can lead humane vampires to an escape from the horrors of Gehenna. He may be the best hope this world has... or lead his followers to even greater horrors.

CONSPIRACIES

Scattered throughout this book are many conspiracies pursuing the Ritual of the Red Sign.

Ambrogino Giovanni has assembled the largest conspiracy, assisted by a host of other vampires. (You may choose to include all of them, or only a few of them, as you see fit.)

A New World Order technocrat leads another cabal; he is an intelligence analyst and expert on the Kindred. He works with a conspiracy of vampires in an attempt to define the boundary between the human and the monstrous. If he can achieve this impossible feat, vampires can be brought from the darkness into the light of day. Some of his agents consider it a "cure" for vampirism. Privately, he knows that the resulting conflict over this book could tear extensive societies of vampires apart.

One of the cabals is led by a Celestial Chorister named Alan Meroni; he attempts to circumvent the Apocalypse by performing the impossible. By showing that a vampire can overcome the Curse of Caine and find redemption (or *humanitas*), he demonstrates to his God (the One) that the world is not damned, but worthy of redemption.

In one city inhabited by vampires, a conspiracy conducts its own research into the ritual (some followers of this conspiracy are introduced in the next chapter). They perform experiments upon 15th-generation vampires to understand the boundary between the living and the dead. The prince (or primogen, depending on

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: A DIABOLICAL CONCLUSION

For players who are well-versed in **Mage**, the ritual may have a far more diabolical conclusion. The soul of a vampire is shattered during the Embrace; to complete the ritual successfully, one must restore it to its previous, mortal state. Tremere's soul was shattered when he became a vampire, for instance, destroying his ability to work true magic. Some heretics believe that some fragment of Saulot's soul lived on in his murderer, allowing him to be more than a mere vampire, creating the first pillars of vampiric Thaumaturgy.

Whether this is true or not, restoring a shattered avatar requires the ritualist to find a source to replace the parts that have been lost. Such a spiritual reservoir never existed before... but it does now. You may recall (if you're acquainted with the world of mages) that a massive cosmological shift has altered the boundaries between the worlds of flesh and spirit. More precisely, the Gauntlet between these worlds now has spiritual strength. This barrier rends the very souls (or avatars) of the mages who pass through it: The Gauntlet has "teeth." Something ephemeral has been forged into the weapon guarding the Gauntlet — and that barrier is made of souls.

A perfect completion of the ritual heals the ritualist's soul with fragments of the Gauntlet itself. By some theories, the Redeemed would then be immune to the Gauntlet, able to see between worlds. It may even be possible for the Redeemed, now more than human, to *pass through these barriers without consequence*. The effects may simply resemble the Storm Warden Merit (from the **Mage** core rulebook) or they may even allow some degree of power over the

Avatar Storm. This could certainly shape up to be a powerful weapon against mages.

The barriers between the spirit world and physical world may not affect the Redeemed, so would it then be possible for him to travel where no other mage could? Would such powers have an effect over the Maelstrom, allowing him to travel into the Underworld (or Shadowlands) to see firsthand exactly what has happened? Or if he is not affected by such powers, would it be possible for him to use lesser magic to actually summon such forces in the physical world? Once one impossible feat occurs, it opens the door for a thousand others.

In game terms, the character could have the Storm Warden Merit. For a mortal, that means he can peer beyond the Periphery using Perception (or Wits, depending on the situation), since the Gauntlet does not block his vision. A character with Awareness may add those dice to the Perception dice pool. He is aware of the existence of the spirit world, though he cannot necessarily communicate with spirits.

If you've read **Manifesto**, this may have one further complication. You may believe that the new Gauntlet actually consists of the shards of "outsiders," spirits that are actually part of an alien entity. The spirit of those outsiders might then inhabit part of the Redeemed; he becomes an Incarnate force that can influence reality through that messianic figure. This is not only the rarest outcome for this plot, but also the most dangerous: An Outsider now exists in the real world, and Ascension is at hand.

your chronicle) has everything he wants — from wealth to power — except one thing: salvation.

The culmination of this part of the plot is several conspiracies, each studying a different book, working together to perform the ritual. Depending on what combination is used, the resultant creation is Redeemed.

PERSPECTIVES: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Traditions are not unified and clans do not always stick together. Regardless of whatever philosophical or political unity large groups may have in common, individuals are prone to argue over differences, a tendency as true of mages as it is of vampires. Rumors of the Ritual of the Red Sign are spreading, leading vastly disparate groups of the living and the undead after the same goal: finding the knowledge required to perform that legendary ritual. The conspiracies that have resulted from this opportunity defy all boundaries of sect, clan, and magical practice.

Visionaries and aspirants seeking the same goal are separated by geography, by philosophy, and by the

(often) unwritten laws of supernatural societies. Camarilla vampires have their Masquerade, forbidden them from disclosing their very existence to those not of the Blood. Sabbat Cainites serve a blasphemous hierarchy that would unite them against all others. Outside both sects, independent vampires form cults, religions, secret societies and extended families, but they must maintain their secrecy to protect themselves from Cainite incursions and seemingly benevolent Kindred intervention.

Mage Traditions are loose affiliations of practitioners who share the same philosophy, but rivalry often prevents them from sharing magical secrets with those who do not have the insight to use it "properly," or temper power with wisdom. Whenever people argue, politics ensue and conflict results. A vast cosmological event has isolated some of the most powerful technocrats and Tradition Masters from the "real world" of Earth. Despite this, Technocratic cells and cabals still maintain their vigilance. They search the world for supernatural horrors that threaten the common populace, often employing strategies and violence against forces they do not fully understand.

In short, for all the efforts of impossible creatures to unite in the shadows in orderly societies, all of creation is beset by chaos and conflict. Politics, religion, philoso-



phy, ambition — forces conspire to keep visionaries separate. The only unified response is in the mantras of xenophobia chanted in the shadows: Don't betray our existence to the outside world; don't consort with other groups we don't really understand; don't question the stereotypes you're told about others.

Dozens, if not hundreds, of isolated individuals have glimpsed the clues of a much larger mystery. The ones willing to act outside the proscriptions of their supernatural societies have the best chance of putting them together, seeing the big picture of change that is set to sweep away this stagnant world. Just as the Maelstrom has ravaged the lands of the Restless Dead, just as the Avatar Storm has cleansed the spirit world, the winds of change are coming to the real world, the dimension humans share with countless supernatural creatures.

One brave soul will stand before the onslaught of change. She may be a messiah, or he may be a charismatic deviant who brings the world to its own destruction. That destined hero (or antihero) will one day be known as the Redeemed — and the story of that one individual has its origins in a dozen others.

The story of the Redeemed begins with countless scattered, lesser stories. Chained together, they can change the world. Each begins from the perspective of one supernatural group or another, but ultimately, when put together, they cross such boundaries... and ultimately redefine them. Throughout this section, any Storyteller should spot opportunities to add another thread of plot into the tapestry of a chronicle. We'll mention a few more in sidebars throughout the book, so keep your eyes open.

A TECHNOCRATIC PERSPECTIVE

Background

At the end of the 19th century, an ambitious technocrat named Lord Ruthven helped organize a vast and powerful conspiracy that would not only revolutionize the world, but reality itself. In the shadow of Queen Victoria's London, he gathered together a vast array of scientific visionaries into one Technocratic Union. The Technocracy had its origins in many different secret societies, some of which (technocratic scholars claim) are as old as technology itself. Some of this history has been rewritten, some forgotten. Within a few decades, one age-old institution, a scholarly organization known as the Ivory Tower, extended its capabilities into the state-of-the-art in Enlightened espionage, training agents and operatives to work across the globe.

By then, the chain of events leading up to Lord Ruthven's bold declarations of "One World, One Truth,

and One Reality" had been obfuscated by the Ivory Tower's carefully managed (and censored) scholarship. History had been rewritten to eradicate the past. By the end of the 20th century, a similar organization that existed five centuries earlier — known as the Order of Reason — had become an esoteric topic for the hidden treaties of Ivory Tower scholars. Much of the records of that society had been lost, hidden away in storehouses of knowledge. The purpose of this revisionism has rather sensational origins... and will soon have very serious repercussions in the 21st century.

Operations

The Ascension War is over. At least, that's what the latest wave of propaganda proclaims. If reality is stable enough to make hunting down and "processing reality deviants" a thing of the past, that means the Union is able to spend more to analyze other supernatural phenomena — and potential supernatural threats. The cosmological reckonings of the Avatar Storm have cut off high-ranking officials from agents in the field. "Horizon Constructs" are still able to provide minimal communication and surveillance support, but agents are largely left out in the cold, in a world surrounded by shadows and lies.

Technocracy operatives are becoming more aware that there are other vast societies that share the night. Not surprisingly, two of the most powerful alliances of supernatural creatures are the vampires of the Camarilla and Sabbat. The Union expended little effort to investigating these secret societies, largely because they viewed other mages as a much more potent threat. While there were considerable threats to the everyday, non-magical world — from environmental horrors to outright terrorism — the Technocracy has left the solutions to those problems to governments and corporations. No other society (that it knows of) has the resources to investigate this supernatural menace.

Of course, the visionaries who organize various technocratic cells don't have the resources to lead a witch-hunt against vampires. They do, however, have opportunities to gather information and make plans. Ordinary humans are unprepared to deal with (or even admit the existence) of vampires. Technocrats, on the other hand, are watching and listening... and without the restraint of high-ranking overseers, many are taking drastic actions. Project Redlight is one of the more notable examples. Its chief organizer, an Operative of the NWO, suspects that if it succeeds, the Union won't need to destroy the world's vampires. Based on their

behaviors, given sufficient motivation, they may very well destroy themselves.

NWO AND THE IVORY TOWER

Background

No other agency is as effective at gathering information about the unknown as the NWO. In Ruthven's day, it was known as the Ivory Tower. Since the Technocracy doesn't seem to be geared up for world conquest currently, the term is coming back into fashion. In recent years, the organization has become less intrusive in the supernatural world, coping with drastic changes to creation by viewing them from a distance.

Declaring themselves the victors of the centuries-old "Ascension War," agents of the Union have since chosen to focus on other agendas. The Pogrom against Traditionalists is over. Now the Technocracy has only just come to understand how many other threats face the human race. Researchers have begun to expand their files on other supernatural creatures, and the Ivory Tower is processing that data.

The New World Order is an alliance of Methodologies related to gathering and analyzing data, specializing in espionage, surveillance and even academia. Throughout most of the 20th century, one of its most critical agendas was supporting a crusade to help reform reality (at least the Technocracy's version of it) by converting or eliminating those who defied it: namely, Tradition mages. Within the Union, it contested with other Conventions over how to fulfill this destiny, but now the issue has become largely academic. The Technocracy's Time Table — its master plan for the next 5 to 10 years — shows that a greater threat endangers the world. In many projections, supernatural activity may actually bring the world to an end within the next five years.

Isolated cells of technocrats on Earth now have more autonomy to pursue their goals. They'll need it, since they're researching every lead they have on what they see as potential threats to all of reality and humanity. A few realize the "threat" various other supernatural creatures pose. It doesn't take a lot of supernatural insight to realize that vampires are at the top of the list.

Project Redlight began as an initiative to use surveillance and intelligence analysis to estimate the population of vampires in the world, their influence, and their capabilities. But just as Ivory Tower analysts slowly gathered vast conclusions about this data — including hints about ancient "Methuselah" vampires — the Avatar Storm threw such efforts into disarray. The surviving data is difficult to access, and often

contradictory, consisting of vast data files an agent may study but with little cogent or trustworthy analysis.

Operations

Special Director Simon Keyes was one of the leading Ivory Tower officials in Project Redlight, with supervisory capability over a hundred agents in the field. Using communication and surveillance technology that is currently state-of-the-art — and occasionally 10 to 20 years ahead of the art, when it's used by the right Enlightened personnel — he has gathered vast amounts of information on the supernatural activities of vampires. The collapse of the network of Horizon Constructs that kept the Union united has made it difficult to disseminate this information. That means for those who can contact him, he may be considered the best expert the Union has on the subject of vampires. Intensely strong-willed (tantamount to an Iron Will) and skilled in conditioning techniques (including powerful Mind Effects), he is a taskmaster to his operatives. For years, he was reluctant to interfere with the activities of the vampires he watched. Recent events have forced his hand.

Without a high command he can advise, brief and ask for guidance, he is unable to fully convince the Union of the extent and the threat of the world's vampiric population. An unfortunate sequence of events in India (mentioned in the Storytelling chapter) won over many hearts and minds in the Union when they saw what the oldest vampires were capable of doing. Then the Avatar Storm wreaked hell with worldwide communications, leaving agents stranded in the field. Until that moment, deliberations within the Union's Inner Circle prevented the Technocracy from taking united action against the world's vampires. Statistical analysis from Iteration X now suggests the world is close to its own destruction. Whether that comes as a result of the influence of vampires, which appears more evident with each successful surveillance op, remains a matter of debate. How to eradicate the world's vampiric population is an enigma... unless you have insight as clear as that of Simon Keyes.

Prolonged observation of a small cell of vampires (a group that referred to itself as a coterie) has picked up conversations regarding a rare or perhaps even unique book called the *Red Sign*. Using variants of Hermetic magic, a reality deviant employing the book's magical techniques could restore and revitalize dead flesh — at least, that's what the testimony of one "vampire archaeologist" suggested. (The creature refers to himself as a "gangrel." The suspect had convinced the study group, referred to in reports as Red Cell #33, that he knew the location of this item and could lead them to it.

Red Cell #33 was killed one week later, when that same individual lead the cell to the subterranean lair of one of the aforementioned "Methuselah vampires." Keyes is in the process of mobilizing a Shockwave of Iteration X enforcers to capture this ancient creature for further study. Unfortunately, their traitorous guide has since disappeared, and is presumably in hiding. In the meantime, rumors of this book's existence can be traced to a separate occurrence concerning the Technocracy, one involving very old data indeed.

KSIRIFAI

Five hundred years earlier, a very different society of Enlightened operatives used very different methods of ingenious espionage. The Ksirifai, colloquially known as "the Razors," were Renaissance spies, operatives of the Order of Reason that maintained a great degree of autonomy and secrecy from the rest of their group. When the Order ultimately fragmented, they continued their work in the shadows, subtly influencing events that led to a now largely academic conflict known as the Ascension War.

The Ksirifai, for reasons history never remembered, had not only helped conceal the existence of the Order of Reason, but also continued their work long after its factionalization. Records and tomes relating to this Renaissance secret society were sealed away in vaults and libraries, hidden until the Razors found it tactically advantageous to reveal their truth. By the late 19th century, the last surviving splinter groups of the original Ksirifai continued their work using methods somewhere between magic, mysticism and science. After learning of Lord Ruthven's ambition, they undertook a modest campaign of espionage to ascertain his true motives.

Operatives of the Ivory Tower, uncertain of the intention of this questionably mystical group, hunted down these Ksirifai agents and destroyed the last remnants of their organization. Acting in secret, the Ksirifai died in the shadows, a historical anomaly hidden from the world in forgotten libraries of Renaissance lore. Yet the records remained... and it would only be a matter of time until some of them were found again.

CRAFTMASONS

Many of those records had been assembled by another secret society within the Order of Reason. Far more academic than the cloak-and-dagger New World Order of the 21st century, they wrote about the philosophical goals of the Order, made observations about supernatural activity within the Renaissance world, and substantiated rumors of distant lands that required exploration and verification. To help guide and recruit



potential allies, they fabricated lodges that hinted at paths to Enlightenment while speaking with and testing the visionaries who had a potential for it. (Sleepers joined these lodges, but only a few were recruited into the Order.) These scientist-philosophers debated the effects of their craft upon the world, most notably the torrents of Paradox that resulted from incautious experiments. From the White Tower of Languedoc, the most esteemed of these scholars helped guide the ambitious goals of the early Order.

Brilliant academics, they also harness incidental applications of Mind magic to write definitive treatises on science, philosophy, politics, and a hundred other subjects — rhetoric so compelling that it could deeply affect the reader. Instilling emotions, bestowing knowledge and even instructing in Enlightened willworking, these “craft tomes” formed the foundation of the Daedalean arts. Centuries later, historical revisionism from the Union’s “Ivory Tower” almost eradicated the Craftsmasons’ memory, until a historian named Terrence Whyte resurrected proof of their existence. Perhaps when some of these “craft tomes” resurfaced, Whyte will have further proof. The critical question for years was who would find them first.

Many of these “craft tomes” were acquired and isolated by the Ksirifai, obscuring the early history of the Technocracy’s forefathers. Enough of them remained at large, however, that they became valuable resources in the libraries of occultists and loremasters. In particular, a few Hermetic mages built upon this body of work. Combining the scientific and mystical treatises compiled by the Craftsmasons with observations made by Hermetic practitioners, these rare tomes offer deep insight into the working of the world — but only for the visionaries with the potential (that is, the *Arete*) to understand them. Several of these books concern the subject of vampires. Their existence is an affront to the Masquerade, and if they are found, they would offer up secrets vampires have kept hidden for millennia.

THE TEMPLARS

Background

Many modern incarnations of this society (authentic or otherwise) attempt to trace their origins back to the early 14th century. In 1308, King Phillip IV of France demanded the extermination of their order; those he could not kill, he imprisoned. Their leader, Jacques de Molay, was killed, but 33 of his followers fled to the corners of the Earth and into the shadows. Some accused their order of blasphemous crimes, including an alleged pact with the demon Baphomet.

Some make even more outrageous claims, such as the idea that several of the conspirators (or in some accounts, all of them) were actually mages, who have recruited other Enlightened willworkers since then. Whether this is true is largely academic, of course, since many mages claim to carry on their traditions, and insist their Crafts can be traced back to them. Their martial skills, including proficiency with modern firearms, is considerable. Their Faith endures undaunted. Armed with an arsenal of insidious and deadly rites, they kill unseen. Some may consider them fanatic — but since belief can influence reality for mages, fanaticism can be a powerful ally.

Operations

A smokescreen of hyperbole, ridicule and outright hoaxes contributes to the continued survival of these self-styled “Templars.” Some skeptics have pronounced that the Knights Templar are like a smorgasbord for conspiracy theories. They can be twisted to fit any shape a theory might need. Just as various children’s toys can pick up and distort newsprint, alleged Templar activity can reflect nearly any supernatural activity possible, whether real or imaged. The most outrageous theories speak of a “hidden Templar treasure” amassed over centuries from a time when they helped secure financial transactions in Medieval Europe. Then again, some people also believe in vampires.

Scholars of the occult have given little consideration to this “Craft,” refusing to consider it as influential as one of the Nine Traditions. It is yet another conspiracy working in the shadows. The justification for their actions is tied up on false history and propaganda, and extremist splinter groups carry this even farther. If you could take a religious militia, place them in the shadows of the world, and then give them the power of magic, the result would be similar to the most dedicated preceptories of Templars in the world.

Not long ago, a cell of 33 Templars had been patrolling the Languedoc region of Southern France, carrying concealed firearms and employing global positioning systems as they conducted another “treasure hunting” operation. They had been following leads concerning the true location of the White Tower of Languedoc, the almost forgotten headquarters of the original Order of Reason.

The stories of caches of hidden Daedalean wealth and remnants of the “Templar treasure” had been entirely fabricated. But when a sizeable, dedicated, and heavily armed band of mages casts rituals to find something unusual, they inevitably find *something*. Their discovery consisted of a hidden library, an archive of Order of Reason lore. It was the Holy Grail of Ivory

Tower academia — treatises on Renaissance supernatural activity, documentation on early Daedalean philosophy, outrageous illustrations in impossible bestiaries, and more. For a modern researcher in technocratic history, it was priceless, the greatest discovery (or heresy) imaginable.

At this point in the story, the Templars (as usual) made a tragic mistake: They decided to sell off several lesser works in the collection. Considering the books' worth, they realized that vast amounts of money would be more "priceless" to them than dusty tomes. Exploiting a few of their political connections to a few influential individuals in the Celestial Chorus, they tracked down buyers. Most of these transactions went off without a hitch, a mere matter of delivering a package and verifying a deposit in a Swiss bank account. When the Choristers discovered that one of the books concerned vampires, however, events took an ugly turn.

The highest (and first) bidder for the tome had introduced himself as a freelance archaeologist. More precisely, he was a Gangrel vampire, a con-artist and eccentric who had devoted his existence to the study of archaeology — as well as means to profit from it. Fabricating credentials, concealing his past failures, and demonstrating that his "employer" had a great deal of wealth, he acquired the book. Within a week, he then tried to sell it for a much greater sum of money, claiming that it was a nearly incomprehensible tome that only truly "enlightened" scholars of the occult could decipher. The tome's dusty cover identified the book's title in Renaissance French, which roughly translated consisted of three words: *The Red Sign*.

At that point, all hell broke loose. The Ritual of the Red Sign had been a myth, and many considered the Gangrel a charlatan for even having mentioned it. Yet after the Gangrel organized clandestine meetings with potential buyers, the first three meetings turned into ambushes. The Gangrel was completely oblivious to a story of a translated, English copy of the book compiled by Hermetics in the early 20th century. So were the attackers who ambushed him — they had thought the book was impossible to find, until the Gangrel verified its existence.

On the run from rivals who realized the advantages of actually killing the dealer and taking the book, he sold out the names of the individuals who had sold it to him in the first place. His compensation was the exchange of a modest sum of money to a secure banking account, along with a 24-hour head start. After that, his blackmailers assured, the hunt for him would begin again. To divert his hunters away from his activities, he betrayed as many of the names and last-known loca-

tions of his Templar contacts, their Chorister contacts, and the number of their Swiss bank account.

The Gangrel has since gone into hiding until he can find another opportunity to profit from his reputation. His current activities are described elsewhere, and the Templars are now too busy to actually track him down. Instead, various cults, cells and factions are hunting the Templars, who have responded with protestations of innocence, violent counterproposals to threats and bursts of semi-automatic weapon fire. The vampires were a bit overconfident about taking down a group of renegade mages, fearing little from faerie dust and magic spells. In the 21st century, however, those automatic weapons work considerably better than magic wands.

Several of the Templars' soldiers in arms have already died. In fact, the rumor that some group calling itself the Knights Templar has the tome has led to a few raids on other preceptories. The most dangerous conflicts are with Templar cells who actually have nothing to do with any of this. Since the Craft isn't as organized as a vampire clan (which in itself isn't terribly organized to begin with), most are unaware of what the rogue Templar cell is doing.

The remaining cells of Templars are responding to ambushes with their usual contingency plans. The policy of "shoot first and ask questions later" isn't enough. The current philosophy is to "shoot first, shoot again, set it on fire to make sure it's really dead, and then ask questions about what it was that just attacked you." In the meantime, the body count mounts.

CELESTIAL CHORUS

Background

All Choristers, it is said, believe in the power of the One. How they view this divine force, and whether an organized religion helps define it better, is merely a matter of details. In those details are a thousand different visions of God, who works through a thousand different religions. Supposedly, they are all represented by the united voice of the Celestial Chorus. Mithraists, Zoroastrians, Pre-Nicene Christians — the Chorus represents many sects that quietly practice their religious ceremonies and magical arts. Yet, practically, the Tradition is as vulnerable to arguments and disagreements over philosophy as any gathering of passionately religious people.

Stereotypically, some zealots are viewed as inquisitors, carrying out what they see as the judgment of a vengeful God. Considering the few memorable occasions when Choristers have burned vampires with Prime magic or summoned fire and True Faith, this is hardly surprising. Yet others seek out the suffering and sinful,

redeemers who use simple prayer and deeds to find the path to peace. While this is a very broad definition, one that is not commonly recognized, both kinds of Choristers become even more polarized — and contentious — when faced by trying times like the ones that soon followed the attacks on Templar preceptories.

Operations

Legends claim that God cursed Caine. If that's true, then the existence of vampires serves as proof of His influence in the world, after a fashion. Investigating the "true origins of vampires" is a perilous exercise, for the surviving Choristers in the world are often not as powerful as the supernatural creatures that surround them. Nonetheless, the rare few who are drawn to the study of vampires learn what they can of defenses that draw on Spirit and Prime. For the sake of their own survival, these Celestial occultists sometimes band together when conducting their researches.

The very existence of the mythical *Ritual of the Red Sign* challenges all that the Choristers think they know about vampires. Some claim that it was God's will that Caine was cursed; using that ritual to break that curse would defy God. Others contest that if any soul can be forgiven for his sins, even the original sin all vampires have carried since the time of Caine, then it should be possible for the lost soul of one of the Kindred to be redeemed. If a vampire can find salvation, there is more hope in the World of Darkness than many thought possible.

One of the Templars' contacts is a Chorister with delusions of grandeur. A brush with death at an early age convinced him that God has plans for him, and when his "will" produced miracles (almost magically), the line between God's will and his own became blurred. This prophet, Alan Meroni, now believes that he is an agent of divine will on Earth, yet for all his self-righteous proclamations, he is actually an agent of redemption.

Years after his Awakening, his expanded insight alerted him to the presence of the undead all around him. He witnessed dead men who were denied the reward of Heaven, and were instead forced to walk the Earth by night, feeding on human blood. To his credit, he also saw no evidence that their fate was the result of deeds performed in life: newly created vampires were little more than victims. Their existence seemed to be a great injustice to him — until he realized that they, too, could find some measure of peace.

In his researches into the occult, he encountered a self-styled "warrior-priest" who practiced a far more martial approach to Enlightened Faith. His knowledge of history bordered on the insane, but this man (who referred

to himself as Frater Anson) had uncovered more diabolical and deadly supernatural activities. With overwhelming firepower, Frater Anson had eliminated what he saw as a far more dangerous religious occurrence.

By Frater's accounts, the bodies of the recently deceased had been coming back to life and seeking human victims. His cabal (or as he put it, squad) had combated dangerous incursions of these "zombies" in several European cities. His men, convinced that the end of the world was near, rallied around him and began to reverently refer to him as Frater Patriot. When he revealed to Meroni the existence of the Walking Dead, his Chorister contact was shocked. Had souls arisen from Hell to possess the bodies of the recently deceased? Was there any connection to the vampires he himself had witnessed? Anson's view of religion was far more inquisitorial, but faced with what both perceived as an obvious evil, they collaborated to research further.

After a violent disagreement over what to do about this outbreak of vampirism, the two went their separate ways. Frater Anson had approached Meroni hoping for a similar alliance against a "cult of vampires in Venice," but Meroni refused. Despite his elaborate tales involving the Giovanni family, the Frater could not convince his Chorister contact.

After a failed raid on the city, Anson returned to an early quest: leads on the "mythical Templar treasure." By this point, Meroni was convinced Anson was insane, until his erstwhile colleague approached him with a cache of knowledge Frater Anson could not understand. It was hardly a compliment, since Anson had approached other Choristers as well, but Alan Meroni actually offered to spend two months poring over the book to decipher its cryptic contents. By the time he was done, Meroni realized that the book was exactly what he was looking for: redemption for the lost souls who troubled him, the creatures of the night doomed to suffer until Judgment Day. When he was done, Meroni returned the book, an act of courtesy he still regrets.

Meroni and Anson have gone their separate ways again. Alan Meroni wants the book, not only to find redemption for the suffering, but also to fulfill his own messianic visions. He is one of the few individuals able to perform parts of the *Ritual of the Red Sign*, but he cannot do it alone. It is a communal ritual, and he lacks the acumen (and Spheres) to do it by himself. He wants the book back, but then again, so do others — and they're all hunting Frater Anson and his 32 fellows.

As far as Frater Anson is concerned, the vampires hunting him are all hellspawn, and any vampire who wants what he's got is going to have to pry it from his cold, dead fingers. Meroni is trying to assemble a cabal

of like-minded mages who believe as he does, including Choristers who would more closely fit the profile of redeemers. Yet with each contact he makes, he risks condemnation from a mage who doesn't understand the ritual's potential — and possible retribution from inquisitors (almost) as violent as Frater Patriot.

EUTHANATOS

Background

The world depends on a cycle of life and death. Whether or not a mage believes that all souls undergo cycles of resurrection and reincarnation is up to an individual's philosophy, but magic grants mages the ability to act on those principles. Accordingly, many Euthanatoi use their insight and power to blur the lines between life and death. Prior to the Maelstrom, they could soften the boundaries between worlds. After it, the vast cosmological perturbations of the Maelstrom, Avatar Storm and similar events in the spirit world redefined their purpose as it redefined creation. Many devoted years to mastery of ghostly lore, but since the Maelstrom has sealed off the barriers between the lands of the living and the Restless Dead, it is uncertain whether they will ever open again. More importantly, it is uncertain whether the cycle of life and death has been disturbed.

Now rumors spread of other world-shaking possibilities. A Chorister may very well have developed the nascent ability to bring the undead back to life. Age-old tomes of forgotten lore have led to espionage and open conflict. If such rituals can affect the undead — as rituals have in the past — can they be adapted for the dead as well? If a vampire can find Redemption, is there hope for ghosts and wraiths... or a possibility that darker spectres may return? What impact does this new knowledge have on the human soul? Perhaps if one lost soul can be summoned from the Shadowlands with an invocation of eternity, there is hope for other lost souls as well. It may be that the Redeemed can shepherd other lost souls back to the world of the living.

And at the same time, the many possible ramifications of the Ritual of the Red Sign promise unknown revelations. Certain Euthanatos may feel that an impossible ritual that defies death or karma may disturb this imbalance even further. Of what use is granting a troubled soul a "Good Death," for instance, if other magic can undo that altruistic act? When one soul is brought back from the edge of Oblivion, what other horrors may be summoned up from the abyss? The Redeemed may be as human as the other men and women who surround us, but how would we know if the ritual went awry? What happens to the bestial urges that

drive a predator vampire when it becomes mortal again? For every Euthanatos who would dare to test this ritual, there is no doubt a cult willing to stop him.

Operations

Nathaniel Galpin is another mage with a keen interest in vampires, but he's always been a bit of a loner. With an ability to cloak himself in darkness, or at least encourage passersby to not notice him, he has become something of an expert in the secret activities of undead. They seem to be quite accustomed to the idea of invisible observers, since their society seems to include a large number of creatures who can use supernatural Disciplines to hide in plain sight.

Nathaniel certainly can't spot them all of these obfuscated creatures, but he has been developing rituals for finding telltale signs of their presence. He cannot detect the presence of their dead flesh, but with his spirit sight, he has made some very unusual observations about their souls. Some don't just feed on the blood of the living; they hunt the souls of older vampires as well, killing their undead vessels and *merging with them to gain strength*.

Unlike many mages (and those technocrats who seem to be staking out his neighborhood as well), he is painfully aware of the extent of vampiric societies around him and their influence. They would probably kill him if they found him, because he knows too much about them. The extent to which these dead things have infested the mortal world appalls him. Ghosts at least had a somewhat symbiotic and passionate relationship with the humans they haunted, back when they used to be in the world. Now he has turned his insight onto another society of dead things, and it fills him with revulsion.

In his city, he has learned of a conspiracy of vampires that plans to infiltrate human society even further. (See the Prince's Conspiracy sidebar in Chapter Four.) They prey upon their own kind, "harvesting" weak vampires from outside the city, then bringing them to a laboratory within the city. Galpin suspects that they may even have a mage helping them. In some of his more successful investigations, he has used rituals to overhear conversations about replicated mortal functions in other vampires. Perhaps they are planning on preying upon human society further? Perhaps they should be stopped.

But whom should Nathaniel turn to next? He can't stop them alone. Technocrats watch the neighborhood, but he would prefer an educated cabal of Enlightened Tradition mages solve this. They, at least, would use discretion. If it comes down to

black hats and mirrorshades, they'll certainly move in with soldiers, and innocent mages may be caught in the crossfire.

Considering the way vampires exploit each other so readily, he may be able to find a cult of vampires (that's a more honest word than "coterie") he could set against these criminals. Whichever side moves in, he'll be watching from the shadows, trying to find out what other contacts they have — and preparing his soul-shattering methods of spiritual warfare for the next vampire who gets in his way.

THE AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD

Background

The Nine Traditions are united by a network of cabals, Contacts, Allies, and other Backgrounds that share information. As word of the Ritual of the Red Sign spreads, philosophical discussions ignite over what significance this knowledge may hold. For all their high kicks and flashy moves, the Akashics are a highly philosophical order. One cannot perfect the body without an enlightened mind, of course, and mental discipline (including Mind rites) is a specialty of this society. Practice, training and ritual forge spiritual perfection as well.

Some rumors even suggest that the Redeemed vampire who completes this ritual may not merely be mortal, but more than human. Various experts attest that the initiate's flesh would not only need to be reanimated, but his soul would need to be restored as well. His mind, body and spirit would require healing. For aesthetes who seek this same perfection, what could the process of redemption teach them? While other mages may foolishly decide the Brothers may only be able to contribute security against the raids of renegade Templars, it would be perfectly within reason for an Akashic Brother to offer to aid someone working to perform the ritual successfully.

Operations

Hidden in the wilderness of the American Southwest, a dojo of Akashics remains largely isolated from the madness of the 21st century. Undisturbed by cosmic horrors, they focus on pushing their bodies and minds to the limits of human performance. As part of their training, they test themselves by practicing with an opponent who risks his very existence by teaching them: a scholar-warrior who has trained for centuries teaches this cabal of Akashic Brothers how to act and think at lightning speed... or more precisely, supernatural Celerity.

The Brotherhood of Benevolent Heaven offers this Brujah shelter, teaching him to master his rage as they

learn to overcome the limitations of their own bodies. He is autarkis, having forsaken all political affiliation to focus on philosophical concerns. Once he attains Golconda, the Brothers will need to provide him blood only on a weekly basis, but their training can continue for a lifetime.

Yet they have not severed all contact with the outside world. Through e-mails and virtual forums (crafted by Virtual Adepts, no doubt), they hear just enough news to trouble their meditations. Rumors of a vampire attempting to become more than human are not unusual, of course. Despite the Masquerade, such stories leak out from time to time. When the rumors of conspiratorial crusades lead to accounts of overt violence, however, the stories of the value of this book or that ritualist gain slightly more credibility.

The sensei of the dojo has contemplated these stories, sitting for hours at a time in quiet stillness. What better candidate is there for this spiritual journey than the disciple of Golconda who has approached him? He has spoken very little of his reasons for leaving his society, and it is fairly certain that someone, somewhere either actively searches for him or would do so once they learned of his betraying secrets to the living. The sensei does not want to seize this opportunity through violence, but if he is to acquire the sacred scrolls (for that is what he was told the "tome" really was), he must do so quickly. The solution to this dilemma lies in speed, not strength.

Of course, just as the knowledge could be used to attain perfection, he is well aware of the possibility that it could be perverted. If an initiate with this knowledge could become mortal, or more than human, he could also attempt to transcend humanity in immoral or amoral ways. If this ritual requires a spiritual component, it is possible it could be twisted into spiritual corruption. A soulless creature with all the advantages of a vampire and none of the drawbacks of the curse — is such a creation possible? No more so than a vampire who escapes the curse of vampirism to become mortal. The Brotherhood, he is certain, must seize this knowledge, if only to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands. Once all others have been denied this dangerous knowledge, their Brujah initiate could perhaps even aid them on their own path to Ascension. Anyone else could be corrupted by the possibilities of such an opportunity.

CULT OF ECSTASY

Background

Ecstatics don't merely revel in pleasure; they are masters of time as well. One may aid an ini-

tiated for no greater reason than love, or a deep-seated need to explore what it is to be human. Then again, Cultists of Ecstasy don't just sense what is past, but what is to come. A vision granted by Time magic can launch any number of possible reactions to the Ritual of the Red Sign. What if an Ecstatic has a vision of a vampire returning to life... before the ritual is performed? And what if that revelation promises great suffering instead of great joy? One visionary could easily lead a cabal of allies to fulfill that destiny... or stop it.

Operations

Hidden in a bunker in Death Valley, a cabal of Ecstatics has found a rather eccentric solution to what they see as the approaching end of the world. In their modest survivalist commune, they have stockpiled enough provisions to outlast World War III. Initiates of their chantry occasionally make runs into civilization for "biochemical supplies," which they employ in a powerful Time-oriented ritual. In intensely altered states, they witness myriad possibilities for the end of the world... and many of them relate to an individual known as the Redeemed.

This messianic figure, they claim, will return from the dead to lead the living. Whether he should be worshipped or destroyed is a matter of great debate within the chantry. For that matter, perhaps it is the mythical *book* that heralds his arrival that must be found and destroyed. The visionaries are unsure who they should approach, but their community does include a few mages who follow other paths and have ties to other Traditions. Several of them have worked in the past with cabals that represent several different philosophies.

Since the Council of Nine has been lost to the Avatar Storm along with most of the world's Masters and Oracles, the future may very well be in their hands. The world must know the danger this individual poses. Perhaps it would be best not to tell others about the book that forecasts his arrival — that vision should be shared only by the dedicated few who realize the necessity of destroying it. How hard can it be? Find the book, burn it, stop the ritual, save the world. If they act quickly enough, they can get involved before anyone else finds out.

SONS OF ETHER

Background

Within the Etherite community, countless scientific societies exchange knowledge for the advancement

of esoteric theories and ideals, from a cure for the common cold to the colonization of distant planets. A few journals have been able to collate an overview of the vast array of near science-fictional accomplishments realized on a daily basis — the sort of achievements one sees in *Paradigma*, for instance. It should come as no surprise then, that the visionaries (not madmen, but visionaries) who experiment on living tissue and dead flesh form a very isolated, insular and private community. Even other Etherites rarely understand their vision. Reputations of such specialists spread within a very limited society of vivisectionists and reanimators. Such stories usually confirming to the average Etherite reanimator that he is the premiere practitioner of his craft, and all his rivals are FOOLS! FOOLS! FOOLS!

Most Etherites are entirely conscious of the risk of pushing the frontiers of science, of course, and the possibility that failed rites can bring Paradox (and, thus, bestow insanity on lesser minds). The risk of defying all of creation, rescuing the subject from a lost curse, is no doubt a wildly improbable undertaking — but if it succeeds, think of the possibilities! The legend of Frankenstein would be replaced by a bold new story: the Etherites who resurrected the dead, challenging a millennia-old curse! A vampire is deathless, is he not? If he could be brought back to life... is it possible someone could learn other secrets of immortality along the way?

Dare we attempt it? But of course! Think of how much we could advance our scientific knowledge if we had not a few scant decades, but centuries to pursue our craft! Can you not see the potential? Then you are a FOOL! The other Sons of Ether will not stop us with their ridiculous talk of conventional morality... nor will anyone else! FOOLS! *Why can they not understand our genius?*

Ahem. As the potential for Paradox from a given impossible experiment approaches infinity, it is directly proportional to the psychological degeneration of the scientist. The idea that all Etherites are mad is a vicious stereotype, but then again, vivisectionists, reanimators, and the sorts of sick bastards who would experiment on captive vampires are not exactly a healthy lot.

Operations

Doctor Frankenstein wasn't just a character in a story, was he? Surely, there must have been some Etherite somewhere who attempted to resurrect the dead (or, at least, simulate life) before that book was written... and if there wasn't, there certainly was after the book was written. And since that time, others have followed his example and failed to learn from his failure.

"Doctor N" is one textbook example. He wants little more from life than the ability to raise the dead. Despite decades of research, this one simple accomplishment has eluded his grasp. He has paid investigators who have promised him supernatural treatises on life and death before, from scholars of Egyptology ranting about "books of the dead," to a fast-talking dead man who kept insisting he had found the *Necronomicon*.

The last individual who approached him about such knowledge introduced himself as a "gangrel," and was certainly ill-mannered enough to deserve that sobriquet. Dr. N was very reluctant to give him any money at all, but he did get something in return: He discovered that the creature had associates who were actually vampires. The money was to compensate him for the fact that they would all kill him for disclosing this fact, or some such nonsense, so Dr. N hopes that the bothersome "gangrel" is dead by now.

In the meantime, the experiments continue. Blasting electricity into human corpses has achieved very limited results. Thus, the doctor has come to the conclusion, after confirming that vampires do exist, that he should use electricity to restore functioning human faculties to a functioning vampire. He has corresponded with other Etherite specialists on the subject, but his knowledge has grown by leaps and bounds now that he has begun exchanging e-mails with a fellow named Netchurch. His experiments on dead bodies concern a rare variety of "thin-blooded vampires," creatures who have managed to find undeath while retaining some of their human functions. More data is required. If such a state of existence is possible, it must be possible to replicate it in other vampires. The secret, no doubt, lies in a greater voltage of electricity. More power.

The good doctor has secretly exchanged information with other vampires who study various states and conditions of decay. For instance, he has received an introduction from a scholar named Xavier, who hints that he may have found a reliable source for an unlimited supply of these subjects. N is composing his missives to this individual very carefully, for he hopes to secure an invitation to witness these experiments firsthand. His associates claim there is further documentation out there to aid in these experiments.

Doctor N privately knows that he is perhaps a bit gullible, and has been fooled before, but the rewards of discovery are worth the risk. Stories of the "lost notes of Doctor Frankenstein" are probably false, but some of the other books — most notably, *Ex Libris Neco* and the heretical play called *The Red Sign* — could be quite useful if performed correctly. Perhaps he should attempt to contact that "gangrel" again. Or perhaps a

Hermetic scholar could aid him? Whom should he contact next, that is the question. That, and the proper quantity of voltage he should administer to the next vampire he finds.

HERMETICS

Background

Tome? Did someone mention a rare tome? Forbidden knowledge from centuries ago, and the Hermetics don't know about it? Don't be ridiculous. Hermetic experts spend lifetimes meditating on Things Man Was Not Meant to Know, and if one is brave enough to ask, they may even be willing to instruct others. Occultists and loremasters within the Order of Hermes have studied a wide array of supernatural subjects, including the legend of the sorcerer Tremere. He attempted a ritual that would grant him immortality, using the blood of an ancient creature (or so they say). When the ritual failed (or so some claim), he suffered a curse that would plague him until his own destruction.

Yet just as magic summoned this curse, legends persist of magical ways to escape it. Historical documents, surviving records from the Dark Ages, refer to many attempts to break the mythical "Curse of Caine," from the Pool of Mirth to the path of Golconda. Seekers after horror have studied in obscurity, overshadowed by more critical topics, like the current activities of the Technocracy. Now young mages, cut off from the political concerns of Masters and Oracles, are intrigued by other supernatural activity and subjects — including research into lost rituals like the Ritual of the Red Sign. As rumors spread, other Tradition mages search for scholars who can help them in their researches, and often, the Order of Hermes is one of the first societies they consult.

Why would Hermetics even be interested? Reconstructing the Ritual of the Red Sign may be the first step in even more ambitious magical accomplishments. If a vampire can be returned to life, would variants of the same ritual be useable on ghosts, or the recently dead... or could such power over life and death lead to true immortality? Tremere tried and failed to use a vampire's blood to gain that treasure; other descendants of the medieval Orders of Hermes may have more ambitious goals for forgotten knowledge.

Operations

Some Hermetics have knowledge that scholars like Alan Meroni (and agents like Simon Keyes) would dearly like to know. The tome studied by Alan Meroni is not the only one that gives insights into the Ritual of the Red Sign. Before the book passed into obscurity, more derivative treatises were written on the subject of

Redemption. The most notable was actually scribed by a Hermetic cabal, one that was far more interested in the philosophical implications and history of the ritual than methods of actually performing it.

Estobal Dumas is one of the world's leading experts on this subject, but considering the violence that has resulted from the rumors of one recovered book, he is hesitant to share this information with others. He has been writing to other scholars for news of the ongoing struggles to obtain this one book, judging carefully what he hears of those who seek it. If he finds a group whose methods and goals he finds acceptable (such as those actively working to protect scholars like Meroni), he may be willing to act as a consultant.

VERBENA

Goddess, no. It's the beginning of the end. In the midst of your rituals, look to the heavens. You will see that the stars are right for change. New suns pass through the heavens, new storms lie just outside the worlds we know, and monsters never seen before walk the night. A few seek escape from this madness, not only within the Traditions, but from other supernatural societies. The Verbena have a reputation as healers, as wise women and cunning men who can restore not only shattered bodies, but troubled souls as well.

In centuries past, some of those efforts to bring healing have brought great horror. Even for the wise, there are limits on what magic can accomplish. One object legend concerns the Cauldron of Rebirth, an artifact that could restore the dead to life. The rituals to reconstruct it went awry. Instead of granting life, it bestowed eternal reanimation, creating monstrous creatures (some would call them "fomori") that responded to their suffering by wreaking havoc and destruction. Hubris invokes heavy punishments, the greatest of which are bestowed by the force of Paradox. The more immediate bring violence and pain.

A separate, yet similar legend concerns the *Invocation of Eternity*, a ritual that could restore life to a dead body, summon a lost soul, or restore the two in one union. Masters of magic have gone mad attempting such feats, for they tamper with the cycle of life and death. That hasn't stopped other ambitious Verbena from seeking this same goal. Others who have tried and failed have left records of their attempts. The average Book of Shadows isn't as meticulous or inscrutable as a Hermetic tome. Yet every account typically includes a warning: Follow this path at your own risk. Guardians patrol the borders between worlds, and they punish the foolish. The Ritual of the Red Sign is an even more ambitious undertaking, but it would seem that one book cannot offer the solution to its mystery. The answer lies

in other, older rituals: To seek the Red Sign, one must first know how to invoke eternity. Several Verbena actively seek this knowledge.

HOLLOW ONES

Who could possibly be more suited to dealing with vampires than the Hollow Ones? No one, we assure you. Orphans estranged from the political dealings of the other Traditions who live on the fringes of the supernatural world, and they're insightful enough to notice other supernatural creatures in the clubs and coffee houses they frequent — and the alleyways behind them, too. Brave and curious Hollow Ones search further, walking the streets by night, or the Barrrens of the city, looking for phenomena ordinary men and women cannot see or hope to understand. Instead of sitting around chantries arguing over philosophical concepts of "Ascension," they explore and experience the real world. It's not only a place where innocent people are victimized, but one where supernatural creatures occasionally attempt to flee the persecution of their own kind.

Between the defined societies of the living and the undead, there is a shadowy realm where the disgruntled and dissatisfied look for sympathy, or just trouble. Outcasts on the run, hiding from hunters. Autarkis apostates forsaking vampiric cults. Initiates seeking a higher state of being, or looking to escape the enslavement of ancient creatures. If you know where to look for them, you will find them, aided by Enlightened insight. Some seek political asylum; a few have heard of the promise of "Golconda." A rare few seek "redemption." When mages are drawn into the world of vampires, they find allies against the night — and sometimes allies in need of help, trying to escape the same oppressive world that orphaned Hollow Ones rebel against.

VAMPIRIC PERSPECTIVES

VENTRUE AND TOREADOR

For centuries, these two clans have helped the Camarilla grow to the extensive secret society that exists tonight. What exactly could the Redeemed do to undermine all this? Why serve elders and princes, after all, in a world where a vampire could theoretically escape an eternity in shadows? A botched ritual could result in something "more than human," while a messianic figure could attract a cult of vampires or mages (or both) to surround and protect him. Any action taken against such a cult could result in retribution from the Redeemed, such as the threat of blowing the Masquerade wide open. If the Redeemed's followers have a chance to become human again, they won't need it once they succeed.

TREMERE

Tremere's torpid body rests in a fortress in Vienna. With so much magical power at their command, would it be possible to not only rouse him from his slumber but return him to his mortal guise again? He made one failed bid for immortality long ago; the Ritual of the Red Sign may give him a second chance. Why allow it to be wasted on some heretical Salubri seeking perfect *humanitas* or torturously tormented Nosferatu when the greatest sorcerer the world has ever known could return to life and usher in a new age for all who follow him?

GIOVANNI

The *Invocation of Eternity* offers the Giovanni even greater power over the spirits they command. It is not enough to merely use them as slaves with Necromancy — what powers may be possible if they could be made flesh and blood again? In rare cases, the ghost of a dead vampire survives after the so-called “Final Death,” so what is possible when that creature is returned to life?

The Giovanni have unique insight into the cycle of birth and death, certainly more so than most Kindred. As they are well aware, the soul continues to exist after death, and this suggests that the concept of rebirth isn't such a far-fetched idea after all. As this clan well knows, the rare spirits who return to the land of the living retain some of their special powers, and if such a thing is true for spirits, why not for the Kindred? If so, the Redeemed would certainly have the best of both worlds. As a consequence, the Giovanni clan is one of the most involved in the search for a cure for the Curse of Caine. (Of course, this may also be contributed to the close-knit clan structure or the influence of Ambrogino himself.)

GANGREL

At their hearts, the Gangrel are wanderers. Most rebel at the slightest hint of restraint or containment. As a result, the Gangrel tend to be intrigued by anything that promises freedom or an increase thereof. Although most members of the clan prefer the rural to the urban, it has been impossible for them to ignore the rumors that have circulated through their predatory nights. The rumors that a ritual may exist that would break or at least counteract the Curse of Caine have certainly caught their attention, and though they tend to shy away from Cainite politics, many would likely make an exception just to learn more about the possibilities. However, most Gangrel do not hold much respect for magic and other such trickery, so this is not to imply that they will simply jump on the bandwagon without a second thought.

Given their more instinctive nature, the Gangrel's natural abilities suit them to act as hunters and couriers. Those who are actively involved in research groups, or who search for the tomes, often act in one of these two capacities, searching out any mention of the books, carrying messages between the conspiracy members or seeking out potential leads and research subjects. In fact, it is rumored that a Gangrel was once in possession of a tome containing the ritual and tried to sell it to the highest bidder. This rumor was never substantiated and the Gangrel in question has gone into hiding.

BRUJAH

Given the idealistic tendencies of many Brujah, it is not surprising that they would take interest in the Ritual of the Red Sign and the conspiracy surrounding it. Of course, some think that the search for such a ritual should be supported at all costs, while others think that an attempt to “redeem” a Kindred would be a step backward, and they'll stop at nothing to make sure it disappears, never to be seen again. At the very least, the possibilities give them something to argue about (or as they might call it “debate”). Few of the Brujah are interested in tedious magical research, so those who are directly involved in the conspiracy tend to serve as guardians and lookouts. While the Gangrel watch the countryside for any appearance of the book, the Brujah scour the cities.

Some Brujah also work to provide samples to be used for research purposes. These Kindred, such as Gyorgi the Scourge, gather anarchists and thin-blooded vampires and turn them over to researchers... for a price. Such a service is invaluable to more prominent vampires who wish to keep their experiments a secret, and the Brujah are the ideal choice for a job that requires muscle, discretion, and hard-headed idealism.

NOSFERATU

Not only does the formation of an inter-clan conspiracy offer unique opportunities for the enterprising Nosferatu, but the possibilities inherent in the Ritual of the Red Sign are particularly intriguing for this clan above all others. Few Nosferatu would turn down the opportunity to participate in or gather information on such a pervasive conspiracy, particularly when the high status of the various participants are considered. As such, the Nosferatu are highly involved and often more in the know than the conspirators themselves.

Their interests are more than academic, however. Out of all of the clans, it can be argued that the lot of the Nosferatu is the worst of all. To spend eternity in a decaying corpse is no picnic, and the possibility that it might be counteracted hasn't escaped the clan. They

speculate among themselves about the possibilities of the ritual, who might be willing to undertake it, and whether or not it would heal the damage done to their bodies. Skeptics argue that conducting the ritual on a Nosferatu would only result in a rotting, deformed human being, but others secretly wonder and hope.

MALKAVIANS

Not surprisingly, a few Malkavians claim to have read the *King in Yellow*, and they unanimously agree that it is one of the best works they've ever written, with such insight, such poise, such depth of meaning! Actually, from the few lucid comments that members of this clan have made about the play, it appears that they may be the only creatures on the planet capable of understanding how it works. Naturally, this makes them highly sought after by members of the conspiracy, if only in a limited fashion. After all, once they've provided their insights, many consider it best to send them away, just in case the rumors about the Yellow Sign are true. Some say that the play was written by one of the oldest Malkavians, if not the Antediluvian, and that the madness contained within is catching. Although such a story smacks of legend, many Kindred consider it wise to act cautiously in this matter.

Anastasia, one of the most prominent Malkavian experts on the play, has claimed that a Malkavian prophecy deals with the "yellow signs." Although the prophecy she has described is difficult to understand, so full is it of seemingly meaningless imagery and literary double-speak, it seems to indicate that the appearance of the "yellow signs" will bring enlightenment to the people. Of course, given some Malkavian ideas of enlightenment, this may not be such a good thing after all.

SETITES

The Setites obviously have an affinity for corruption. They work to undermine any and all institutions that they possibly can in an effort to ready the world for Set's return. Clearly, this ritual and the conspiracy underlying it present a major opportunity for the clan. Not only do they have the opportunity to seize control of a major ritual (parts of which are rumored to cause insanity, no less), but also to spread their influence through the Kindred as well as the mage communities. It's a dream opportunity for the Setites. As a result, they've taken steps to insinuate themselves into the conspiracy as only a snake can, and once they've made themselves indispensable, the corruption begins.

A small group of Setites from Las Vegas has heard of the Ritual of the Red Sign, and more importantly of the play *The King in Yellow*. Currently, they have

committed all of their resources into finding a copy of this marvelous work, and if it happens, they'll stop at nothing to see it put on the stage, complete with chorus girls and ostrich feathers.

TZIMISCE

Although most Tzimisce would consider the concept that Cainites might be redeemed to be absolutely ridiculous (and that's putting it kindly), a few members of this clan have a different view. While they're not particularly interested in redemption, they see the possibilities in defeating the Curse of Caine. Perhaps they believe that ending the curse will bring about Gehenna, or they plan to use the ritual as a weapon against their enemies. Certainly, the Tzimisce are perfectly willing to try a few experiments to determine if such a ritual might be of use to them, and if the participants fail to survive, that's really too bad.

Out of all of the Tzimisce, the *koldun* sorcerers are the most obviously suited for participation in this type of experimentation, and one such example is the Tzimisce called Duality. Duality not only provides insight into the Koldunic side of things, but also offers a seemingly unceasing source of test subjects to be used for research purposes. It is one of the most active Tzimisce involved in the conspiracy.

LASOMBRA

A few Lasombra have direct contact with the conspiracy, but most of them choose to exercise their influence from the shadows. After all, the Lasombra are consummate string-pullers, and it is very much their style to keep tabs on the matter's goings-on, with the intent to seize a significant degree of influence when the time is right. A few Lasombra have taken a more direct approach, locating and directing resources to the search for the tomes as well as the research activities going on. However, as a whole, the clan is content to watch and wait for the right moment to interfere.

In terms of philosophy, the Lasombra are most interested in how to turn any new developments to their own profit, and the Ritual of the Red Sign is no exception. Certainly, most of the clan wouldn't see the ritual as a sign of redemption, but more as a tool to be used.

THE AFTERMATH

So, once the ritual has been conducted, what happens now? The first question to answer is how it turned out. Did the group have all of the desired tomes and was the ritual a success? Remember that we have four major possibilities here, and only one of

THIS IS BIG. VERY BIG.

Obviously, the performance of this highly powerful ritual will have widespread implications, and we're not just talking about the political and philosophical ramifications here. The uproar going on in vampiric and mage circles is only the tip of the iceberg. The coming of the Redeemed could very well be one of the signs that the end is near, and the approach of the Apocalypse is an event of the highest magnitude. Even an unsuccessful attempt might alter the very fabric of reality. Consider that these rituals interfere with the "natural" order of things, the uni-directional cycle of birth, life and death. (Or at least, so most mages would see it. Vampires, on the other hand, might take such a comment as a personal insult, since it implies that they too are unnatural. After all, they're the ones who cheated death in the first place.) Not only will they have widespread effects on both vampires and mages, but also on the world at large.

The following are some suggestions for Storytellers to consider when developing a Red Sign chronicle. These plot devices are designed to increase the dramatic tension in the chronicle and to make it completely obvious to everyone involved that this is serious stuff. After all, what fun is it if it all ends with a whimper instead of a bang?

- **The Initial Stages:** One idea is to start out small. Perhaps as the preparations for the ritual begin, the Powers That Be sit up and take notice. There may be a series of warnings along the lines of the Seven Signs. These warnings should be ominous enough without being hazardous. After all, these are warnings, not punishments. However, as each sign passes unheeded, they could grow progressively more ominous as well as more blatant. Some possible signs include plagues of insects, unexplained astrological phenomena, or drastic meteorological changes. If it snows at midnight every night during the first week of July in Florida, obviously something strange is going on. These inexplicable

them is particularly pleasant. Chances are pretty good that the characters' triumph will be short-lived, and they'll find themselves in an unexpected fight with the person they had intended on redeeming. How will they deal with the need to put down their selected subject like a wounded animal? Undoubtedly, they'll feel a little disheartened when, after all

happenings become particularly worrisome when one begins to wonder who or what is sending them.

- **En Medias Res:** As the preparations for the ritual draw to a close, the signs and warnings may grow more drastic. Maybe the signs manifest in people. They begin speaking in tongues, or every resident of the city has vivid nightmares featuring a red sign hanging over their ruined skyline. One question to ask is how supernatural creatures might be affected. Do they show the same signs as the average Joe? Do mages develop random Paradox flaws or find their magic increasingly difficult to control or more powerful? Do vampires find that their Beast is easier or more difficult to keep under wraps? As the veil between two planes of existence thins, it's likely that some characters will feel it more than the less enlightened.

- **The Big Bang:** If the players are not involved with the initial preparations for the ritual, it may be necessary to skip right to the big stuff. Even if they're not physically present for the ritual, or indeed if they never see the tomes at all, widespread unexplained phenomena could be their first clue that something big is happening, and that something powerful isn't all that pleased about it. Again, the magnitude of these events is for the Storyteller to decide. Will they occur worldwide, or are they limited to the locale where the ritual is taking place? Can unenlightened mortals see them, and how do they react? Regardless of whether the signs have been building throughout your chronicle or your characters are new to the whole thing, these signs should leave no doubt in anyone's mind that big things are happening here. They're overtly supernatural and should be as spooky as you can manage. It might rain blood, or perhaps the worlds have become so close that spirits begin to walk the streets. There could be pockets of reality where concepts like space, time, or sound take on new meaning. Regardless of the signs you choose, they should be big. This is an event of cosmic proportions, after all.

their effort, the damn thing still doesn't work. (Of course, if the characters managed to get it right the first time, none of this is particularly applicable, but you can still read this part and laugh at the poor saps who failed to dot all their I's and cross their T's.)

While it's possible that the characters will regard their failure as a challenge and immediately concoct

potential solutions, you may need to be prepared to give them a carrot or two to get them moving again. How are you going to accomplish that? Consider that even a failed attempt at the ritual is going to attract a lot of attention among those who are in the know, particularly if you employ any of the signs or other interesting phenomena we've been suggesting as a part of your chronicle. Anyone familiar with magic is going to know quite clearly that a major ritual was attempted, and it may not be so obvious as to whether or not the ritual succeeded. Obviously, people will be curious, and this provides you with the opportunity to bring them the help they need.

Of course, having the missing tome dropped directly into the characters' laps via airmail isn't the best way to motivate the characters. But simply providing the characters with a scholar who could focus in on the basic steps needed to conduct such a ritual would at the very least give them an idea of what they're missing. Clearly, if the result of the ritual is a Soulless, they'll need to find a way to call up and retain the soul of the intended subject. The scholar might be able to point them toward some appropriate tomes that bind a soul to a body or vessel. Through trial and error, they could locate the correct tome, and finally be ready to try the ritual again.

One caveat to this entire process is not to let it drag on too long. Of course, you don't want to lead the characters around by their noses and solve all their problems for them, but after the second or third failed attempt, they might very well lose interest in completing what seems an impossible task. If the first attempt is unsuccessful, make sure that the players have plenty of resources available to help them fix the problem (without having the Storyteller characters resolve it for them, of course), so that they don't become so discouraged that they finally give up.

SUCCESS AT LAST!

Regardless of whether it took the characters one try or five, finally they successfully perform the ritual. What does that mean for them? Well, the first consideration is fairly simple: They are now some of the most wanted people on the planet, and not everyone who's looking for them wants to shake their hand and get their autograph. For every eager vampire who wants to see the sun again, for every delighted mage who wants to learn the ritual so that she can go off and save some souls, there are a handful of Sabbat and Nephandi eager to warp the ritual to their own ends, with or without the characters' assistance. This will probably be the characters'

first taste of infamy, and while it might seem pleasant enough at the beginning, it will likely grow dangerous very quickly.

Another issue to consider is that conducting a ritual of this nature takes a lot out of a person! When those nasty Marauders come knocking at the door, the characters better have some friends nearby to help protect them, because they'll probably feel more like sleeping than anything else. Such massive manipulation of energies takes a lot out of a person. Of course, they hopefully have the Redeemed on their side, and while he or she is just a plain old mortal again, simply getting a look at the Redeemed can sometimes be enough to awe even the most jaded of hearts. Okay, so it isn't very likely, but it is an option.

Speaking of the Redeemed, what should the characters do with her? Since the Redeemed may well be a garden-variety mortal, and there's no guarantee that she's retained any of her supernatural abilities, she'll need some protection while she gains her bearings. At least, that seems like the next logical step, but unfortunately, she might have something else in mind. After all, she's now able to experience things she hasn't been able to experience in... well, probably in a while. Is she really going to

WHAT ABOUT ME?

Of course, none of this talk is particularly relevant if your players' characters decided to try and stop the ritual from occurring. Perhaps this was a part of your master plan, or maybe they took off running in a direction you just didn't expect. (How dare they!?) Regardless, you still have the makings of a very interesting chronicle. Once the characters get their hands on one of the tomes, they'll suddenly be the subject of a very intense manhunt. They'll need to avoid hunters from both the vampire and mage communities. Should they stay on the run and hope to avoid capture that way? Confide in their higher-ups in an effort to hide the book away (realizing of course that the higher-up could very well be a member of the conspiracy)? Or should they go to ground while they try to find a way to destroy the tome forever? While a cat-and-mouse game might not be exactly what you had in mind, it could make for a very satisfying ending to this story. Although it is important to note that there may be more than one copy of these rituals floating around. What will the characters do if they hear about another copy? Will they go to investigate? If they do, is the report valid, or is it nothing more than a clever trap?

want a gaggle of onlookers following her around all of the time while she reacquaints herself with sunrises, chocolate ice cream and sex? Probably not. So, not only do the characters need to worry about their own safety, but now they also have to worry about her.

Of course, this worry might be somewhat alleviated if the Redeemed retains some of her Disciplines or other supernatural advantages. You might notice that our description of the Paragon said very little about her particular abilities. Does she retain her Disciplines? Does she regain the ability to use magic if she was a human mage before her Embrace? Does she recover her pretty human face if she has spent nights as a Nosferatu? Well, we're not going to answer those questions, because that's up to you. Suffice it to say that the Redeemed has been given a second chance at life because she truly repented of her sins, and she is now a paragon of humanity. Remember that the character now has a Humanity rating of 10, but only because there isn't a higher level to give her. Effectively, she is one of the most humane people on the planet, if not the most humane. The question is whether or not those supernatural abilities would enhance or detract from that humanity. Certainly, the Redeemed now has one heck of an overactive conscience, and while it may be technically possible for her to use Majesty to cow a crowd, she might shirk away from the idea of subjugating people to her will and be unable to force herself to do it. Or perhaps her powers function only when she needs to protect herself. These are just a few ideas to consider, but really, the final decision is up to you.

GATHERING CULTS

Once the immediate safety concerns are taken care of (and the players' characters have all had a nice long nap), the story still isn't quite over. Remember that the breaking of the Curse of Caine isn't something to be taken lightly among the mages, and it would be a massive letdown if the characters accomplished something of great cosmic influence but never got to see the aftermath. Of course, the vampires will all be riled up over the news. This is not only an event of massive magical importance, but will almost assuredly also be the cause of intense philosophical controversy. Those who believe that vampires are cursed are likely to think the ritual a hoax at best, or an abomination against the will of God at the worst. The other side might argue that redemption is possible and indeed this ritual must be an example of God's will and infinite mercy. Al-



though they might argue until their faces turn blue, it's clear that they will never come to a satisfying conclusion.

Sadly enough, this is an argument that is bound to turn ugly, and the players' characters are quite likely to be caught in the middle of all of it. Once again, let's remember that the coming of the Redeemed is said to be a sign that the End is near. For now, there are no overt supernatural signs to that effect, and in fact the strange occurrences cease when the ritual is completed. Still, the world is reeling from the effects of the ritual, and one of the first signs of the coming Apocalypse could be a full-scale battle over control of the Ritual of the Red Sign.

The members of the conspiracy could potentially act against such a battle, but they'll have their own problems to deal with. Once the ritual is successfully conducted, the conspiracy is likely to fall apart. While some members have forged lasting relationships with their collaborators, most of them don't see eye-to-eye. They'll argue over the appropriate things to do with the ritual, whether or not it should be conducted again and on whom, whether it's appropriate to use the ritual as a weapon against unsuspecting Kindred, and it will be nigh impossible for them to reach a satisfying compromise. As we've seen in earlier chapters, the conspiracy members truly have only one thing in common: an interest in learning more about the Ritual of the Red Sign. Once it has been conducted, their reason for being is no longer applicable; it is only logical to assume that they will once again part ways.

Who participates in this conflict and why? Although Kindred would usually side with Kindred, Technocrats with Technocrats, and Tradition mages with Tradition mages, this battle is likely to be more philosophical in nature. There are, after all, three prevailing opinions about what to do with the ritual: Use it to redeem lost souls, hide it forever, or use it as an instrument of corruption. Given that these opinions are based on deeply held matters of personal philosophy, it's unlikely that a sadistic Nephandus would choose to side with a pacifist Chorister when there's a Setite standing nearby ready to cause mayhem. While it is rare to see a vampire siding with a mage, this is indeed a special situation. After all, we've bent the rules enough to get ourselves to this point, so a little bit of a crossover shouldn't be that surprising.

I'D LIKE 500 COPIES OF THIS ANCIENT TOME, PLEASE.

What if the characters decide to copy the tomes and pass them out to everyone? Wouldn't that solve all the problems and let everyone exist in peace and harmony? Of course not. Even if copying a tome was a possibility (and we'll get to that in a minute), the fact is that the ritual is ungodly powerful, and there are people out there who would use it for evil. Then, there are other people out there who would step up to fight them, and that would end up starting a skirmish anyway.

Besides, these tomes are magical in nature, and simply popping them onto a Xerox machine and hitting "Copy" isn't going to work. They naturally resist any attempt to copy them, whether it is by hand or via machinery. Perhaps the copies come out all garbled, or maybe the copy machine spits out page after page covered with red signs. A skilled magus with a lot of time on his hands might be able to come up with a way to counteract this effect, but with the masters all lost to the Avatar Storm, there are few mages out there with the skill to make that happen. Actually, this is probably a good thing, since the world would be quite literally torn apart if the ritual were to be conducted every day. The amount of energy expended to open up a gateway between planes of existence doesn't just fade away in a matter of minutes, after all. The World of Darkness will feel the aftershocks of the Ritual of the Red Sign for a long, long time.

During the next stage of your chronicle, everyone chooses a side including the players' characters. Don't forget the Redeemed, because she's the only existing proof at this point that the ritual works, and she certainly has a destiny to fulfill. Slowly, those two sides begin to skirmish among each other. Does it have to escalate to violence? No, you can choose to have it be an out-and-out battle in the streets or go for a more clandestine feel, where the struggle occurs through intrigue and politics. But either way, there's no way that the two sides can manage to coexist peacefully, particularly since only one of them has access to the ritual.

THE STORM

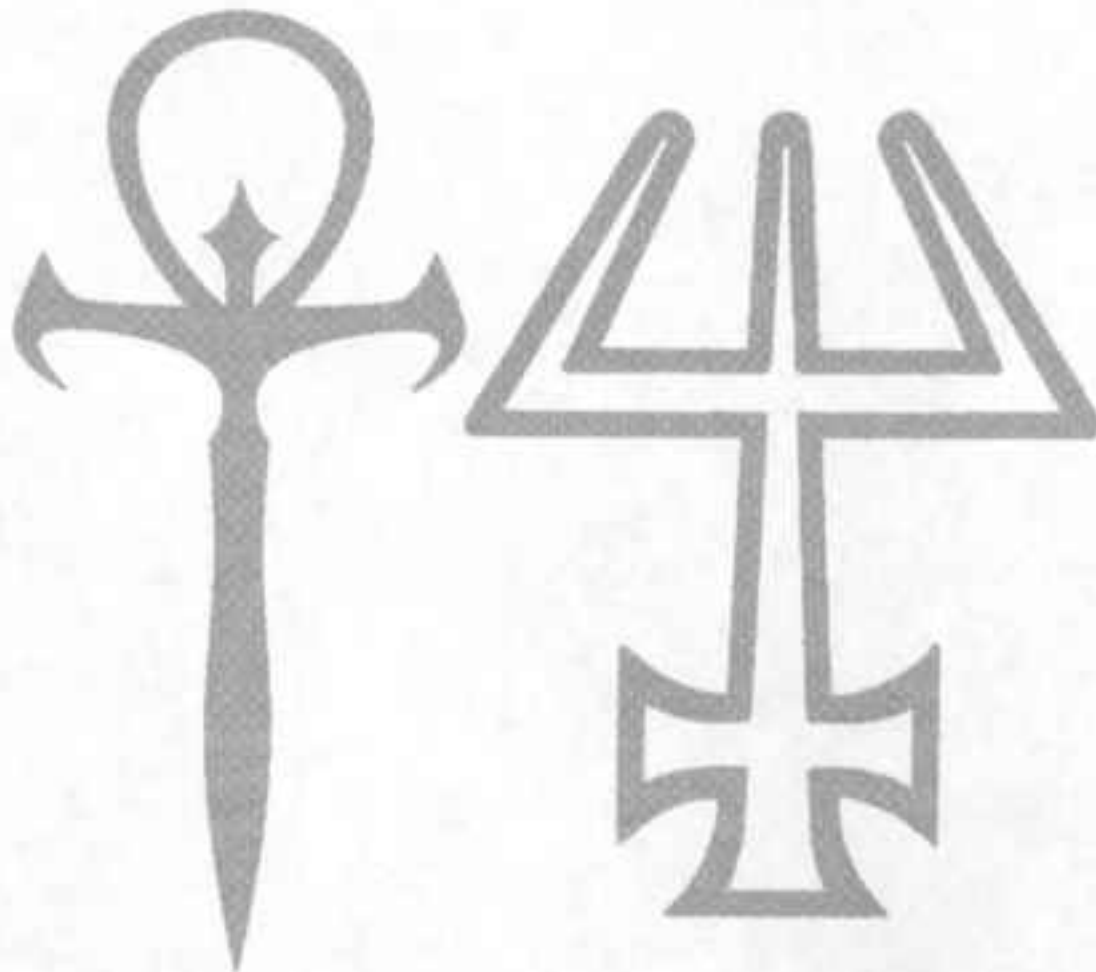
Once the stage is set, it's only a matter of time before the fight begins. We've already discussed the

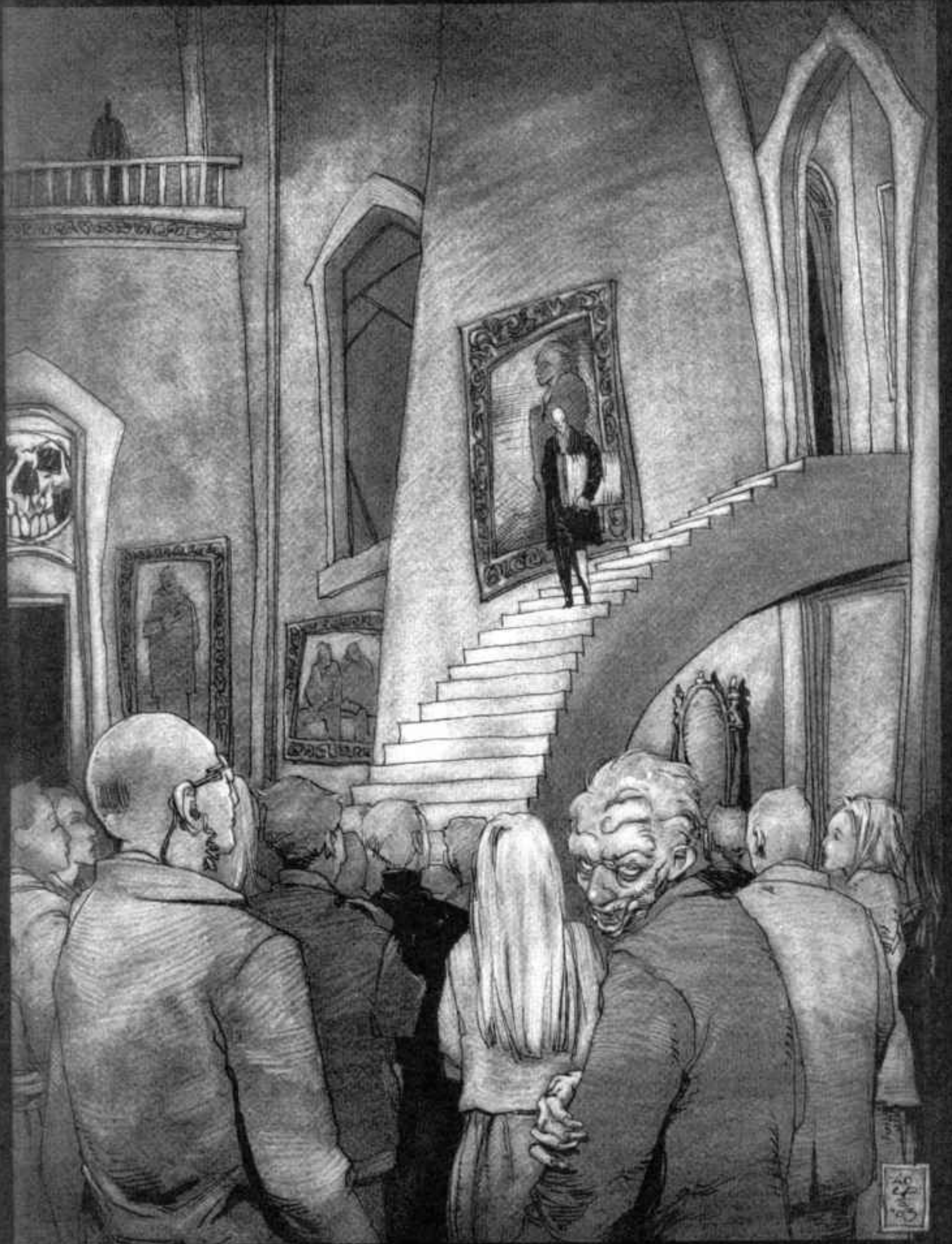
philosophical reasons behind the conflict, but what exactly is the point? Well, the point is simple. The winner of the conflict is the one who controls the ritual. That means that they have possession of the tomes — and the people with the know-how to conduct the ritual. The Redeemed would be a nice added bonus as well. What does this mean? This means that the characters could be in quite a lot of trouble... again.

If the characters have already chosen sides, they'll have some help in remaining safely hidden, but of course there are always spies, both fleshly and spirit in nature. Furthermore, though they might feel secure among their chosen compatriots, there is almost always someone in the group who has his own personal agenda. Maybe he's determined that they'll use the ritual to bring back his vampire lover, maybe he's

decided that they should teach him how to perform the ritual himself.

As the conflict escalates, things once again turn strange. The signs slowly appear once more, and it becomes staggeringly clear that tampering with the forces of nature isn't going to go unnoticed. Perhaps the Redeemed goes out into the mortal world and amasses legions of followers. Maybe the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse or the Wild Hunt comes riding, in search of the lost soul that was returned to the world. Whatever the chosen signs, keep them big. If we've said it before, we'll say it a thousand times: The Ritual of the Red Sign is an event of staggering proportions, and the coming of The End is no laughing matter. Regardless of the outcome in terms of the players' characters, this chronicle should take you one step closer to ultimate destruction... or is it ultimate salvation? Only time will tell.







CHAPTER FOUR: CONSPIRATORS

Storytellers, take note: We've presented enough characters in this chapter to populate four or five chronicles. We don't expect you to use them all, but to pick and choose the characters that you feel will add the most to your story. So, though we've presented, for example, primogen of Russian cities, Italian Necromancers, Tremere schemers, Sabbat archbishops, three characters who are each in possession of one of the rare tomes, as well as a few others who have read one of those forbidden books and let them slip through their fingers, we're not going to come after you with a baseball bat if you don't use them all. In fact, it might make it more interesting if

only one or two of the individuals make themselves available or known to the characters at the beginning of the chronicle, and they have to seek out the rest of the individuals via trial and error, not to mention dealing with the Widderslaite and other nasties that result from their first few botched attempts at the ritual.

The players' characters might find themselves, say, in possession of the tome or appointed as spies of the Tremere. More than anything else, these characters serve as hooks by which to bring your troupe's characters into the events of **The Red Sign**. Use, modify or ignore them as best serves your troupe and chronicle.

**AMBROGINO GIOVANNI, AMBITION
PERSONIFIED**

5th generation, Childe of Lady Constancia

Clan: Giovanni

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Visionary

Embrace: 1045

Apparent Age: Mid-50s

Much can be said about Ambrogino Giovanni: one of the greatest necromancers in his clan, an occult genius, a rogue in one of the tightest-knit clans and a right bastard. Even before his Embrace, Ambrogino was both skilled and driven. Becoming a vampire simply gave him all of eternity to fulfill his ambitions.

For more than 300 years, ever since Ambrogino learned of the fabled *Sargon Fragment*, his main ambition was ascension to godhead. When Ambrogino believed the *Fragment* destroyed, he began searching the Underworld of the ghosts for its spiritual reflection. It was during one of these searches that Ambrogino witnessed one of the most powerful storms ever to rock the Underworld and became aware, through spirits fleeing this storm, of strange glowing figures that had appeared just before the tempest struck. Determined to learn more, Ambrogino turned his attentions toward investigation. It was during these research endeavors that Ambrogino eventually came to the attention of the mages involved in the Red Sign ritual.

Ambrogino is an elder and powerful vampire, a master of Necromancy and quite skilled at Thaumaturgy. He is exceptionally wealthy and has influence over kine throughout the world. He is intelligent, manipulative and shrewd. However, his fault is, was and always will be his overconfidence, which might more appropriately be called arrogance. Ambrogino knows that he is exceptional and he believes himself all but invulnerable and infallible. In the end, this ego will likely be his downfall.

(For more on Ambrogino Giovanni, see *Children of the Night*, pages 83-84)

**NATACHA DIMITRIVA RADOCHARA, VENTRUE
PRIMOGEN OF ST. PETERSBURG**

Background: Natacha was born into a minor noble family in the great Russian empire. Her family was not rich, but Natacha still managed to attract a fair number of suitors, relying more on her personality and clever flattering than her looks. She played suitors against each other, collecting gifts from all of them, and waiting for the right one to come along. Finally, she was married into an extremely wealthy



family. Her husband left the running of the estates to her while he indulged himself in travels and business ventures. Natacha displayed a gift for administration. She also held grand soirees that were attended by the upper echelon of Russian and Eastern European society. It was during these parties that her sire-to-be, Dimitri, realized just what an asset she could be to Clan Ventrue... and to him personally.

At first, Natacha thought Dimitri was simply a wealthy and elderly gentleman who was flirting with her. Slowly, he revealed more and more of the world of the Kindred to Natacha, at the same time blood bonding her to him. In the end, when he offered her the chance to become one of the undead, Natacha accepted.

At first, Natacha was shocked and overwhelmed by the experience of becoming a vampire. Her sire feared her lost to frenzy, but she gradually managed to gain some semblance of control over herself. Shocked by the Beast Within, Natacha wanted to leave Russia and her sire took her on a tour of Europe. Here, Natacha was introduced to several esteemed members of Camarilla society and she gained her first taste of real power. She enjoyed it immensely. Returning to Russia after a few decades, she, with her sire's help, immediately established a powerbase for herself using the lesser Russian nobility as its foundation. However, World War I and the Communist Party ruined many of her efforts and then Baba Yaga arose and raised her Shadow Curtain. Natacha fled, but Dimitri stayed behind, trying to act as an agent of the Camarilla in Russia. He has never been heard from again.

After the war, Natacha established herself in the west. She served a stint as an archon before moving on to serve various powerful Kindred directly, including members of the Inner Circle. When the Shadow Curtain fell, Natacha moved swiftly into her homeland and offered her assistance to Nikolai, the prince of St. Petersburg. He took her up on her offer and made her primogen. With Nikolai spending most of his time on Vasilievsky Island, Natacha often seems to be the true power of St. Petersburg.

Image: Natacha is short, but still manages to be imposing, with black hair and ice-blue eyes. Her behavior is always extremely dignified and there is very little that can shake her composure. Her voice is her main weapon — she never lowers herself to making actual threats, but merely speaks in a carefully downplayed monotone while reciting the facts of the situation. Natacha prefers to dress in severe suits that minimize her femininity.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a master politician and an expert at mind games. You prefer to dominate a situation, though often from behind the throne rather than openly. Never let anyone get to you; always remain calm and composed. You are the master of your realm and of yourself, never forget that. You are beginning to become jaded: You have wealth, you have power, you have achieved your ambitions, so now what? This whole project is something to occupy your nights with — though a Christian in life, you really don't worry too much about the whole God's Curse aspect. The possibility that the Embrace can be reversed is simply too interesting not to investigate.

Clan: Ventrue

Sire: Dimitri Tchmill

Nature: Director

Demeanor: Rogue

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1789

Apparent Age: Mid-30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 3, Intimidation 4, Leadership 5, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 5, Firearms 1, Melee 1

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 1, Finance 3, Investigation 1, Law 2, Linguistics 4, Occult 2, Politics 6, Science 1

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 5, Fortitude 4, Presence 6

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Herd 3, Influence 4, Resources 5, Retainers 5, Status 5

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 5, Courage 4

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 7

PERCIVAL, RELUCTANT ARCHBISHOP OF GUADALAJARA

Background: Percival's father was a professor of Medieval English Literature and his work meant all to him, so much so that he named his sons after the knights of Arthurian Legend. A strong and athletic young man, Percival joined the Royal Hussars and, despite not being of noble blood, managed to rise in the ranks. To his father, this was a dream come true. He praised his son for becoming a true knight.

Percival's Embrace was something of a fluke. His sire, Ermenegildo, was not looking for a new childe, he was simply acting as a Sabbat scout in London. However, when he saw the dashing hussar, something about him made Ermenegildo think of the legends of El Cid that he had grown up listening to. Not being the most stable of Cainites, Ermenegildo arranged for Percival to be assaulted by muggers and he was astonished to see how well the young man handled himself. Almost on the spur of the moment, Ermenegildo Embraced Percival, wanting to see if he would survive the transition to vampire physically and mentally intact.

Burdened in life with a father who wanted him to be an Arthurian knight, Percival now found himself with a sire who wanted him to be El Cid. Coupled with the strain of having to drink blood from mortals



(as well as being forced to participate in the Sabbat rites), Percival's mind cracked. He managed to act normal enough for his sire to accept him, though Ermenegildo soon abandoned Percival when it was clear that he was not El Cid. Seeking to escape the painful memories Europe held for him, Percival fled to the New World. Here, he lost himself for decades in the fighting between the Sabbat and the Camarilla, driven by a subconscious death wish, and was finally awarded with the title of Archbishop of Guadalajara for his valor. It was upon taking his office in this city that Percival first heard of Teotihuacán. After his first visit, he felt that the answers to the meaning of his existence might be found in these ruins and became one of the Cainite archeologists seeking hidden knowledge in the ghost city.

Image: Percival is archetypally tall, dark and handsome. His hair, which is lustrous black, falls to his shoulders in thick curls and he has been compared to Antonio Banderas more than once. He sports a well-trimmed moustache and a goatee slightly longer than could reasonably be considered "well kempt." When he cares about his wardrobe, he prefers old-fashioned suits in charcoal or midnight blue, but he dresses most often in tough field clothes and ties his hair back casually.

Roleplaying Hints: You are on a grand quest, a quest to restore life back to vampires. You will defy God Himself and show yourself as the grandest knight ever. Maybe then, you will know what your purpose in life is. But you must be careful. Others aim to hinder your quest, to lead you astray. As such, you must adopt a mask, the mask of a Sabbat Archbishop, stern, unyielding, dedicated to the Sword of Caine. Play the role to the hilt (maybe even overacting at times), so that your enemies do not suspect what you are.

Clan: Lasombra

Sire: Ermenegildo the Rake

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Architect

Generation: 7th (through diablerie; 10th by Embrace)

Embrace: 1866

Apparent Age: Early 30s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 1, Leadership 1, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Melee (Fencing) 4, Ride 3, Survival 1

Knowledges: Academics 4, Linguistics 5, Medicine 2, Occult 5, Politics 2, Science 1

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 1, Obtenebration 5, Potence 3, Fortitude 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 4, Influence 1, Resources 4, Retainers 2, Sabbat Status 4

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 3, Courage 5

Morality: Humanity 3

Willpower: 7

RUTOR, THE REBELLIOUS DAWN

Background: Rutor was born and raised on Tzimisce lands. He was bred for war, war against the Tremere who had invaded the ancestral homeland of the Fiends and to war he went, though not of his own choosing. His master believed Rutor suborned by the blood bond, but Rutor was immune to this and ended up betraying his master to her enemies, earning the Embrace from Clan Tremere as a backhanded reward.

Rutor, however, was as malcontent and rebellious as always and when he thought his period of apprenticeship over (which was long before his mentor thought it was), he left Ceoris to establish a powerbase of his own. After years of traveling and avoiding contact with his clan, he ended up in Scandinavia, where he made a bid to become Prince of Copenhagen. However, when the Tremere clan spread northward, Rutor again decided to leave, rather than be caught in what he saw as the restrictive hierarchy of the clan. For a time he made his haven in the New World, dodging the Sabbat, but when Camarilla presence in the North America grew, Rutor went back to Europe.



For the last century or so, Rutor has kept minimal contact with his clan while at the same time focusing on expanding his own influence and occult knowledge. He has sometimes associated with Ambrogino Giovanni, serving as a sort of mercenary for the Necromancer, and when Ambrogino began to put together his group, Rutor was one of the first he contacted.

Image: Striking is a word that fits Rutor well; he is tall, with a noble bearing and intense, glistening eyes. His black, curly hair falls to his shoulders and he has a neatly trimmed full beard. His voice, however, is deep and gravelly and he must work hard to suppress a sneer whenever talking to anyone he considers his inferior. His wardrobe is extensive, but he usually wears dark colors and some form of long coat.

Roleplaying Hints: The most important person in the world is you. You know that others don't feel that way and you do your level best to be sociable and work together with others, but you are too much of an egotist to be a part of any group for long if you can't gain control of it. Already, you are feeling the strain of having to defer to Ambrogino. You tend to stare intently at people that you are jealous of and casually disregard those you feel are beneath you.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Jervais

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Rebel

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1200

Apparent Age: Early 30s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 5, Intimidation 2, Leadership 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Body Crafts 3, Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 3, Melee 5, Ride 2, Security 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 1, Finance 1, Investigation 1, Law 1, Linguistics 5, Medicine 1, Occult 5

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Auspex 5, Dominate 4, Fortitude 2, Potence 2, Protean 3, Thaumaturgy 6, Vicissitude 4

Thaumaturgy Paths: Blood 5, Elemental Control 4, Thaumaturgical Countermagic 4, Movement of the Mind 3, Alchemy 3, Weather Control 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 5, Influence 1, Resources 4, Retainers 3, Status 3

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 3, Courage 5

Morality: Humanity 3

Willpower: 8

DUALITY, KOLDUN AND CULT LEADER

Background: Poland in the early 20th century was not a good place for a woman feeling herself trapped in a man's body. Being gay was not accepted and it was taboo to question your own gender. As such, life was hard for young Sebastian, the son of a renowned surgeon. Driven mentally to the edge of insanity and physically to acts of great perversion, Sebastian found himself as an acolyte in one of the occult societies of Krakow. Here, he chanted nightly to dark spirits and forbidden gods and he gave blood offerings and drank the foul blood that was given in return. Surprisingly, the High Magus decided that Sebastian was worthy of enlightenment and Embraced him. Thus, Duality was born.

No longer torn between its male and female side, Duality turned out to be an exceptionally quick study, soon surpassing its sire in the arts of fleshcrafting and the occult. Arkedi decided to send Duality to Mexico City, to learn at the feet of some of the greatest *koldun* in the Sabbat. Once there, Duality learned not only Koldunic Sorcery, but also the lore of its clan. After years of study, it formed the Cult of the Revelation with a small number of other Tzimisce. When Duality learned of Percival and his search for occult lore in Teotihuacán, it managed to have itself assigned as Percival's templar, hoping to exploit whatever discoveries Percival made for its own plans.

Image: Duality has used its Vicissitude to reshape itself. Its left side looks like a stunningly beautiful woman with long, blonde hair and a blue eye, its right like an extremely handsome man with short, dark hair and a green eye. Its clothing tends to be as gender-neutral as possible. When out among mortals, Duality usually lets one of its sides take over, though it has been known to simply wear a hat and upturned collar.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a divided being. You are both male and female, you are both a modern warrior of the Sabbat and a master of ancient sorcery. You are both a devoted bodyguard and a traitor. You are deeply religious, believing fully in the ascension of your clan when the Eldest arises. You scoff at the notion of the Curse of God—you are not cursed, you are blessed and you will bring about Transcendence



through Gehenna, no matter who you must defy in the process. Of course, you cannot allow yourself to reveal your plans, so you play your role as Percival's supporter as well as possible.

Clan: Tzimisce

Sire: Arkedi

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Deviant

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1921

Apparent Age: Mid-20s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0/5

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 1, Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Body Crafts 5, Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 1, Melee 3, Security 1, Survival 1

Knowledges: Academics 3, Koldunism 4, Linguistics 3, Medicine 3, Occult 4, Politics 1, Science 2

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Auspex 3, Fortitude 1, Koldunic Sorcery 5, Vicissitude 4

Koldunic Paths: Way of the Spirit 5, Way of Earth 3

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5, Resources 3, Retainers 2, Sabbat Status 3

Virtues: Conviction 3, Instincts 5, Courage 4

Morality: Path of Metamorphosis 6

Willpower: 8

ANDREW STUART, ETRIOUS' SPY

9th generation, Childe of Erich Wassermann

Clan: Tremere

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Rebel

Embrace: 1888

Apparent Age: Late 20s

Andrew grew up in wealth in Glasgow, the son of a successful banker. He attended the prestigious University of Glasgow where he excelled not only scholastically, but also socially. After graduating with a merit degree in Anthropology, he went on a tour of Europe, entertaining offers from various universities. However, in Vienna, he was made an offer he could not so easily turn down.

Andrew made the transition to Kindred unlife seemingly without any difficulties and quickly became a valued member of his chantry. His skills not only at Thaumaturgy, but also at winning confidence and influencing people, earned him the notice of some of the high-ranking members of the clan and he found himself gaining a great deal of status within the clan. Andrew smiled and laughed and managed to avoid all the jealous plots directed at him by the enemies that his quick rise through the ranks made. To his superiors, he seemed the perfect Tremere — intelligent, manipulative, ambitious but not overly so, and loyal to the pyramid. As such, he was the wisest choice when Etrius needed someone to infiltrate the conspiracy surrounding the Red Sign.

In reality, Andrew is far from the smooth Tremere he appears. The very talents for acting that brought him to the point he is at now also allowed him to mask his deep-seated uncertainty about himself, his abilities and his vampiric nature. A religious man in life, Andrew has so far been able to reconcile his beliefs, but now he is forced to confront them as the conspiracy challenges the work of God. This serves to amplify his nervousness about himself and his powers and it probably won't be long before something goes wrong and Andrew either blows his cover, catastrophically fails in a ritual or decides to try to put a stop to the whole project, betraying both Rutor and Etrius at once.

Andrew is a handsome man of average height, with straw-colored hair and bright blue eyes. He has a ready smile, an amiable face, a charming voice and he is always able to say just the right thing to win people over. He prefers to dress in the latest fashion and defies the "traditional" Tremere look by totally eschewing dark clothing.

PHILIPPE DE MARSEILLES, DESPERATE PENITENT

7th generation, Childe of Remilliard le Blanche

Clan: Toreador

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Visionary

Embrace: 1620

Apparent Age: Early 30s

In life, Philippe was certainly one of the most beautiful men in all of France. He was also a gifted artist, if somewhat tortured, pouring his soul out on the canvas. As such, it was only a matter of time before he came to the attention of one of Marseilles' Toreador.

At first, Philippe was horrified at his new state. Then, he went from horrified to absolute dismay and shock. To be denied the sun, the taste of wine and food, the pleasure of a woman, to be forced to drink the blood of his erstwhile fellows to survive, to be the slave of a raging Beast that wanted nothing but to kill — it was all to be cursed by God. It was almost too much for Philippe, who spent weeks in a state of fugue-like depression followed by months of contemplating suicide. In the end, Philippe discarded the idea of suicide because it was sinful and instead decided upon the path of redemption. His sire mostly ignored this, knowing that with age most vampires either adjust or at least accept their fate. But not so with Philippe. Drawing upon his family resources, he managed to set himself up quite well and then undertook his quest for redemption. Golconda was the most logical target and Philippe has spent more than 300 years and an incredible amount of resources researching this fabled state. He has also pursued any and all rumors about vampires who have become mortal again. He accepted the post as primogen in his home city, hoping that the prestige of the position might help him in his quest. So far, he has achieved next to nothing. Only when he joined the conspiracy did it seem like his quest search had come to an end.

Philippe is a driven man, tortured by what he has become and what he is forced to do. He has been pushed almost to insanity by guilt and self-loathing and if the conspiracy doesn't deliver results soon, it is quite likely that he will cross the line into genuine madness. He believes that God has forsaken him, but that he can regain His grace and this hope is all that keeps him going through the night. Philippe acts quite intensely, interspersed with periods of depression and feelings of guilt and despair. He can be charming if he puts his mind to it, but it has become

harder and harder for him. Physically, Philippe is still exceptionally handsome with dark-blond hair, green eyes and an effortless grace and style.

THEMISTOCLES, THE CONSCIENTIOUS TRAITOR

Background: Themistocles was a scholar from Thrace in life. His father sent him to Constantinople, where his skill earned him a place at Emperor Justinian's court. Here, he fell in with the Monophysite heresy, but was protected from persecution by the empress, herself a Monophysite. His love of learning and obvious talent attracted the attention of a Brujah making his haven in the grand city, and after a period of observation and intellectual testing, Themistocles was Embraced.

For a century, Themistocles was tutored by his sire, but eventually he decided to strike out on his own, to search for knowledge and experience and to look for a way to reconcile his religious beliefs with his state as a vampire. He finally ended up in the Languedoc region of France as the Cathar heresy was at its height. Here, he made a haven and studied with Cathar scholars, eventually absorbing some of their Gnostic beliefs. When the Albigensian Crusade began in the early 13th century, Themistocles protected several Cathars and hid important works in his haven. However, with the fall of Montsegur in 1255, Themistocles withdrew from involvement in mortal society for several centuries.

When he finally emerged from this self-imposed exile, Themistocles resumed his quest for knowledge, sending out his retainers to hunt down rare



works and sometimes traveling himself when circumstances seemed to require it. It was during these travels that he became acquainted with Ambrogino Giovanni. Although the two respected each other as scholars, there was little love lost between them.

Image: Themistocles is short by modern standards, but with broad shoulders and a muscular build. His skin is very pale, his head shaven and his face as expressionless as one of the classic marble statues that he resembles. He normally dresses in dark, loose-fitting clothing.

Roleplaying Hints: Ever since you learned of the path of the Scorched Heart, you have searched for perfection in the absence of emotion, though you still maintain your religious beliefs. You speak rarely and never say anything that you do not consider important. You do not often allow yourself to display emotions and you strive not to feel any either. The whole project of turning a vampire into a mortal has shocked you to the core, but you do your best not to let it show through, instead playing the cold, dedicated knowledge-seeker to the hilt.

Clan: Brujah

Sire: Marcus the Advocate

Nature: Perfectionist

Demeanor: Fanatic

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 537 AD

Apparent Age: Mid-30s

Physical: Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 6, Brawl 2, Dodge 4, Intimidation 3

Skills: Archery 5, Crafts (Stonemason) 3, Etiquette 1, Melee 2, Ride 3, Survival 5

Knowledges: Academics 6, Finance 1, History 5, Investigation 3, Law 1, Linguistics 7 (languages too numerous to list — if it needs to be spoken, written or translated, Themistocles can almost certainly do it), Medicine 5, Occult 5, Science 5

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Celerity 7, Fortitude 5, Potence 7, Presence 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Herd 3, Resources 2, Retainers 7, Status 3

Virtues: Conviction 1, Self-Control 5, Courage 5

Morality: Path of the Scorched Heart 5

Willpower: 9

ANKH-SEN-SUTEKH, MERCENARY SORCERESS

8th generation, Childe of Sutekh-Neferu

Clan: Follower of Set

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Traditionalist

Embrace: 1315

Apparent Age: Late 40s

Born under another name to a slave in one of the great temples to Set, Ankh-sen-Sutekh seemed destined to be just another blood doll. However, her sire saw her potential and put her through a series of tests designed to determine not only her dedication to Set, but also her magical potential. As it turned out, she excelled in both areas.

Ankh-sen-Sutekh spent the first decades of her vampiric existence learning from her sire at the temple. She was indoctrinated into the beliefs of the Followers of Set; that civilization is the tool of Osiris, enemy of Set, and that all Setites must strive toward destroying civilization and awakening Set. The indoctrination worked so well that the new Setite took the name Ankh-sen-Sutekh, literally She-Lives-For-Sutekh. In addition, she was tutored in the Akhu style of religious sorcery practiced by her clan.

After being released by her sire, Ankh-sen-Sutekh set out to do her part in exposing the flaws of civilization's august personalities and bringing about the return of Set. She set herself up in Alexandria, selling her magical services to the highest bidder, always on the lookout for jobs where she could turn up personal secrets and subvert the established order. The money, boons and contacts she made from her mercenary work was put into creating a network of spies, assassins and mercenaries that eventually spanned the entire Mediterranean. For centuries, Ankh-sen-Sutekh continued on her mission to awaken her dark god.

Ankh-sen-Sutekh is a small woman with black hair and intense eyes. She tends to dress more or less conservatively, unless she is involved in her magic, in which case she dresses like an Egyptian priestess of old. Despite her small size, she radiates an almost palpable aura of power. Ankh-sen-Sutekh doesn't talk much, preferring to let her actions speak for her.

THE MOUSE, INFORMATION BROKER

9th generation, childe of Harold Tanner

Clan: Nosferatu

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Conniver

Embrace: 1875

Apparent Age: Early 40s

Aristotle Marmonides was born the son of a Greek professor of Antiquities at Oxford University. He went to this university himself and studied history. After graduating, he set up an antiquities shop in London, specializing in items from the Mediterranean region, as well as Egyptian artifacts. His skills at procuring these artifacts, along with his extensive network of contacts, earned him the attention of one Harold Tanner, a legend among the London Nosferatu. He Embraced the unfortunate Aristotle after corresponding with him briefly regarding an artifact of Tanner's interest, who later gave him a stipend as a mentor to see what the young man would do with the money. The shock of finding out what his mysterious mentor really was, the agony of the Nosferatu Embrace and the horrible realization of the truth about the World of Darkness made Aristotle, already a shy man, somewhat timid and nervous. This, coupled with his small size, earned him the nickname The Mouse among his fellow Nosferatu. When Aristotle finally managed to fight his way back into a semblance of status in the clan, he took this name as an honorific.

Upon his release, The Mouse set himself up in London, this time under an antiquities shop. Using his vast network, now improved by his sire and his contacts among the clan, he quickly expanded his "brokerage" to deal in more than just artifacts. Secrets became another commodity and it turned out that The Mouse had not only the sense of a shrewd businessman but also a talent for finding information and secrets about anyone and anything. His status within the clan grew and for the last 50 years, he has been one of the premier Kindred information brokers in Western Europe. It helps that The Mouse has an almost insatiable curiosity and a great mind for putting together facts from seemingly unrelated clues.

The Mouse is small, hunched and tries his best to look unassuming. His small eyes lie deep in their sockets, hidden behind a pair of glasses almost too thick to be believed, his chin juts out from his face like a pier and his hair is long, gray and tangled. The Mouse prefers to dress in relatively clean and comfortable clothing. When he leaves his haven, he usually wears a dirty, threadbare trench coat and a baseball cap.

KINDRED RELATIONS CHART

Much like a coterie chart, this table summarizes the relationships of the vampiric conspirators to one another.

This Character...	...Regarding this Character...	...Feels This Way.
Ambrogino	Natacha Percival Duality Rutor Andrew Themistocles Ankh-sen-Sutekh	Blinded by ambition. Insane fanatic. Useful but dangerous. Watch carefully! Rutor's problem. A fellow scholar. Untrustworthy mercenary.
Natacha	Ambrogino Percival Duality Rutor Andrew Themistocles Ankh-sen-Sutekh	Overconfident fool. Competent rival. Percival's flunky. Useful but untrustworthy. Better than Rutor. Ambrogino's clone. Mercenary.
Percival	Ambrogino Natacha Duality Rutor Andrew Themistocles Ankh-sen-Sutekh	Untrustworthy but useful. Callous powermonger. My only true ally. Dangerously competent. Honorless traitor. Far too callous. Uninteresting.

This Character...	...Regarding this Character...	...Feels This Way.
Duality	Ambrogino Natacha Percival Rutor Andrew Themistocles Ankh-sen-Sutekh	Capable but expendable. Camarilla enemy. A key to power. Surprisingly amiable. A typical Tremere. Weird, but learned. Worships wrong Antediluvian.
Rutor	Ambrogino Natacha Percival Duality Andrew Themistocles Ankh-sen-Sutekh	Use, then discard. The bitch with the money. Why I didn't join the Sabbat? A freak, but efficient. A wimp, but useful. Callous freak. Dangerous and untrustworthy.
Andrew	Ambrogino Natacha Percival Duality Rutor Themistocles Ankh-sen-Sutekh	The greatest threat. Traitor. Enemy. Insane Tzimisce. Bastard traitor. Useful but scary. Untrustworthy mercenary.
Themistocles	Ambrogino Natacha Percival Duality Rutor Andrew Ankh-sen-Sutekh	He must be stopped. Consumed by ambition. Intelligent, but misguided. Strangely fascinating. Selfish fool. Something of a mystery. Unfocused but skilled.
Ankh-sen-Sutekh	Ambrogino Natacha Percival Duality Rutor Andrew Themistocles	Eliminate him. The face of the enemy. Another enemy. Knows a little too much. Corruptible. Skilled but weak. Dangerous.

FRATER ANSON, "FRATER PATRIOT," DREAMSPEAKER WARRIOR-PRIEST

Background: For as long as he can remember, Frater Anson has been able to see ghosts. Poltergeist activity was a common thing around his boyhood home, and it was not uncommon for his parents to find him conversing with empty air. Luckily for him, his parents had a deep and abiding belief in the spirit world, passed down from their Haitian grandparents. They did not

have the Sight themselves, but they nurtured it in their son and helped him to learn to deal with it as best they could. Yet, they could not understand the torment that he faced. Always, there were spirits clustering about him, disturbing his sleep, begging for messages to be delivered and tasks to be completed, and they tormented him when he refused to comply with their wishes. His schoolwork suffered, and in the seventh grade, he was finally expelled from school.



He was desperate for help, and at last he told his parents about his problems. They were dismayed to learn how miserable he was, but being practical folk, they quickly set their minds to remedying the situation. The family could not afford private schools, and Frater's parents felt that sending him away would only worsen the problem. They decided that his mother would home-school the boy, and his grandmother would travel from Haiti to help him learn to deal with his gifts.

The plan was a success, and when he graduated from high school, he had a scholarship to study pre-law at a local university. His spirit visions were by no means abated, but his grandmother, a Dreamspeaker of the highest caliber, had taught him to control them and to use them to good ends. In general, he was happy and healthy, and his first few years of college went very smoothly. During the week, he attended classes and spent time with friends. He spent the weekends in study sessions with his grandmother, and he made it a point to still help the needy souls that came to him. He reserved Sundays for communication with the spirits, and he faithfully set out in his old beat-up car every Sunday on what he called "running errands for the dead."

One such Sunday, he found himself in a used bookstore, endeavoring to retrieve a beloved book for a young wraith who could not rest until it was safely stored away. At the back of the store, he found an ancient tome that positively glowed with power. He politely inquired about purchasing the book, only to find that it was not for sale. He was so instantly, irrationally obsessed with the idea of own-

ing this book that he did something quite out of character. To his shame, Frater returned that night with some of his ghostly friends to aid him, and he stole it.

Thus began a long period of research and training for Frater Anson. The book in question was one of the rare copies of the Sussex edition of *The Ritual of the Red Sign*. After reading and studying it in full, he knew he was onto something, and proceeded to research the existence and nature of vampires. His spirit contacts were of the most help in this endeavor, though their information was largely limited to the nature of the Giovanni and, in some instances, the Tremere. Unfortunately for him, news travels fast, and soon the Giovanni heard that a young upstart mage was asking questions about them, and he purportedly knew of a way to reverse the curse laid upon them. Quite naturally, they resolved to find him, question him, and dispose of him if necessary.

He learned quickly that secrecy was of utmost priority, and he dropped out of school immediately and left town so as to protect his family. He had a few minor run-ins with his vampiric hunters, but his sheer physical strength combined with his magical abilities helped him to triumph or escape. He became something of a crusader, looking for others who might be willing to join with him in his fight against the undead. At times, his spirit contacts led him to potential allies. Yet, his group of followers is primarily made up of converts whom he has saved from the clutches of a creature of the night. Since they quite literally owe him their lives, they are more than willing to follow him into the most desperate of situations.

Frater Anson is not convinced that the Ritual of the Red Sign would really undo the Curse of Caine, and he is not yet certain how he feels about the possibility. However, he does concede that the book certainly attracts vampiric attention, making his job as a hunter of vampires much easier, or so he justifies his continued possession of it. Yet, in reality, he has become quite obsessed by it, and would take drastic measures to maintain his hold on it.

Image: Frater Anson is of Haitian descent, and his features strongly reflect his ancestry. His skin is of the darkest ebony, his nose broad, and his teeth a startling white in the dark circle of his face. Yet, he rarely smiles, and in fact often wears an expression of such grim determination that it unnerves even the staunchest of hearts. This, combined with his enormous size, unevenly scarred skin, and a bald head covered with tribal tattoos, makes him an imposing

figure indeed. In an effort to put people at ease, he always speaks in soft tones, and the touch of his broad fingers is surprisingly gentle. Generally, he carries himself as a man who is afraid that he might break something, though when his fury is aroused, all pretense of gentleness is gone.

Roleplaying Hints: You don't have time to beat around the bush, since danger could very well be around the corner. In your world, time is a valuable thing to waste. Still, you were taught from a young age that politeness is important, and you're willing to observe the niceties if time allows. Frankly, this nomadic life is a little too lonely for your preference. You'd much rather be at home with your family, and anything that you can do to connect with someone else is a blessing. Unfortunately, this tome that you are carrying not only has sent you running for your life, but it also seems to attract even more spirits to you. Without your grandmother's help in controlling them, they've begun to take over your life again. As a result, you sometimes come across as manic and uncontrolled to others. However, those with the ability to see spirits will quickly come to understand that this is because you're listening to 20 different conversations at once.

Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Fanatic

Age: 27

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness (Low Umbra) 5, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3

Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 4, Melee 3, Stealth 2, Research 2

Knowledges: Cosmology 3, Investigation 1, Occult (vampires) 3

Arete: 4

Spheres: Life 3, Prime 1, Spirit 4

Backgrounds: Destiny 4, Arcane 2, Avatar 1, Resources 1

Willpower: 7

IRVING SLOAN, DREAMSPEAKER DEVOTEE

Background: Before he met Frater Anson, Irving's life was going nowhere fast. He slogged his miserable way through high school, mostly by keeping his head down and trying to avoid attention whenever possible. He was hopeless at sports, barely kept his grades above passing, and couldn't sing or play an instrument. At school, he was a non-entity, and for years to come, his former classmates would look at his picture in the yearbook and would be

unable to remember a single thing about him. All in all, he was completely forgettable.

Upon graduation, he had no desire to go to college, so he screwed around and played video games all night until his parents finally grew tired of supporting him and kicked him out of the house. He moved into the city with a few of his friends who worked as cashiers at a local grocery store, and they got him a job restocking the shelves at night. The pay was pretty good (for someone with no genuine ambitions), and there wasn't anything else he wanted to do, so he took it.

Late one night, as he took a smoke break in the employee parking lot, the thing attacked him. It looked like a creature from a bad sci-fi movie, and it smelled even worse. With a strength born of panic, he fought back. He kicked and flailed with no result, and the thing laughed at him mockingly until he jammed his lit cigarette into its eye. With a roar of pain, it released him and then pounced, sinking its teeth into his neck. All of the fight went out of him, and he certainly would have died if they hadn't shown up. They were dressed all in black with white collars, and for a moment, he thought he'd been saved by a troupe of priests. The thought made him laugh, and the vampire turned to look at him in surprise. The distraction was all they needed, and one of the figures threw himself at the creature and impaled it on a sharpened chair leg.

This is how Irving Sloan met Frater Anson. That first night, he was awed and frightened and not a little weak from loss of blood, so the group took him to a safe location to rest and recuperate (and



GAINING ACCESS TO THE RITUAL OF THE RED SIGN

Clearly, Frater Anson isn't going to simply hand over his copy of this invaluable ancient tome to anyone who comes knocking. Here are a few options for the Storyteller to consider when trying to make the book available to the players' characters:

Anyone with the ability to communicate with spirits could learn about the book and possibly gain possession of it. After all, this tome attracts spirits like honey attracts flies. While some of them are loyal to Frater Anson, others are not. This could afford opportunities for both the Giovanni and any mage skilled in the use of the Spirit sphere. They could either steal the book altogether or sneak a peak at it while Frater and his followers are out for their nightly vampire hunt (though if he has wind of a plot to steal the book, Frater will risk bringing it with him on the hunt).

Tradition mages have the greatest chance of gaining access to the book peacefully. Perhaps the characters have some special expertise or knowledge (like Alan Meroni) that will cause Frater to bring the book to them and solicit their advice. In fact, if they are desperate enough, they might pretend to have some special insight in an effort to get just a glimpse at the book. However, if the ruse is discovered, Frater and his followers will definitely not be happy about it.

Given Frater's negative view of vampires and his ability to detect the undead using the Life sphere, any non-Giovanni vampires will need to take the book by force. When the group is out vampire hunting, the tome is usually left in a secure location at their lair in case of capture or death. At these times, mortal guards watch over the lair, and a host of spirits looks over the book. If Frater is concerned that someone is trying to take the book, he'll carry it with him everywhere, trusting his own abilities and those of his spirit allies to keep it safe. Either of these situations offers an opportunity for skilled vampires to make their move.

Technocracy mages are also likely to take the book by force. Their skills with the Spirit sphere are generally limited. Given their abilities, their best chance is to detain the followers (perhaps with a roadblock or "routine search") and then deal with Frater on his own. Capturing Frater Anson along with the book would be a major benefit for the Technocrats, but he is well aware of this and may choose to commit suicide rather than allow himself to be taken.

make certain that he wasn't going to rise again as one of the undead). In a few days, when he'd recovered, the two sat for a long afternoon and talked. The conversation ended with Frater's invitation to join the group and Irving's acceptance. He moved out of his apartment, quit his job, and took up with his new friends. There were about two dozen or so of them in all; most of whom were in their 20s or early 30s, and most had been saved from a vampiric attack by Frater Anson. They watched each other's backs, and they hunted vampires.

Thus began Irving's period of study. Before he could go out with the group on their hunting expeditions, he needed to learn to shoot, to attack with a stake, to fight with his hands if need be. He learned to move through shadows, silent and unseen. He learned about the existence of vampires, their abilities and weaknesses. Strangely enough, he was somewhat of a natural at it all. He jokingly attributed it to his years of playing video games, but secretly he knew he'd found his vocation, and he dedicated himself to it and to Frater Anson with a single-minded devotion.

A few weeks before his first mission, Irving began to see things out of the corners of his eyes. He told no one, worried that it would jeopardize his status with the group, but he noticed Frater watching him at odd moments. On his first mission, the group was traveling down a darkened alleyway on their way back to the lair. There was no way Irving could have seen the creature waiting for them in the darkest corner, but a voice from nowhere whispered a warning in his ear, and he looked up to see Frater Anson watching him expectantly. He shouted a warning and attacked. After they dispatched the thing and returned to the lair, Frater took Irving on as his apprentice. Now, he's coming to learn that there's more to this vampire hunting thing than meets the eye, and it has only served to intensify his devotion.

Image: If Irving were to be described in one word, it would be "average." He is of average build, average height, and average appearance. He has average brown hair and average hazel eyes. His voice and demeanor are nice enough, but nothing exemplary. The good news is that he quite simply fades into the crowd. He's unobtrusive and unassuming, and he doesn't look in the least bit dangerous. Actually, he doesn't seem to be much of anything. When he leaves, it's difficult to remember much about him. Most people would doubt that he was there at all, except for the pile of cigarette butts he leaves behind him wherever he goes.

Roleplaying Hints: You're used to being ignored, and you don't even bother to compensate anymore. You just go along with your business because that's what's important. On occasion, you make jokes and pal around with your companions, and they always seem so surprised to find out that you have a personality. It would strike you as kind of funny if it weren't so sad. But even you have to admit that there isn't much that sets you apart from the crowd, except maybe for your tendency to chain-smoke.

The good news is that you've found something (and someone) that you really believe in, and you're actually good at it. Out of all of the members of the group, you're the most devoted to the cause, except maybe for Frater Anson himself. You'd do just about anything to ensure his safety and to rid the world of vampires forever, regardless of the costs. Although you haven't learned much yet about the tome that Frater carries around, you know it contains a magical weapon that could be used against the vampires, and you can't wait to see it hauled out.

Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Conformist

Age: 26

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Intuition 3

Skills: Firearms 1, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Computer 2, Cosmology 2, Enigmas 2, Investigation 2, Occult 2

Arete: 1

Spheres: Life 1, Prime 1, Spirit 1

Backgrounds: Arcane 5, Destiny 1, Mentor 3

Willpower: 5

MELISSA CHONG, AKASHIC SCHOLAR

Background: Melissa Chong grew up in a military household, and her American Marine father and Korean mother both held extremely high expectations for their only daughter. As a result, Melissa grew up with an overdeveloped work ethic. She played the violin, learned to speak three languages fluently, and earned a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. She topped off these accomplishments by graduating from high school at 16, and earning a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration by age 18, both while holding down a part-time job at her dojo.

Melissa's parents were understandably proud of these achievements, but what they didn't know is that her sensei, Master Hatsumi, spent most of her lessons training her in the finer points of Do and The Way. By the time she left for college, she not only had her black belt in Tae Kwon Do, but she was also taking her first steps into the world as a member of the Akashic Brotherhood.

Melissa enjoyed college because she has always had a true, deep-seated love for learning and exploration. She spent her time outside of the classroom in the library or the dojo where she taught martial arts for a little extra spending money. Yet, though her college years were an unequivocal success on paper, she had few friends and indeed little idea of how to communicate with people at all. All her life, she had been too busy to learn the finer points of making friends.

About a year ago, after she graduated, Melissa opened up her own dojo, where she teaches Tae Kwon Do, women's self defense, and kickboxing. Although she would greatly enjoy taking on an apprentice, Master Hatsumi (with whom she continues to communicate) has counseled her to wait and gain some worldly experience before acting as a beacon to another. Although she feels herself to be ready for such a task, she has contented herself with the idea that a worthy apprentice has not yet come along.

In the meantime, Melissa looked for a new pursuit to occupy her time. She decided that her level of magical knowledge and history was lacking and turned her mind to an exploration of magical tomes. Master Hatsumi was instrumental in helping her build a library that would make most Hermetics drool with envy. In the past few years, her intense, single-minded study of these books has made her somewhat of an expert on the nature of tomes and how to decipher them. Furthermore, she is always looking for new books to study. Among her most cherished tomes happens to be a copy of *Ex Libris Necro*, though she's never tried to complete the ritual contained within and has no desire to do so.

Image: Melissa Chong's Korean heritage shows in her slight build and almond eyes, but her pale skin and brown-black hair come directly from her father. Always proper, she prefers to wear skirts or dresses when not in the dojo, and regardless of the situation, she is impeccably groomed. Although she is (to put it simply) tiny, her economical way of moving, piercing eyes, and calculating expression make it clear

that she is no damsel in distress. Strangely enough, she seems to be alert even when sleeping.

Roleplaying Hints: First and foremost, you are a teacher and a scholar, and you never forget this. With strangers and acquaintances, you are polite to a fault but still hold yourself somewhat aloof. After all, it is not proper for a teacher to become friends with a student. You tend to steer the conversation toward business matters as a result, and rather than dance around a subject, you prefer to directly state what's on your mind. As a result, you can sometimes appear abrupt and hasty, though you see it as being honest and forthright.

Although you don't realize it, you're lonely. You don't realize what is missing from your life because you've never really had friends. Yet, if someone managed to break through your defense mechanisms, they would have a loyal (and capable!) friend for life. Anyone persistent enough to break through those barriers will earn your gratitude and unflagging devotion, not to mention one heck of an impressive bodyguard.

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Architect

Age: 20

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl (Tae Kwon Do) 4, Instruction 3, Intuition 1

Skills: Do 3, Etiquette 2, Leadership 1, Meditation 3, Melee 2, Research 4

Knowledges: Academics 4, Enigmas 2, Linguistics 3 (Korean, Japanese, Latin), Mage Lore 3

Arete: 2

Spheres: Correspondence 1, Mind 2

Backgrounds: Mentor 3, Resources 3, Sanctum 1

Willpower: 7

JEN SMITH, MARAUDER ACTRESS

Background: Jen Smith never intended to become an actress. Actually, she always had an affinity for animals, and during her younger years, she had every intention of becoming a veterinarian. She spent her summers grooming dogs, helping with her local 4-H club, and eventually earning a job at a local vet clinic. At her local county fair one year, Jen was approached by a young man in a dapper suit that was much too dressy for such a casual function. He was a talent scout for a modeling agency, and he offered her a job.



The next few years were a whirlwind of travel and cash, drugs and dieting. Her career took off quickly, so quickly in fact that her dreams of working with animals fell by the wayside, never to be picked up again. She had an apartment in Paris and one in New York. She rarely saw her family. Being young and far away from home, she was taken advantage of again and again. She finally hit rock bottom on her 25th birthday, when she overdosed and went into convulsions, falling face-first into her birthday cake.

She awoke in a hospital bed, in a detox ward for drug addicts. During her stay there, she learned to control her destructive impulses, decided to leave the modeling world behind, and joined the Cult of Ecstasy. Her mentor's name was Trey, and he too was a patient. He'd come there voluntarily, he told her, just to find people like her. During their time together, Trey and Jen talked a lot about drugs and altered states of consciousness, and she gradually learned how to draw the line between recreational use and addiction. Later, she would often say that her time with Trey did more to heal her than all of the therapy she'd ever had.

When she left, she turned her mind to acting as a new profession. She had plenty of friends in the business and enough money in the bank to jumpstart a new career. Soon she found herself working fairly steadily. No job was too big or too small for her, though she wisely refused to work in pornography. She had walk-on roles on sitcoms and cameos in films; she understudied the part of Ophelia in an off-Broadway production of *Hamlet*. She did made-for-TV

movies and acted in commercials, and all in all she was happy and in control. Although she still used drugs on occasion, often to help her with her magic, she never overdid it.

One year, she found herself acting in the chorus of a Greek tragedy. It wasn't the largest of parts, and she had a lot of time to spare while the lead actors worked on their lines, so she spent a lot of time in the theater office, reading old scripts and looking through scrapbooks. The history of the old theater fascinated her, and she quickly devoured their entire shelf of scripts and notes and old newspaper clippings. Finally, tucked into the back corner of the shelf, she found it: a short script, so old and decayed that the front cover had long since disintegrated. The play was called *The King in Yellow*, and it was a curious find since no one at the theater could remember having ever produced it. Still, it was the only thing left to read, and it piqued her curiosity, so she read it.

It slowly drove her mad.

No one noticed it at first. Sure, Jen was talking to thin air a lot, but she had lines to practice, and it wasn't such an uncommon behavior among a bunch of actors trying to learn a difficult play. And yes, it seemed like perhaps she wasn't sleeping well, but she had a reputation as a party animal, so that wasn't surprising, either. She wasn't eating much, but that was to be expected from a former model. By the time anyone noticed, it was too late for Jen. She had lost all contact with reality, and she was convinced that the Man in the Pallid Mask was coming for her, to reward her for her persistence and triumphs over adversity.

Eventually, someone got a message to Trey, and he came to visit his wayward protégé. What he found was alarming indeed, so alarming that he attempted to take the book from her. In a fit of rage and fury, Jen lashed out with all of the magic in her power, and Trey went careening through space and time, never to be seen again. Strangely enough, she felt no backlash from her action, though she rationalized this as a gift from the Man in the Pallid Mask.

Since then, Jen has traveled from place to place, or rather from theater to theater. She is searching for one particular theater where she will put on a full-scale production of *The King in Yellow*. Somehow, she knows that there is one theater in particular that the Man in the Pallid Mask wants her to use, and all she needs to do is find it.

Image: Jen is indeed an actress, but she is an actress whose beauty is beginning to show signs of

decay. Her long blonde hair isn't quite as lustrous as it once was, and streaks of gray now show at her temples. Her makeup is always impeccably applied, but it cannot hide the faint dark circles under her eyes and the first hints of wrinkles at the corners of her mouth. Although she selects her clothes with the finest taste and no expense spared, they never seem to fit perfectly, and she often looks uncomfortable in them. Still, despite all of this, she is still beautiful, and she carries herself with an air of importance and an aura of mystery. Jen never fails to turn heads. However, it's difficult to tell, just looking at her, if she ought to be admired or perhaps pitied.

Roleplaying Hints: Although you are completely insane, it's not entirely obvious at first. After all, you're an actress, and a little eccentricity isn't out of the ordinary in your profession. Still, you are single-minded to a fault, and you don't have much patience for anything that stands in the way of your goal. In fact, you'll lash out without a second thought if anyone gives you any trouble. The idea that the punishment should fit the crime doesn't mean much to you anymore; you have the same contempt for someone who accidentally trips you as you do for someone who shoots at you. However, anyone who shows a willingness to help you is immediately your best friend, and you're more than willing to share your copy of this wonderful play with anyone who would like to read it. Perhaps you'll find one of your major leads that way, or at least someone who is willing to act as your stage manager.

Despite your lack of sanity and conscience, you still maintain your love of animals. Indeed, they're the only things with the power to bring back your old self again. When interacting with animals, you can almost forget about the Man in the Pallid Mask and just be Jen. You'd never do anything to hurt an animal, and you'll quickly take action against anyone who does.

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Age: 29

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Expression 4, Intuition 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 1, Firearms 1, Leadership 1, Meditation 1, Research 1

Knowledges: Computer 1, Cosmology 1, Culture 2, Enigmas 2, Mage Lore 1, Occult 2

Arete: 3

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 2, Prime 2, Time 3

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Avatar 3, Influence 2, Resources 3

Willpower: 5

CECILIA LYONS, ORDER OF HERMES CONSPIRATOR

Background: Cecilia was a child of privilege, and when she graduated from high school, her parents decided that it was time to send their child abroad so that she might add some polish to her manners. She was more than happy to go. After years spent at a strict boarding school for girls, she was eager to strike out on her own and see the world. Unfortunately for her, this wasn't to be. Her parents traveled along with her, and they even went so far as to hire a chaperone to travel with her and keep her out of trouble. The companion, a reputable scholar from Oxford who was taking a year off to work on a manuscript, was content to take Cecilia on tours through Paris and Copenhagen and Prague, to teach her as much of the language and customs as he knew, and generally make the trip interesting while still keeping her parents happy.

Toward the end of the trip, Mr. Murray offered to take her on a special pilgrimage to a place called Maison Liban. He was very secretive about the trip, going so far as to make her promise not to speak of this place to anyone. The touch of intrigue delighted the girl, and she readily accepted. This is how Cecilia Lyons met Pierre de Calice. Their first encounter in the front hall lasted no more than five minutes, and in that time, Pierre saw the magical potential in the young, naïve girl, and Cecilia fell in love.

The experience rocked her, to say the least, and Mr. Murray was actually dismayed to find that her grand introduction to a Hermetic chantry left her depressed and withdrawn. A Hermetic mage himself, he'd brought her to the chantry as a prospective apprentice, though she knew nothing of those plans. He was rather dismayed to find that, despite the innate magical talents that he felt from her, she sensed nothing from the chantry or the mages that inhabited. She was too distracted by a sudden case of puppy love.

Still, he saw no harm in trying, and he suggested to Cecilia that she might stay at the chantry and study under the scholars there. She jumped at the chance, and between the two of them, they convinced her parents to allow her to spend some time

at Maison Liban under the care of the best private tutors the world had to offer.

Cecilia was delighted, and she applied herself to her lessons in the hope that she might impress Pierre and make him notice her. She found, to her surprise, that the lessons were not only interesting, but came quite naturally to her. This talent, combined with her unique dreamy idealism, all but insured that she stood out among the mages at the chantry, and Pierre couldn't help but take interest in her training. He attempted to reason with the girl and bring her back down to earth, but she responded with an unshakable devotion that was both annoying and endearing at the same time.

Unfortunately for Pierre, he couldn't seem to get Cecilia out of his mind, and she became somewhat of a distraction for him. He tried to rationalize the absurdity of it, telling himself (quite accurately) that she was too young for him, too idealistic, too foolish. Still, he found himself leaving his books to seek her out, and eventually broke an appointment with Philippe de Marseilles to spend time in her company. This, he realized, was veering into dangerous territory, and he resolved to send her away before the situation grew any worse.

His initial attempts to get rid of Cecilia only succeeded in hurting her feelings, and she shut herself in her room and refused to come out. Finally, Pierre himself went to see her, and against his better judgment, he confided his problems to her. Although Cecilia was sad to hear that he wished to send her away, she was ecstatic to learn that he was beginning to think about her. She agreed to leave at



once, though she secretly hoped that he might find her absence too much to bear and eventually ask her to return.

Since she didn't know where to go and had no desire to return to her parents, she asked Pierre if there was some chantry-related matter that she might attend to. Pierre sent her to look for a copy of *The Ritual of the Red Sign*, believing it to be a wild-goose chase that would keep her out of trouble while he attended to business. Little does he know that, underneath her air-headed demeanor, Cecilia has a keen mind and even keener intuition, and she just might manage to succeed where others have failed.

Image: Cecilia is certainly a pretty young thing, and on the surface, she looks like a college coed out to have a good time. She has long, curly hair, a complexion that always looks tanned, and a bright, guileless smile. These factors, combined with her preferred casual style of dress, often make her look younger than she is, and it isn't rare for her to be mistaken for a teenager. All in all, Cecilia's appearance and expression give no indication that she's really an intellectual at heart, and most people are quite surprised to find the cool-headed logician under that ditzy exterior. If the truth were told, Cecilia would probably say that she didn't know she had it in her, either.

Roleplaying Hints: You've grown up very quickly over the past few years, though on the outside you don't appear to have changed. Let everyone think

WHAT A COINCIDENCE!

It is quite a coincidence if all three books happen to be in the same place at the same time, isn't it? After all of these years, Frater Patriot, Melissa and Jen all bring their books to the sleepy little town that your chronicle happens to be set in, and everything goes to hell in a handbasket. Does it seem kind of far-fetched? Maybe.

But consider that most people in the know would agree that the signs all point to the same thing: The End is coming. Although mages and vampires have different names for it, it all amounts to the same thing. If all three books come together and the Ritual of the Red Sign is completed, is that another sign that the end is near, or is it a symbol of possible redemption and salvation? As we all know, coincidences rarely happen, and one possible theme for a chronicle is that the characters are pawns in a cosmic game of strategy. If this is true, which side will win?

that you're obsessed with silly, girlish things; you know you're a woman now, and you've got a purpose. You're determined to find that book and take it back to Pierre and prove to him that you're worthy of his love, and you'll stop at nothing to make that happen. If everyone underestimates you, then that means that they won't hesitate to tell you things, so you play into that image every chance you get.

Unfortunately, though you'd like to think of yourself as ruthless, there's still quite a lot of the dreamer in you yet. You're a little too quick to trust people, and you would consider telling people a little bit about the conspiracy if it would get you closer to a copy of the book. You would be an invaluable source of information, if only someone would see past your image to the keen mind working inside.

Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Age: 22

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Expression 2, Intuition 4, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Etiquette 1, Leadership 1, Research 2, Survival 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 1, Culture 3, Enigmas 3, Investigation 1, Linguistics 1 (Latin), Mage Lore 1, Occult 2, Science 1

Arete: 2

Spheres: Forces 2, Mind 1, Prime 2, Time 1

Backgrounds: Avatar 5, Destiny 2, Resources 3

Willpower: 6

SABINE MARCEAU, NEPHANDUS HUNTER

Background: When Sabine was seven, her parents were killed in an avalanche. Both avid hikers, they left their daughter in the care of her uncle while they scaled mountains and rappelled down sheer cliff faces. Their deaths came as a great shock to the family as well as to the mountain-climbing community, among which they were highly respected. The bodies, unfortunately, were never found. (Later, Sabine would wonder if perhaps her Nephandic relative had something to do with it, but she never asked.)

Luckily for Sabine, she was very close to her uncle, and he agreed to take her in rather than send her to an orphanage. She had always been close to Uncle Jean-Paul, since he never spoke down to her and would often tell the most interesting stories when he put her to bed. In fact, though she never



told anyone, he even sometimes did magic tricks for her. Sabine never could manage to figure out how he did them, though she studied sleight-of-hand for many years.

Sabine and her uncle lived together in a lodge, and they had many guests who came and went at odd hours. Some of them were very kind to Sabine but others frightened her with their strange ways and their burning eyes. Sometimes they would corner her and ask her strange questions, and she would answer as her uncle taught her until they were finally satisfied enough to go away. Eventually, one of the guests, a dwarf-like man with a perpetual sneer, pushed her too far, and she lashed out at him without knowing how she did it. The air around her cracked like a whip, and he fell to the ground, screaming for her blood. Surely, he would have done something terrible to her if her uncle hadn't intervened.

With the assistance of her uncle, Sabine learned the secrets of magic and of the Hermetic Order. She knew that these lessons were to be kept secret, but even more secret were the lessons that she had late at night, the lessons where she learned that the Hermetics were all wrong, the lessons where she learned the truth. Sometimes, she worried because the lessons taught her to think and do bad things, but she loved and trusted her uncle and so she did what she was told. Thus began her long spiral into the darkness.

She was a prodigy because her training began at such a young age; Sabine quickly rose in the ranks of both the Hermetic Order and the Nephandi. As her uncle's right hand assistant, she often acted on his

behalf and therefore on the behalf of the Red Temple as a whole. At first, she took charge of the day-to-day affairs around the Red Temple, arranging visits and communications by the Nephandi and the occasional Hermetic, only allowing the latter to see what she and her uncle wanted them to see. As she grew older and her power developed, Jean-Paul included her in some of his most secret plans, and thus she learned about the conspiracy and his designs for it.

The plot was simple. Jean-Paul was a member of the conspiracy and would gain power and information through his participation. Yet, he wanted the power of the Ritual of the Red Sign all to himself, rather than having to share it with a bunch of idiots and religious types who saw it as a tool of salvation rather than one of destruction. It was Jean-Paul's goal to claim the ritual for himself and his master, and he selected Sabine to make it happen. While he worked from the inside, she would work from the outside, in an effort to find the book and take it away before anyone else learned of it.

Thus began years of traveling for Sabine, where she learned the finer points of hiding her Nephandic nature and gaining information about a mysterious book from unwilling subjects. Jean-Paul fed her as much information as he could, but largely she was on her own. In her many years of travel, Sabine has grown to be quite self-reliant, and now that she has tracked the tome down to a group of vampire hunters in a small city, she is determined to retrieve it on her own and present it to their master herself. True, it is a betrayal of her uncle, but if he knew the dark designs in her heart, he would probably be just as proud as he would be angry.

Image: Sabine is in her mid-40s, yet still very attractive and physically fit for her age. At all times, she plays the part of the sophisticated French traveler, roaming the world in search of new sights and new experiences. To this end, she is poised, cultivated in manner, and impeccably groomed. Her clothing, manner, and appearance in general all seem to indicate success and good breeding. However, if necessary, Sabine can get her hands dirty and will do so in order to win the trust or admiration of her companions if she deems it necessary.

Roleplaying Hints: You're tired of living under your uncle's thumb, and you're determined to do some thinking for yourself. After all, you've spent years upon years doing what he wants you to, what he thinks is right. What have you gotten from all of this work? You have nothing to show for it, while Uncle Jean-Paul takes all the credit when reporting back to

IF JEAN-PAUL FINDS OUT...

If Jean-Paul Joreau learns of his niece's desire to steal the book for herself, it's unlikely that he'll stick his neck out or interfere. After all, if she manages to get herself killed, it will save him the effort of doing it himself. If she manages to get away with the book, he can take it from her at his leisure. He's chosen to keep tabs on her and mind his time. He is confident that, though she may be more socially adept than he, he will win any magical battle that they may have. Unfortunately for Sabine, he's probably right.

your masters. It's time to show them that, even with all of his magical abilities, his time is over. Now, it's your time.

But first, you need to get the book, and in order to do that, you must be very careful. For you, it is a struggle between playing the part of a self-assured Hermetic while still being accessible. Your goal is to make the book come to you, and then quietly disappear with it before anyone in the conspiracy even knows you've absconded with it. To this end, you are determined to make yourself as useful as possible to any and all mages you run into. You're certain that one of them can give you the lead you desire. If that doesn't work, well, the man who has that book is reportedly a vampire hunter. If you need to find bait for your trap, you will.

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Caregiver

Age: 43

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Expression 3, Instruction 1, Intuition 1, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Leadership 1

Knowledges: Cosmology 1, Culture 2, Enigmas 2, Investigation 3, Mage Lore 3, Vampire Lore 2, Occult 3

Arete: 3

Spheres: Entropy 3, Forces 3, Mind 2, Prime 2

Backgrounds: Mentor 5, Resources 3

Willpower: 7

**WILLIAM REVERE, NEW WORLD ORDER
DOUBLE AGENT**

Background: William has always been a scientist at heart. While the other kids in the

neighborhood were playing stickball and tag, William was building a telescope or designing a tree house. A pale, sickly child devoted to science and learning, William never quite fit in with the other kids, and they teased him for it. Other children might have become bitter at the constant taunts and shoves in the hallways at school, but not William. He simply accepted it as the price he paid for what he knew to be his burgeoning genius.

High school and college were largely the same, with his days and nights filled with questions of scientific theory and laboratory practice, but in college he was pleased to find himself among others who shared his fascination with how things worked. With regard to science, William was always a jack-of-all-trades, never developing an interest in one particular field or another, but instead fascinated with the process of asking and answering questions and finding a concrete solution to a problem.

His senior year, William was invited to present his final paper about the development and potential applications of the scientific process to all aspects of civilization. The presentation was clearly a success, for it attracted a wealth of job offers from various think tanks, as well as an offer from the Technocracy. The New World Order slowly took him under its wing, offering him more and more insight into the nature of existence as his clearance level slowly rose. William thrived under the circumstances, impressing his superiors with his ability to deduce what might be happening in the higher levels of control based on what was happening in his own office.



Above all, William was known for having an open mind, secure in his belief that a scientific theory could be found to explain any phenomena if only one looked hard enough for it. With this philosophy in mind, he was assigned to the Red Five project under the direction of Lieutenant Geary Mandel. He jumped into his studies with an open and eager mind, but what he found wasn't entirely what he expected. He went into the project expecting to find a scientific rationale for so-called "psychic" abilities, but the creatures they encountered through the project could not be explained away by science, no matter how hard he tried.

His disillusionment was written so clearly on his face that anyone could read it, and Lieutenant Mandel took a chance on William as a result, letting him in on the secret experiments that were being conducted at a handful of obscure Red Five camps. If William would consent to take charge of the experimental team at one of the camps, he might find the answers he wanted. William knew that if his participation was ever made public, his life would likely be forfeited, but once again he accepted the risk. After all, it was the price he paid for his science.

William spent many years at the Red Five facility, offering captured Tradition mages freedom in exchange for their willing participation in some of his research studies. He learned much about the mechanics of magic and is now one of the foremost experts on the subject. Furthermore, he had the opportunity to examine other categories of reality deviants, including a few vampires and the occasional werewolf. He was less compassionate with these creatures, so determined was he to learn more about the diseases they carried. He shared with Mandel the belief that vampirism is a disease, and he is determined to find a cure for it before the end.

William and Mandel have become rather close confidants in their years together, and Mandel has told William about the conspiracy and their efforts to cure vampirism. Given that William has the more extensive scientific background in the physiology of vampires and the nature of magic out of the pair of them, they both agreed that he would be an asset to anyone attempting to enact the ritual, or as they would prefer to call it, "the treatment." To this end, Mandel pulled a few strings and had William reassigned to the city where the book containing the ritual was rumored to be found. William's task is to act as a consultant to the conspiracy once its members have retrieved the book, all while keeping the local Technocrats from learning of his secret, and Mandel's.

Image: William is the stereotypical scientist, a balding gent in his mid-50s who never seems to take

much time with his appearance. What little hair he has is always mussed, largely due to his habit of running his fingers through it when he's deep in thought. He often wears his labcoat out in public, mostly because he forgets to take it off when he leaves the lab. Whatever he's wearing, it is frequently wrinkled and often spotted with crumbs from his latest sandwich or stains from his most recent cup of coffee. As a result of his unkempt appearance, most people write him off as incompetent. However, William often surprises them with his keen powers of observation and insight. Regardless of his appearance, when he opens his mouth, it is clear that he's no dummy.

Roleplaying Hints: For a Technocrat, you're remarkably tolerant. This stems from your belief that all things can be explained through science. This belief helps you to feel secure regardless of the situation or company. Although you certainly aren't chummy with Tradition mages, you're interested in them on a clinical level, and you realize that it's in your best interest to get along with them. You're willing to set up a mutually beneficial arrangement to get what you need.

Unfortunately, when it comes to dealing direct with vampires, you're less adept at hiding your true feelings. You firmly believe that vampirism is a disease, and patients who don't want to take their medicine are not tolerated in your lab. You can't help but talk down to them, and it often creates a little too much tension for others to handle. As a result, you tend to limit yourself to working with other mages. However, you'll trade information with anyone if the exchange is worthwhile. It's a sacrifice you're willing to make.

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Director

Age: 56

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Instruction 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Firearms 2, Leadership 3, Research 4, Technology 3

Knowledges: Computer 2, Enigmas 3, Investigation 2, Mage Lore 3, Occult 2, Science 5

Arete: 3

Spheres: Life 3, Matter 2, Mind 3, Prime 1

Backgrounds: Mentor 3, Resources 3

Willpower: 8

GILLIAN CARTER, NEW WORLD ORDER
TELECOMMUNICATIONS EXPERT

Background: Gillian's life before college wasn't particularly interesting or impressive. She was a good student from a good family who got passably good grades in school. She participated in sports and cheerleading, though she never excelled at any of them. Her early years weren't much to talk about. She was popular and successful enough and that was what mattered.

Gillian had always had a dream of being a newscaster on television, but when she graduated high school, she realistically evaluated her chances. She went to a good school, but not one of the best. Her grades were good, but not stellar. She wasn't bad looking, but she was no beauty. All in all, she might be able to make her dream happen, but she concluded that she'd rather excel at a different field than be mediocre as a newscaster. So she decided that if she didn't have a chance in front of the camera, she'd run the scenes behind the camera. She went to a broadcasting school and finally found something she could sink her teeth into. She learned the ins and outs of camera work, with all of the details about sound and lighting and wiring. By the time she graduated (in the top five percent of her class), she was an expert at the technological art of broadcasting and telecommunications.

What she didn't know is that the New World Order kept tabs on all of the broadcasting schools, often approaching one or two students to recruit for their technological expertise. That year, she was one of two students to be selected, and she felt so flattered by the attention that she found herself saying



yes without quite realizing what she'd gotten herself into. Still, she had to admit that the work she was doing was interesting. Instead of monitoring a studio all day, she was setting up new telecommunications networks nearly every day. Sometimes, she'd work within a particular location, and other times she'd set up mobile units capable of following a target and recording their every move. She never knew much about the targets they chose or why they were chosen, but that wasn't her place anyway.

Still, being the low girl on the totem pole sometimes has its negatives. Whenever a senior officer visited their operations, she was the one who was always designated to act as the gofer and babysitter, chauffeuring them around and making sure they got the information and contacts they needed. Although she resented the time away from her work, she did her duty and kept her mouth shut. Unfortunately, this most recent visitor, a middle-aged scientist named William Revere, has really overstayed his welcome, and Gillian is really tired of driving him around all the time.

Image: Gillian is the young, earnest newcomer who is very eager to prove herself. She always appears bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at least five minutes before she's supposed to, with her simple business suit, polished briefcase, and van full of telecommunications gadgets all organized into bins that are labeled in neat block letters. She's made every effort to appear older and more responsible by cutting her hair into a short, neat bob, wearing tasteful makeup and refined business suits. Still, she really just looks like a kid wearing mom's clothes for dress up. She looks like she'd be more at home in jeans and a T-shirt.

Roleplaying Hints: You enjoy your job, and you're very proud of your excellent performance. In fact, you never pass up a chance to show off your work. Bragging isn't your forte, but you just get so excited when you solve a new problem that you want to share your excitement with others. You know that your coworkers often laugh at you, and you'd like to take every opportunity to prove to them that you're not a kid and you're not to be laughed at. You know they respect you, but you don't think they respect you enough.

You're not all that happy about being assigned to help William during his research here. Frankly, you don't understand what he's doing here anyway, since he mostly seems to sit around and discuss theory all day, or has you drive him around to meet with random people, or disappears for all hours taking

BRINGING IN THE BIG GUYS

You may notice that we've refrained from providing statistics for the major players in the conspiracy. While the Big Five (Ambrogino Giovanni, Jean-Paul Joreau, Pierre de Calice, Dr. Emma Dodd, and Geary Mandel) are all deeply involved in the conspiracy, perhaps more so than anyone else in the World of Darkness, we've chosen to provide full statistics for other characters. But why?

The first reason is fairly simple. It's no fun to play in a chronicle where the Storyteller characters do everything and get all the glory. These five characters are very powerful individuals, and if they show up, relatively young or inexperienced characters will likely be stuck bringing them coffee (or caffeinated mortals) while they study the tomes. The point of this book is to give you ideas of how your players could become involved in such an earth-shaking event, and we've tried to give you Storyteller characters that will let your players become as involved as they want to be.

Still, isn't it logical that the big guys would show up as soon as one of the tomes was found? Not necessarily. Remember that, even though these are

central characters and the books are invaluable resources, these five characters can't be everywhere at once. If they tracked down every rumored appearance of a tome, they'd never spend any time actually getting anything done. Furthermore, it's only logical to assume that these five characters have their fingers in plenty of plots and intrigues. Powerful people have lots of things to do, and lots of enemies that they need to shield against. That's why they need to delegate authority.

Still, it's possible that Cecilia might call on Pierre de Calice, or that William Revere might drop a line to his friend Mandel to tell him what's happening. If one of the players' characters or Storyteller characters decided to call on one of the Big Five, they might decide it's worth their while to make an appearance. Still, it would take them a while to travel to your city, particularly if they're Kindred and can travel only by night. You're more than welcome to bring these characters into your chronicle if it suits your purposes. The background information provided in the previous chapters should be enough to help you figure out what makes the Big Five tick, even though we haven't provided a full set of statistics.

long walks around the city. He says it helps him think; you're just relieved he hasn't asked you to go with him. Still, you're loyal to the Technocracy without quite understanding what that means, and if you somehow learned that he was doing something he shouldn't, you wouldn't hesitate to turn him in... particularly if that means getting him out of your hair so you can get back to your job.

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Conformist

Age: 23

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Expression 2, Intuition 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 1, Research 1, Stealth 1, Technology 4

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 3, Enigmas 2, Investigation 3

Arete: 2

Spheres: Correspondence 1, Forces 2, Mind 2, Prime 1

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Resources 2

Willpower: 6





CHAPTER FIVE: STORYTELLING

CHANGING THE WORLD

APOCALYPSE PLOTS

The *Red Sign* chronicle depends on one of the most dangerous story elements possible in the World of Darkness, an event that brings the world closer to its own destruction — and why not? Many Storytellers ambitiously start long-term chronicles, but few bring them to conclusion.

In most games, the characters take their time exploring a world that seems to grow a little bit larger in each story, one where the amount of unfathomed supernatural activity seems limitless. That means they have a habit of wanting to check in on *one more* contact they haven't talked to for a while, suggesting a trip back to that city they left six months ago, or finding yet another nefarious con-

spiracy that suggests another subplot. In a book like this, however, the resolution of the story brings us a little bit closer to the end, not just of the chronicle, but the end of *everything*.

This type of plot usually leads up to a Big Event, usually one with far-reaching complications. It may be the culmination of a much larger plot, or it may be the resolution of a legend or prophecy. Extremists use words like “destiny” and “fate” at these times. More free-willed individuals (like the players' characters) may rush to stop the event from happening, or they may be powerless to stop it — in which case, they must deal with the consequences.

Although students of the occult may want to analyze these occurrences in terms of what they know, the event is even more terrifying when its cause or effect is unknown. That same sense of fear can motivate your players' roleplaying as well. Just when they think we understand the workings of the supernatural world, just when we've adjusted to an

existence we once thought of as horrific, a shocking occurrence forces us to examine the world all over again. Consider that some of your players may have become rather blasé about their characters feeding off blood by now — or perhaps have had one firefight too many with secret agents in black suits — and that may not be a bad thing, either.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED

For the sake of this chapter, we need a term to define this big event. **Vampire** players may want some reference to Gehenna here, while **Mage** players could try to work in Ascension. To find some neutral ground, a better term might be “apocalypse plot.” By examining the way they work in general, you (as the Storyteller) will probably get more ideas about how to run more specific apocalyptic events, like the one defined **The Red Sign**. Such events have occurred in the World of Darkness before, of course, and they will happen again.

For instance, an excellent example of an apocalypse plot comes from a **Werewolf** book called **Rage Across the Heavens**. Scholars of the Garou know that when two werewolves mate, their offspring is sterile, cursed with original sin for the forbidden union between their parents — the proper term for that child is “metis.” Yet on the same night that a new star appeared in the Umbral heavens, two metis did indeed bear a child, fulfilling a prophecy that the offspring would play a major role in the coming Apocalypse. The birth of that child is an “apocalypse” of sorts, since it confirms that in the Final Nights, the unthinkable may become real.

That book furthered its apocalypse plot by setting up many different factions to fight each other over the child, presumably with the characters caught in the middle. That’s one way to incorporate the information in this book, too. Although one or two massive conspiracies seem to have a huge head-start in learning the Ritual of the Red Sign, many smaller groups contest with them, either directly or indirectly. In both stories, the players have a chance to decide whether to change sides or make a stand against everyone. If they actually find a true copy of the book — and not some vitiated, derivative adaptation that doesn’t actually contain the ritual — they may need to defend themselves against these factions, or choose one to join.

If you’ve been reading **Vampire** faithfully, you’ve seen other apocalypse plots unfold. In **Time of Thin Blood**, the existence of 14th- and 15th-generation vampires — the last generations of Caine’s

childer — has been confirmed. It is unthinkable that Cainite blood should be so diluted that these childer cannot Embrace other vampires in turn; because that is “impossible,” it becomes less remarkable that these thin-blooded vampires have powers that have never been seen before. Some are able to walk in daylight for brief periods of time, consume food, or even have visions of the horrors that await us in the Final Nights.

The dominant approach in that book was to personalize the horror involved, showing a larger scope of events throughout encounters with specific thin-blooded vampires. In the same way, the big turning point in this story is the creation of the first Redeemed. The characters might be the first individual she approaches, or they may be contracted to hunt her down. Indeed, the Redeemed may actually come from their own coterie. Whichever option you pursue, encountering this paragon individually takes the story away from philosophical abstractions and makes it personal.

One of the most grandiose Gehenna plots was the awakening of the Ravnos Antediluvian. If you’ve used that plot element, it’s fairly likely that its central events occurred in the background of your chronicle. In India, the first of the Antediluvians returned from millennia of torpor. Countless Ravnos, answering the call of their mad progenitor, turned on each other in a frenzy of destruction. Hundreds, if not thousands, died, especially after the “technocratic” carpet bombing began. (You’ll notice that the word “Technocracy” never appears in **Time of Thin Blood**. This is to keep the setting events as focused on **Vampire** as possible, though players of other games are free to use the capital-T Technocracy as movers and shakers in that story arc.)

In that book, the apocalypse plot was more of a backstory that occurred behind the scenes, leaving the Storyteller to figure out how to link it into the ongoing chronicle. Granted, the book you’re holding now has more events and characters than you’d choose to use at any one time — which means you’ll need to decide how many of the events described in this book are taking place in the background. Since there isn’t one overarching, official, canonical series of events taking place (a concept we’ll address a little later on), you don’t need to use all of it. Even when you play on a cosmic scale, don’t feel like you need to describe *everything* going on. A little bit of plot occurring in the background is a good thing... so long as the characters can interact with the story in some way.

Mage players have gotten a taste of Ascension in the revised edition of *Mage and Manifesto: Transmissions from the Rogue Council*. On a cosmic scale, the nature of the spirit world is shifting, and it doesn't work in the characters' favor. Places mages could reach before are now gone, or at least fading away. On a more personal scale, that means mages can't cross between worlds with the ease they used to enjoy years ago. *Manifesto* offered theories (some would say outright evidence) of precisely why the Gauntlet now has teeth, foreshadowing cosmic forces that may be moving into the physical world as well.

In many stories players have told since the release of those books, powerful Tradition mages had ideas and theories about why these events occurred. It is an inevitable topic of discussion in any mage cabal, since everyone wants to find the reasons and how it will affect them here and now. Some of your more political players may be familiar with the concept of thinking globally and acting locally. The motto here is, in the context of the story, is "think cosmically, but show it personally." As rumors of the Red Sign spread, the players may be tempted to interview many elders (vampiric, magical or otherwise) about their opinions and predictions. No matter what broad, sweeping changes may be taking place with reality, the story is more accessible if you demonstrate those broad concepts in a way that characters can interact with them.

The Red Sign is the next book in this series. According to early legends, it is impossible for a vampire to escape the Curse of Caine. Other sources claim that such an event is inevitable, but usually posit a prophecy that it heralds the end of the world. When the impossible becomes real, it is a sign that reality is unraveling, and even more horrible events — such as the return of the Antediluvians to the world — might be equally possible.

INVESTING IN THE GAME

By running this type of story, you're still making an investment in a long-term chronicle. An apocalypse plot isn't the type of tale you can tell in a few evenings, unlike the first few stories you may have told for *Vampire* or *Mage*. Telling the story of a vampire's Embrace or mage's Awakening must now seem relatively simple, if you've been playing these games for years. If you're going to show the world going to hell, you might as well take your time.

The players are making an investment as well, however. They're not just investing their time; they have an emotional investment in the story as a

whole, perhaps becoming rather attached to their characters. The story loses its drama if you merely tell them over and over that the world is ending... occasionally, you must show them. Maybe you've already had to deal with the balancing act that results. Push events too far, and the protagonists are convinced that all is hopeless. They're powerless to seize control of their own fate. How much worse can things get?

If you never push at all, however (that is, push the world a little closer to the brink of oblivion), the characters may actually become comfortable with their surroundings. Mages stay secluded in chantries, keeping their immediate neighborhood free of supernatural incursions. Vampires develop networks of powerful contacts and influence, content to regard feeding on blood as a mere inconvenience. No matter how often others try to draw them into investigating the unknown, they may become apathetic — unless they have a way to get involved in the world in a profound and significant way.

Whether you're thinking of a Gehenna or Ascension, a good apocalypse plot is one that is designed with the players' character in mind. More weird shit will happen in the shadows that they can ever fully investigate, but you must occasionally give them a way to interact with the most important of these events. Don't just have an Antediluvian rise from the Earth... let the characters follow a trail of clues that will lead them closer to the fallout of that event. One of the most beautiful moments in a well-done apocalypse plot is when you can see the players mentally put the last piece of the puzzle in place and realize what it means.

CHRONICLE STRUCTURE

When leading into the stories (and fragments of stories) presented in this book, the Storyteller really has three major choices of how to approach a Red Sign chronicle. Each presents its own particular type of chronicle. We'll call the three variants:

- Unmasking the Conspiracy
- Achieving the Impossible, and
- Reacting to the Unthinkable

The first type of chronicle begins before the Ritual of the Red Sign is performed successfully. It presumes the ritual is going to be performed by someone other than the players' characters. The coterie begins by investigating one aspect of a

"crimson conspiracy," or perhaps they uncover a rumor of a tome's existence. At some point, someone (hopefully one of the characters) realizes what the conspiracy hopes to achieve. They must then decide whether to stop it, perhaps based on the opinions of their elders). Either way, they'll have an advantage if they can figure out the individuals behind this cabal, and unmask the conspiracy.

The second type of chronicle sets out from the start to offer the players' characters a firsthand chance to make sure the ritual succeeds. They might try to perform the ritual themselves (if they're mages), present someone in their coterie as an initiate for the ritual (if they're vampires), or help someone who wants to be the ritual's initiate (regardless of what they are). Other conspiracies may be trying to achieve the same goal or desperately fighting to stop them. Potential allies, rivals, and enemies make the story more complex, frustrating the characters' efforts to achieve the impossible.

The third type of chronicle assumes that the Ritual of the Red Sign has already been performed (or that it's inevitable, and the characters can only react to it). Most of the events in this book are set before the ritual takes place, but it is possible to run a story that actually begins with the creation of the Redeemed. The characters learn, either through firsthand testimony or the revelations of elders and contacts, that a vampire has become human. If you've spent time building an elaborate background for your chronicle, it's going to set other forces in motion. Before long, allies will rally around him, enemies will try to destroy him, and other initiates will try to follow him. Whatever city he is in, vampires and mages are drawn to him — and the characters must decide how to react to the unthinkable.

BEFORE THE RITUAL

The temporal part of the story — whether the chronicle begins before or after the event — is the most important decision you'll make. Most of this book assumes the ritual hasn't been performed yet, but beginning the story after it has succeeded (for better or worse) is another option, one that raises many more issues. Until the end of this chapter, we'll focus mainly on the first two options. The last one is worthy of a chronicle all its own; you might even run it as a sequel to this one.

SETTING UP THE INTRODUCTION

Whether your characters want the ritual to succeed or fail is, of course, up to the players. The most



important consideration is which approach you want them to take, at least at the beginning. Setting the characters on a course of action can give your characters a direction to advance the story. A coterie of neonates might have a reason to help a humane Salubri become mortal, or a chantry of Tremere might be out to destroy her and everyone helping her. An amalgam of rogue Technocrats might like the idea of the Masquerade being shattered when the Red Sign ritual succeeds, or a Euthanatos mentor might feel it would destroy the circle of life and death and possibly all Creation. Your players may surprise you, however, by switching sides. They may start out to destroy a cult of deviant visionaries in the beginning and then find reasons to join them in the end. The more morally ambiguous you make the ritual, the richer your story will become.

ASSEMBLING YOUR CAST

By now, you've seen plenty of Kindred, Cainites, Traditionalists, technocrats, conspiracies, cabals, and cults — no doubt you've been passing judgment on which you like and which you don't care for. It's a box of interchangeable puzzle pieces; you must decide which pieces to use and how you want to fit them together. More precisely, you're going to take a handful of these pieces and give them to the players, one by one. They'll have to figure out how they're put together until they realize the big picture.

STORY SEED: REDLIGHT SURVEILLANCE

For any chronicle with vampiric activity, particularly one in which individuals are searching for tomes like the Red Sign, NWO surveillance should begin as a fairly subtle influence on the story. It may begin with the characters or other individuals feeling as though they are being watched and then finding evidence of surveillance devices nearby. Yet because there's a bit of Enlightened procedure involved, there's no guarantee that someone without Arete can figure out what the high-tech devices used by agents do, or where their transmissions lead. Components of (alleged) cameras and recording devices may slag themselves when they're tampered with, or a device's purpose may be unfathomable after it's taken apart. Whatever method you choose, the Technocracy (like stories about it) thrives on paranoia. For groups that like intrigue and conspiracy, consider using these techniques to add a little paranoia.

STORY SEED: FIREFIGHT

The Templars have all the stealth training one would expect from a special operations group, along with Mind magic and a little bit of Entropy to help them. While magical misdirection and a smoke grenade or flash-bang can provide an excellent distraction to any operation, when guns go off and weapon fire heats up, the Templars are rather unsubtle about announcing their presence. This doesn't mean they patrol streets in camouflage while carrying M16s (not usually, at any rate), but when Frater Patriot's squad moves to take up a position and seize an objective, they don't do it halfway. For groups that like a little bit of combat, consider activating the story arc with a Templar firefight.

If you're exceptionally prepared, you could just shake up the box and throw all the pieces down on the floor. It's the hardest variant of the story to adjudicate sensibly, but it gives the characters complete freedom. They'll need to take copious notes about all the individuals they meet, but don't introduce them all too soon! A more complex story isn't necessarily a better one; instead, this approach involves adding more detail to the plot slowly and strategically.

Your players will no doubt discuss (in character or out of character) whether or not the ritual is a good thing. Listen to them. Let them make up their own opinions. If they start having doubts about stopping the ritual, introduce one or two characters who may help them in slowing it down. If they decide someone would make a particularly deserving initiate, give them leads on resources that will help them fulfill the ritual on their own.

DURING THE INVESTIGATION

For all the complexity in this book, there is one plot you can always fall back on: Find the tome. The more complex a story is, the more critical it is that you have a fall-back position. You'll need it in case you've thrown out too many supporting characters, or the characters' motivations have become too ambiguous, or the players are simply overwhelmed and confused.

THE MCGUFFIN

In one case, the driving plot device is known as a McGuffin. It's like the Maltese Falcon: Everyone wants it and everyone is trying to get it. Who wants it, why they want it, what they'll do together — these

facts all add texture to the story, but ultimately, the most important fact at any given time is who's studying that book. The next critical bit of information is what they'll do with it, which should define for the players whether they're going to side with that group, defy it or strike out on their own.

At the start of the story, the question of who has the book is rather simple. You have several choices of which character to drop hints about, depending on what motivates your group: The Gangrel archaeologist, the Templars, Simon Keyes, and Alan Meroni are all good examples. Here are four illustrations of how to do this for various groups:

Camarilla Vampires: The prince of the city has called a blood hunt against the Gangrel archaeologist, with a brief explanation that he's selling a rare item without introducing himself to the prince first. This is a complete lie, however, since the prince wants to take the book himself and make sure its former owner is dead.

Tradition Mages: The characters are invited to visit a chantry. Moments before they arrive inside, flashes of semi-automatic weapon fire are visible in the building's windows. Someone in the chantry was trying to acquire a rare book, and vastly underestimated the fanaticism of the people selling it. One of the survivors of the fight, hiding nearby, later describes it as a book of "vampiric lore." The buyer had an unusual interest in vampires, acting almost as though his own life depended on it.

Technocracy Mages: A rogue technocrat has been observing a dangerous population of vampires. Why he's doing this is a mystery, but as the story begins, his agents kill a lone vampire. Basic investigation reveals that the victim was a bookseller, and he was on his way to a covert meeting with a potential buyer. The subject of the book was vampirism... but why is the technocracy pursuing this agenda? The truth is out there.

Sabbat Vampires: The Sword of Caine is set to invade a city and it's looking for weaknesses before its members attack. The characters' pack has been enlisted as a group of advance scouts who must explore the city. They may be spies pretending to be Camarilla vampires or they may rely on stealth (their choice). While in the city's Barrens, they discover that the city's scourge has been abducting lone Caitiff, Gangrel and other wanderers from the streets, and one particularly onerous Gangrel escaped but left behind this weird book....

Start it out simple, then consider this: At the beginning of the story, the book contains the raw information needed to attempt the ritual. Within a matter of weeks, Alan Meroni will possess that information. At that point, the story could shift to a search for that Celestial Chorister (see the "Manhunt" sidebar).

STORY SEED: MANHUNT

Alan Meroni can be far more active in a story than a mere book passed from one faction to the next. Regardless of which tomes are passed around, they all need to be translated and interpreted. Meroni already has a head start. Forming subplots around the McGuffin part of this plot (find the tomes!) is fairly easy, but hunting Meroni is far more complicated. The Storyteller should ask himself each week (without telling anyone else) whom Meroni is going to try to recruit next. The next question, then, is who is tracking that character down?

Like any human being, Meroni leaves a trail of data behind him when he travels, so finding him may simply be a matter of interviewing witnesses ("have you seen this man lately?"), checking itineraries, and so on. Mages have plenty of Effects to aid them in this research, from Virtual Adept data searches to ephemeral spirits that can track individuals to outright mind manipulation of people who may have seen him. Vampires not only have Disciplines for observing others undisturbed, reading minds and conditioning them, but far-reaching Influences that can make any manhunt for the Chorister more interesting. Shutting down an airport, sending in police to an area where he may be hiding, tracing his financial activity through banks and ATMs are all typical strategies. With enough Influence, all things are possible.

Meroni, on the other hand, fully believes that God is on his side. A little prayer can work wonders, especially when coincidental magic is involved. Once players learn the name of the first mage to "translate" the tome, they may throw resources into finding him. This can lead to a type of plot called a "frustration game," in which the characters chase someone down and he repeatedly escapes. If the early part of your story bogs down in a round of "Who has the tomes?" news of a sighting of the Chorister can jumpstart it again.

Each person who studies that book for a sufficient period of time is then another resource for completing the ritual. Researching that person reveals the character's motives for wanting the book, which leads back to the motivation of whether to work with her or stop her. The story becomes far more interesting if you leak a little bit of knowledge at a time that hints at what the book can do.

As part of the characters' research, you may want to refer to the summaries we've provided about transformations, Golconda, apotheosis and diablerie, since some will speculate that those goals are motivators. You've no doubt noticed that there are many, lesser works derived from the original *Red Sign* written in the 15th century. Tracking them down (perhaps using Investigation if the characters are stuck) gives hints about the secrets held in the original book. Eventually, the characters should learn the original book's real potential. This, of course, may happen right before the ritual is attempted or right after.

Before long, the players may decide that the book (that is, the knowledge within it) should be destroyed so that no one else learns the ritual, or they may want to seize it so nobody else claims it. If a patron sent them out to retrieve the book, they may want it so that no one else can use it. The book is just a book, of course; the important thing is the knowledge inside it. It's like a virus. The more people it passes through (who have time to study it), the more it "infects" the chronicle with potential.

This approach to the story can be as complex as you want to make it. The book may pass through many hands quickly or it may stay in hiding for a long time while the characters do research. You may introduce another major tome to the plot, like *The Yellow Sign* or *Ex Libris Necro*, then let some of the characters speculate about why that book is related to this one. Or you may just let the players study *The Red Sign* for a time, and let them fend off other groups that are after this knowledge. At the start of this story, they'll be asking where the McGuffin is, but as the story expands, they'll have a more complex story, asking who knows what, and what they want to do. This leads to two other types of stories.

THE COTERIE PLOT

To be perfectly honest, there are more characters in this book than you will probably want to use in your story. (That has something to do with our fondness for free will, along with a bit of trust that you'll want to customize the story for your players). The more characters you add, of course, the more

confusing the plot will be. A different approach to the story then, or a supplement to the last one, is unraveling a vast conspiracy.

Think back to the first chapter of this book: Three vampires have organized a conspiracy to seek out the Ritual of the Red Sign. All of their associates are linked into one big coterie chart (or several small ones, depending on how you choose to break it up). A group of characters could find a lead pointing to any one character in that chart, and as long as they have a reason to investigate, they'll realize the connection that character has to others on that chart.

For vampires, the first lead can be as blatant as a prince (or archbishop, or priest, or whatever) saying, "Watch this guy, and find out who he's really working for." Some characters can use Obfuscate (or Entropy) to shadow him, some will use Dominate (or Mind) to read his mind, and others can just dedicate ghouls, allies, retainers, or even Influence to see what he's doing. Before long, you can drop that hint that he's looking for something (or if someone has already learned the ritual, *someone*). Follow the trail and you'll eventually find someone with one of the books and figure out what he's doing.

The same principle applies to mages. We're including some coterie charts, but since they can be fairly fluid (or entirely mutable), you can build your own and pick a starting point. A Son of Ether with a reputation for insanity works with a Tremere to experiment with captured vampires. A rogue Technocrat observes the local vampires. A lone Euthanatos has tipped us off that the vampires have a plan to infiltrate mortal society. (Or if you like, just start off with "What the fuck are those Templars doing?") As long as the characters have a reason to follow the trail, you can unveil the coterie chart member by member.

As an alternative, maybe someone really wants to perform the ritual but doesn't want to tip off the characters as to why. He simply says, "Bring me the book, it's dangerous, it can't fall into the wrong hands" or "These guys have a book and I don't trust them." Start with a limited number of characters, play connect-the-dots on the coterie chart, and let the players research the relationships. Let them piece together why this other group wants the book and then, if you're entirely diabolical, wait until they ask why *their* ally wants the book. By the time Templars open fire, or lightning-fast Akashic Brothers assault some poor neonates, or Anastasia starts preaching about the end of the world, they will realize its significance is mounting. When they understand

what purpose the book serves, the plot will become a race. The story gets more interesting if there's more than one group racing after it, which leads to our next approach.

NEWTONIAN PLOTS

Have you been playing **Vampire** or **Mage** for a while? Then you know how entertaining the interplay of vastly different groups can be. Picture a pool table. Each ball on the table is a different mage, vampire or group. If the characters collide with one group, they may force it to interact with another one, and soon there's motion on the table. Someone's going to get knocked into a pocket eventually. Or maybe it's more like an asteroid field: Each chunk of rock is going to go in a particular direction until it caroms off another one.

This model of story is a "Newtonian plot." The mantra here (in case you're not a science geek) is Newton's Third Law: An object in motion stays in motion in a straight line at a constant speed unless acted upon by an unbalanced force. Granted, indi-

viduals are more unpredictable than chunks of rock, but the same principle applies to drama in a limited way. Someone's gonna do what he's gonna do until someone gets in his way.

The group of characters is like the cue ball on our table. You set up where everyone is then hand the players the cue. They take their shot, then you take yours: Who's going to collide with the characters next? If the players' characters have the tome, or know how to perform the ritual, the answer is: as many groups as you want. If they haven't got the book, they'll have competition from another group. All points converge on who has the book until someone learns the ritual and comes close to performing it.

In the Newtonian version of this plot, there's an idea that makes this far more interesting: The Ritual of the Red Sign is a communal ritual, so no one individual can perform it alone. Several mages must work together (particularly if you raised the degree of difficulty as suggested in Chapter Three), and they need a vampire to stand in the center of the cer-

ANOTHER APPROACH: ENDING THE HERO'S JOURNEY

The writings of Joseph Campbell have been misinterpreted and abused countless times. Many of his books, such as *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, have provided insights and analysis into the structure of myth. By following the structure of the archetypal "hero's journey," many have tried to recapture that mythic feel in modern works of fiction. There's no guarantee you'll create a myth as enduring as the *Odyssey* or *Iliad* by using Campbell's archetypal structure, but many dyed-in-the-wool White Wolf gamers have given it the best try they can. If you know what we're talking about, then the possibilities of a Red Sign chronicle feed right into the possibilities of modern myth.

Many gamers are familiar with the start of the heroes' journey: The hero leaves the world he knows to explore the unknown. Many chronicles begin that way; it's like the moment a sire's Embrace brings his childe into a World of Darkness, outside of mortal society. Just as important is the final stage of the journey, when the hero returns to the world he knows, bringing the wisdom he's learned with him.

Not every **Vampire** chronicle has a strong ending. Many chronicles have launched over the last 10 years, but not all of them have come to a dramatic conclusion. If one of the characters in

your chronicle survives the Ritual of the Red Sign, it's an obvious way to bring a long-running chronicle to an end.

No doubt over countless nights, the protagonists of your chronicle have learned much about mortal society by dwelling outside it. They've explored the darkest corners of their souls, and hopefully learned to keep the Beasts Within them in check. Just like **Vampire** characters (and writers, vicariously), **Kindred** have an unfortunate tendency of occasionally waxing poetic about how deeply they understand human society after they've survived the Embrace — but this story arc can put that wisdom to the test.

The Ritual of the Red Sign can be the culmination of a long-term **Vampire** chronicle. Many begin with the Embrace (or Creation Rite) of each and every vampire in the coterie. If you've been playing this game for years, you've no doubt gone through this routine several times, developing the art of telling these preludes into a science. Ending a chronicle by having a vampire return to humanity would bring the story full circle. In the chronicle's denouement, the "hero" must deal with the consequences of returning to the mortal world, showing what he has learned from his departure from mortal society.



emony. For that matter, if you're playing with the idea that several books are needed, vampires will be scrambling to obtain the other books as well. Let them chase the Gangrel archaeologist, if you like, or set up another group to protect him. The smaller groups may form larger groups to succeed, which leads to more conflict.

Then consider who's out to stop the ritual, destroy the book or kill the vampire who's attempting this. It is possible that the story may conclude without anyone performing the ritual. Maybe the characters themselves destroy it before anyone else claims it, or maybe they set forces in motion so that Keyes' Technocracy cell cleans house. Perhaps the prince's weakness for the temptation of that book distracts him from the aforementioned Sabbat invasion, and everyone suffers for the prince's hubris (or insanity, in case the treasured tome is *The Yellow Sign*).

There is no one official way to run this plot, only permutations. This is a book that can rip entire societies apart. What you do with it is up to you. It's your world, to save or destroy as you see fit.

WORSE THAN RULES LAWYERS?

You have the potential here to save the world... or destroy it. The idea of a world-shaking event that

isn't defined for all players everywhere — with an outcome that isn't a given — challenges a few commonly held misconceptions about the World of Darkness. It gives the characters absolute freedom, allowing them to deviate from what's been published in books over the last decade. Some players will recoil in horror from that very concept. It's worth spending a few moments preparing for this eventuality and the pernicious variety of gamer who spawns it.

If you've spent time playing storytelling games, you've probably heard enough invective against "rules lawyers" by now. They're the bane of any artful Storyteller's existence, since they live to pervert and abuse the rules for their own benefit and amusement. Chapter Three, with its details about the Ritual of the Red Sign, offers some options that can help you circumvent the designs of this pernicious gamer. Hell, if that's not enough, consider the Golden Rule that's been touted since the first *Vampire* rulebook appeared.

When you're running an apocalypse plot, there's another variety of lawyer to watch out for: the gamer who insists on citing every element of backstory that's ever been published. Some insist that every story must pertain to the one true "canonical" version of the

World of Darkness; others on knowledge they've acquired in out-of-print or irrelevant White Wolf books, blurring the boundary between what *they* know and what their *characters* know, or that what's assumed to be true in **Werewolf** must also be true for **Mage**. While there are countless varieties and variations of this phenomenon, for the sake of discussion, we'll refer to them all as background lawyers.

According to the Golden Rule of the Storyteller System, whenever the rules get in the way of the story you tell, you (as the Storyteller) have the freedom to alter or amend them as you see fit. Since this is your story, you'll also need to invent people, places, conspiracies, and even organizations to advance your plot. Maybe you need to put a Technocracy stronghold in the center of Manhattan, or maybe in your chronicle, the Sabbat (or Camarilla, or the anarchs) has conquered your hometown. This book introduces many more characters, and this time, you've got a great deal of freedom in deciding where to put them.

The background lawyer bristles at such deviations from "canon." In his mind, if someone or something has been mentioned in passing in a book somewhere, it must be true, and he insists that the world around his character conform to his expectations. Invite the characters into a new city, and he'll tell you the name of the vampire's prince, the location of the largest Technocracy stronghold, and where the werewolf caern is. Mention a supernatural group the characters have never seen before, and he'll give you a breakdown of their supernatural powers and philosophy. He's got pithy descriptions of every clan, Tradition, tribe, and seven other groups you've never heard of. He is, in short, out to prove he knows more about the background of the world than you do... and you're the Storyteller!

Granted, there's probably a good reason why the background lawyer insists on showing off his knowledge. For a start, if he's been buying every White Wolf book he can get his hands on (bless his heart!), then he's going to want to find a way to actually use all his favorite bits of backstory. By reciting chapter

and verse, he's really giving you his expectations of what he wants from the game — even if that means his expectations differ from what you have planned. In theory, **Vampire** and **Mage** are supposed to be firmly entrenched in the horror genre... and nothing's more horrific than the unknown. If he's read the sourcebooks for everything, then the world is a defined and comfortable place. For this story, you'll have to manage background lawyers carefully.

If this idea seems a bit academic, then consider what that means to an apocalypse plot. You're out to challenge all those assumptions, showing him something he's never seen before now. The ideas in this book are only a start. By unveiling the plots and conspiracies in this book, you'll have the experience to perform similar (and impossible) feats. In each case, you'll have to maintain the Amazing Balancing Act of Realism (mentioned earlier), showing just enough to keep the world horrific, but not pushing hard enough to shatter the illusion of free will.

The background lawyer may seem like your natural enemy when you're running a chronicle like this. He wants a documented record somewhere of how this plot unfolds in print, and may even seize the opportunity to buy that book and read it later... or even worse, before the story is over (while citing some rationale that he can separate player and character knowledge). Even if you don't hunt him down and kick him out of your chronicle, you're going to have the tools you need from this book to construct your own unique approach to this plot.

When running this story, you may have to gently remind this individual that your chronicle is different than some of the books that have been published. This is pretty damn honest, considering the fact that **The Red Sign** doesn't have one canonical plot, nor should it. Save for a few events that jumpstart the story, which you can use, amend, or reject as described earlier, you're really creating your version of the world's inexorable slide toward destruction. You may even decide to begin the story "in the middle," after the ritual has been successfully performed. Even if you're not, it never hurts to plan ahead.

The Red Sign

Forbidden Arcana

The Curse of Caine is a Biblical punishment, handed down by God Himself. Could it be true that a conspiracy of Kindred and mages has found a way to reverse its effects? As the world comes closer and closer to Gehenna, might the Kindred escape their divine fate? Or is it all part of some larger plan? As a title that combines the themes of *Mage* and *Vampire*, *The Red Sign* is a Lovecraftian revelation of ages-old horror. As the Kindred discover a method to escape damnation, a faction of mages aids them in their blasphemous quest. Players can either join the conspiracy or oppose it — or find themselves knowing entirely too much about it.

The Red Sign includes:

- A new secret society to join or confront
- An opportunity to participate as characters from *Mage* or *Vampire*
- New revelations to protect or exploit

TIME OF
JUDGMENT

MAGE
THE ASCENSION

VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE



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