

Chapter One: A Place In Time

Aye! Here! Who was it that sent you? Did your sire make you then realize just how very tiring the whole thing is? How hard it is to raise a fledgling vampire up from the mud?

Pay it no mind. No mind at all. You aren't the first, and you won't be the last. You, come sit here at my knee. Stop your sobbing, you're wasting the vitae.

You're the Damned, now, childe, and it could be a whole lot worse. Count your blessings, aye? Being damned, vampires, it's as bad as you feared and better than you ever imagine. You sit here, and I'll tell you all you really need to know. A hundred Cainites or more come and sat here to hear this, and now you join a proud tradition.

The Embrace

Where to start, since you need me to start somewhere... There's a beginning to all of this, but that's not a story I know. I know the end though, and what follows the end, so why don't we start there?

Someone murdered you, childe. Someone decided that your life was to come to an end. There are a lot of justifications for a vampire murdering another, but the only reason it's ever done is egotistical selfishness. I know, I've done in more than a few times.

What's worse, though, is that after they murdered you, they corrupted your corpse, put their foul blood in your mouth, and pulled you from the Grace of God back into this mud pit we call Earth. You've been robbed of Heaven, childe, and in exchange, you'll get an eternity of struggle or servitude. Or you'll get a gruesome and painful end. We don't know what happens when we die the Final Death. Only that we are gone. So I'll make no promise of Heaven now, but then again, I won't promise Hell, either.

Physiognomy of the Dead

But it isn't all doom and gloom, little bird. Here. You wipe your eyes again with my apron. Put on a brave face and I'll tell you about the wonders of your new self. There's a world of new curiosities and pleasures ahead of you. Oh. Don't you turn away when an ugly old woman talks of pleasures. You'd be surprised what joys you'll soon find in horror, and what toe-curling delight you'll draw out of things you'd never speak about in church.

Your body, mine, all of us, are made of sin. It's not a thing to be ashamed of; it's simply what it is. What a human can do we can do better. We can run faster, see in the dark. For most of us, our bodies become more perfect visions of what we were as humans. No, not me, childe, but I am a special kind of sinner. No! You are a creature meant to steal virtue and arouse vice, you drink blood and tempt the holy with your strange secret powers and your allure.

It's the cleanliness about you that's always thrown me. Even in my clan, don't our teeth straighten and grow so very white? I've watched during the Embrace, watches as pox marks vanish and turn to baby smooth skin. Smoother. Once, I saw a lad who was struck by an affliction of the crown that left him bald as a friar, but didn't Damnation go and give him a head full of lovely hair. Didn't he just become a randy beast as a result? This is what I'm saying, we're

creatures made of sin rebuilt by the corruption of Caine to spread slowly but surely across all four corners of the earth.

What else have you noticed? The heart, aye? Sad that. No, your heart won't beat unless you make it or you're thick in the heady rush of slaking your lust. See here, the tears you've wept on my skirts? They're bloody too, and so beware, as a good weeping will give away your nature. You'll learn to hold it in, childe; we all do somehow.

Did I say that you are stronger? Throw yourself from a parapet, be kicked by a horse, even a well-intended thrust by a man-at-arms will hardly slow you down. Beware only the Sun, God's judgment, and fire, God's purifier, and a blow that would sever your head from your shoulders. No matter whatever the Orthodoxy out of Russia tells you that a stake will kill you, they're wrong. Put a spike of hollywood into a vampire's chest, and all you will do is stop him. When the stake is removed, he will rise, most likely hungry, mad, and bent on revenge against them that incapacitated him in the first place.

The Beast

But you've still got your human mind, odd aye? All your memories, your feelings, your attachments. You may still be in the town where you grew up, living on your father's land. You still feel guilt, don't you? A heavy heart over your first kill? Oh, I see it in your eyes.

There's a reason for that! For now, you've got a human soul as you did before you died. Does that comfort you? I don't know that it should, because having a human soul means that you can still lose it. And if you do? You fall to the Beast. You become a creature not of sin, but a creature of destruction and murder. You're nothing but killing and eating without a thought in your head or your heart.

You act coy, aye, but I know you already know what I'm describing. You can feel it, can't you? Moving behind your eyes, testing the confines of your ribcage, like your heart is its prison. It's boiling in your blood, this hate, your Beast. But make no mistake; it's as much ally as it is enemy. It needs your body to survive for it to survive, and so, it will keep you alive if you know how to find equilibrium with it. When you see fire and you start to run before you've realized it, that is the Beast protecting you. When you fly into a rage and kill off the competition invading your territory, that is the Beast ensuring you have enough blood to survive. It isn't kind or beautiful, but it is nature, after a fashion. It is your nature, anyway, and nature can be terribly cruel.

Midnight Courts and Churchyards

Anywhere you go in the world, so far as I can tell, you will find Vampires. And anywhere you find Vampires, you will find us practicing most of the same customs and idle pastimes. We meet in pairs or small groups, we wage shadow wars against other small groups, we plot and plan, and we make sure that our downfall, as well as the downfall of our enemies are a sort of spectator sport by those untouched by the drama.

We call this society, though it has as much in common with society as rats fighting over the pickings on a corpse. We align ourselves by family lines, we vie for affection, protection, and power handed down by monsters that are our Elders in age and strength. And we bicker,

backstab, and collude. Sometimes we kill, but that's rare, as the first draw of Final Death can turn so quickly into a spiral of revenge after revenge in most counties, we give up our rights to murder one another to one final authority. In this part of the world, we tend to call these leaders Princes. I'm told outside of Christendom, they have other titles, and sometimes, very different ways of doing things.

And anywhere you find us, you'll find a succession of older and older monsters, those who have seen more and more of the extremes and limitations of forever. Poor bastards. Sooner or later, ten years dead turns to a hundred years dead, unless you've gotten yourself destroyed. A hundred years becomes two hundred in the blink of an eye. For those of us who do not eat and drink at the table of humility like myself, that age flies by and leaves an Elder hungry for more than just blood and sin. It leaves them hungry for conquest and the power like unto God.

The War of Princes

In these modern nights where travel, communication, and technology leaps forward at such a pace to leave old ladies like myself confused and a touch afraid, we have the War of Princes. In these nights that are so very holy, and yet, without the Voice of God, (if you're a Papist, that is, we are without a Pope after all.) It is in these nights, that the Eldest of us, and most listless of us war endlessly over land and power and esteem and sometimes nothing at all.

The Audacity of Youth

Was there peace when I was young? That's a difficult question to answer, but at least, in my wild youth, no great Prince demanded I sneak away as fast as my legs could carry me to conduct clandestine war against the Prince of Cardiff. I have witnessed, to my sorrow, a generation of childer Embraced for no purpose other than quick sortie and death at the hands of other childer Embraced elsewhere for the same ends. I will tell you all I can in hopes of preparing you, but alas, I weep inside knowing what your fate is so likely to be.

Here, I will lower my voice so that we may not be overheard, though such a thing is unlikely. Know that there are those youths who have not accepted the endless wars as their only fate. They reject the Right of Princes and the authority of the eldest. They draw from dark histories and mythologies. They gather even now in the forgotten or forsaken places in London and indeed all over the world.

I would not say go that way. But it is no more likely a death than the way that was planned for you at your making.

Social Distinctions

The oldest books, records, and recollections of the eldest tell us that we have done the things we do now since God threw Caine out of Nod. How our modern minds operate so much like ancient ones tells you this: change is potentially impossible for us as a whole. May I live so long as to see those words proven false.

Age

Oh the claim of age! See how I lord it about when anyone comes to order me about. Pah!

But pay my bitterness little mind, Grandmother Penne has always been a Fetch and Carry, now I am simply an old Fetch and Carry.

For some, though, for most even, age brings with it a granted and obvious shine of respectability. This is a dangerous world we have all been Damned into, and I would say, surviving in it for any length of time is a thing to consider if not respect in its own right. Any Vampire who has lived even a year longer than you may have something to teach you. Or at least, have a thing you can learn on account of them. While you have no reason to love a monster with decades or centuries on you, it may be wise to give 'em a nod and a bowed head so long as they've got knowledge on how to survive that you don't. If they're willing to teach, then aye, maybe respect is a thing they can earn. If they refuse, ah well, you can draw the knowledge out in other ways.

Fledglings

A fledgling, a youth, a wee, just born demon fresh from their bloody end. That's you, my love, still under your Sire's wing with more to learn than a fresh birthed calf. A calf is born knowing how to walk. You barely know even that. You're full of instincts, of course, the Beast guides you to fear fire and sunlight, and that you need to feed to live. What your instincts fail is telling you how to live, night to night, cursed as you are. That's where your sire comes in, or if you're very lucky, Grandma Penne. You are an afterthought in most Cainte courts; a non-being who has not earned the right to be even called vampire. You may find that your needs are secondary to every other you meet, and there is little justice for you that is not granted you.

Neonates

When your sire's had about enough of you, or else, has decided that you've learned what they can teach you, she'll take you to her elder, and usually her Prince, and release you formally from her ward. Two things happen in that moment. First, you are awarded a thousand new freedoms. Second, you are tossed to the wolves. Now, you are a vampire in your own right with your own responsibilities and respect. But make no mistake, to many a vampire, a childe so young as a neonate is still disposable. To many, you are, at release from your sire, a new pawn on the board, and one every vampire around you may hope to manipulate to their own end. Or else, they may simply hope to destroy and consume you for whatever terrible reasons they have.

Ancilla

So here now is a wretch worth paying attention to, aye? An ancilla is a member of the Damned who has managed to hang on for a century or two, and not gone so insane as to be put down. To the youngest of us, they may be more accessible than elders and saner, so worth listening to. To the eldest of us, they may still be seen as disposable, but since they are so much harder to dispose of, better to use than simply abuse. If you need a thing done right – an elder assumes – you get an ancilla to do it. Never mind that a wise ancilla has lived long enough to know her best bet is to pass along her duties to a neonate to keep her own skin from the fire.

Elders

Sometimes, we beasts last a long time. Forever maybe, or so it seems to those of us who reach these impossible ages. Most vampires grudgingly agree to call a vampire three hundred years or more an elder, though as with any claim of age, manifestation of great power is more important than documentation and years gone by. I know a lad I've got centuries on who most call elder because he's better than I am at throwing around his potency and creating an air of terror and authority. Not so much for this old bird though. Still, an elder is a terrible thing, a vampire of centuries who must have killed dozens or hundreds of times. Do not think for a second that you are a special exception to them.

Methuselah

Due to my advanced years and incredible patience, I have myself once met a Methuselah. The encounters are always hair raising, with palpable fear. These monsters are a thousand years or more, and are barely human in their way of thinking. They are clever, ancient, and willing to do whatever it takes to get what they want. At that age, few things can stop them from their desires. Do whatever you can, my little fawn, to never be between a Methuselah and what he wants. Or worse, never be the thing a Methuselah wants. A Methuselah's powers are unknowable, and often only rumored. Do not cross one. And should they cross you, flee just so fast as you can.

Antediluvians

Lastly, we have the Antediluvians, those Damned grandchilder of our mythical founder. If they are real –and that I cannot say– they would be thousands of years old. They exist, so far as I can tell, only in stories and those stories are as varied as the clans. Each one is said to have founded one of the thirteen clans, though there may be more or less of them now thanks to ancient blood feuds and betrayal. We hear rumors of other clans from other parts of the world which throws our understanding to the winds. Sometimes they are said to be all dead. Sometimes they are said to sleep eternally, exhausted by their own age to wake at the end of nights. Sometimes they are said to be awake and about, pulling all our puppet strings in a war as ancient as mankind's birth.

Clans Both High and Low

Aye? I've said a word you don't well know, and so let me explain. We are all of us, reborn into these nights according to the whims of our sires and perhaps, the will of our sire's elders. As with humanity, how we were reborn, and to whom, as well as where and when can matter more than a lifetime of right unliving. Much of your eternity was decided for you, by the actions of your sire and his ancestors before him, long before your heartbeat for the first time, never mind when it beat for the last. And it is these sins before you that color all your nights before you. Let me explain.

Clans

You are not just your sire's childe. Sadly, you've got generations upon generations of sinners to answer for. We come from families, all of us, you and I and that Prince in her tower. These families, round about thirteen in number, each manifest Damnation in special ways. We've a family of mangled peasants like your grandmother Penne here, and a family of kings and lords so high above the lot of us we cannot even see their feet. The Curse gives each family a way of survival. To further the example, my accursed blood was granted the ability to hide from sight so as not to frighten my prey. The family of kings and lords can put a command in your mind and compel you with raw strength of will to do as you're told. There is a family of serpents that can make you love them with a smile and a gesture. There's also a family of roving beasts who can sleep in soil and turn into bats. The list goes on.

These are clans. Matters of clan, and therefore matters of family, will go on to fill your nights worries for the rest of your unlife. There is no escaping the impulses and weaknesses of your clan, let alone release from paying for the sins and sometimes reaping the benefits of your cousins and siblings within your city and outside of it. Your clan is as much the shackle that punishes you during your damnation as it is the freedom and power you wield and the politics you will have to dance around forever.

Crowns and Beggars

You're born into a family, and you take the lump that come with it, aye? So too, you die into a clan, and with it, comes centuries of weight trial and sin, as I've said. In general, we see clans as High or Low, depending on who's in charge of the city, what the history is, and who's done the most wrong and been caught in recent memory.

A High Clan's got voice in society, the church, and most importantly, in the Prince's Court. They have rights granted to them without earning them. They bear privileges just by virtue of being murdered into a lineage. For the Low Clans, it's different. While we might be able to earn a place as individuals —and won't that place be a sad dirty place— our clan as a whole always starts off on the bottom rung with plenty stepping on us to get up higher.

Usually, who is considered High and who is considered Low becomes a tradition in an area. We've long had Clan Ventrue on top here in London thanks to the Romans. And thanks to the Celts, my Clan Nosferatu has long been a Low Clan. I think even if I was crowned Prince tomorrow, and the city filled with my Childer, we'd still be a Low Clan because it has so long been true in London.

There's no universal truth as to what Clans are High or Low. There are trends by region, but ultimately, a city's Court determines which clans are clans of standing and importance, and which are less. I'm told it can change in the blink of an eye if a court is totally disrupted, but I've never seen it happen first hand, or known anyone who has seen it first hand. Fact is, there tends to be reasons why the High and Low is what it is, and each city has it's own justification for those positions.

The Roads

I know, my little love, I see that sadness in your eyes as you soak in what I have to tell you. Damnation and sin and murder all around you, so you ask yourself 'how will I hold on and not go mad in the process?' Let Grandmother Penne give you a little bit of hope, then. While the majority of the Damned spiral down and burn up in the first ten years or so, there are those of us who hang on to who we are or what we someday hope to become, and find a sort of spiritual map to guide us away from total control of the Beast and the oblivion that promises. These maps are highly personal, but there are certain schools of thinking that are followed with their own guidelines for what makes a smart vampire, or at least what makes a moral one. We call these Roads, and they vary from the familiar to the inconceivable.

Your grandmother is what they call a Prodigal, because I follow a Road very similar to my morals in life. There are those whose morals align themselves with the rights of gentry and kings, or those who follow Roads that seek knowledge above all else. I know a Gangrel barbarian of considerable age who functions, thrives even, by following a Road that makes peace with the Beast rather than holding it at bay. I have seen it works, even if I cannot fathom it myself. There are dark Roads, and Roads practiced by people from cultures so far from what even I know that they seem alien, but we must be careful what we label evil when it comes to surviving the night. Evil is highly subjective when it comes to a culture of murderers, and sometimes, anything that helps you hold on another night is worth almost any cost.

The Traditions

Your sire has told you that there are laws we have that cannot be broken, hasn't he? That's good. You walk with me, and I'll tell you all about our laws, what we call the Traditions. To most vampires, they are things tossed at you by your sire a few times and then remembered only when you've violated them. Which is why most vampires don't survive their first decade. You are lucky, because Grandmother Penne will tell not only what they are, but why they are what they are. This will give you an edge, and when staring down the Sheriff's stake in the middle of a court meaning to bury you, any edge is a thing worth having.

See here, love, in my modest library, we've the words of Caine and others, written by a dozen hands. They are the Traditions, but which ones, wonder, are the right ones?

The First Tradition: The Covenant

'Thy blood makes thee my brood, crafted in my image. My curse thine, my salvation thine. I stand before and above thee as god-regent. I am the way, my Traditions covenant. Renounce me and Renounce all hope.' Thus spoke Caine. - The God-Regent Translations

The blood of the Betrayer flows through you, making you in His image. You are cursed, and it is only through obedience that you survive. You are the Betrayer's kind, and are bound by these, God's laws for you. - The Qaanoon, collected by Duras the Dacian

Don't we all need to know where we come from, aye? This Tradition, more than any other, establishes for us from whence we came and who's got the power night to night. In my part of the world, it's well known that Caine, the first murderer, was also the first of us, and all power as

well as all curses flow directly from him. Why's this matter? Maybe not much to you, but this Tradition is how most Princes establish their authority. Caine tells us, in most translations, that those closest to him are those with the most authority, and so age is the right of authority. It's a simple idea and works well enough until you consider the oldest vampire in a city may not be the most willing to rule, or able, and those who take power may use their age to hold a rule they cannot manage.

From these scrolls, as well as travelers who've come to sit down with me, I have come to realize that not all vampires see Caine as the first of us. I've heard our creation myth tied to Babylonian gods, Lilith, a cursed African hero, and even those who believe there is no First, or at least, no single First. I cannot imagine how their elders take advantage of these beliefs, but I'm sure that they do.

The Second Tradition: The Domain

"As I am master of Nod, thy domain is thine own concern. Thou art its master, and all will respect this or suffer thy wrath. All will present themselves when entering, and thou shall protect them in turn. By right, thou art allowed to hunt within the bounds of thy domain, its blood thine own. Accept its responsibility, minister thy domain and pay others the same respect thou expect." Thus spoke Caine. - The God-Regent Translations

The herd and the land that they inhabit are the domain. If you can keep it, it is yours. If you can take it, it becomes yours. If you can do neither, you submit to those who can and call them elder. - The Ways of Hibernia, as translated by Duras the Dacian

The territory where you bed down, and where you can feed, are the night to night affairs of all of us, and at least so far as I'm concerned, the most important politics you can stick your nose into. Often, and due to the Covenant, a Prince declares a city as his domain alone, and his ability to hold and maintain that domain is the reality behind his power base. Age be damned, if he cannot maintain his city, he will lose it.

But that's not to say you will starve. A Prince also knows well that he can claim a city as his domain, but he must divvy up its management as well as provide feeding rights to his subjects. Some cities, like my fine London, are divided up into fiefdoms under the Prince Regent, with his favored friends and children holding domain over these fiefdoms. From there, the likes of you and me beg for scraps and hope we can get permission to feed in one or another of these smaller domains, but it's an alternative to rule only by one Prince, and so I'll take it. I'm told some cities operate differently, with large neutral areas where anyone can feed. I've also heard that Paradise is full of singing babies and clouds, but I'll believe it when I see it.

The Third Tradition: The Progeny

"Thou shalt only sire another with the permission and blessing of thine elder. To create is the providence of those closest to me, for they shall be accountable. Break this, and both thee and thy progeny shall be slain." Thus spoke Caine. - The God-Regent Translations

Creation is a sacrament, and one not celebrated lightly. One obtains the advice and guidance of ones foremothers and sisters. To celebrate the sacrament without such blessings is to

blaspheme and forfeit all that the Mother has given you. - Traditsiya, as collected by Duras the Dacian

Just as it is with mortals, aye? Everyone is so very concerned with who is whose heir and who has the right to leave heirs. The struggles of Kings and Emperors is not so different than the struggles of we, the damned. Is there a spiritual aspect to this particular Tradition? Oh, I'm not the one to ask that, but could be. To me, the Third Tradition is a practical and pragmatic one. If we could all run about Embracing and making ours every pretty lad who turned our eye we'd make a great many mistakes in the process. And to the elders, of course, who they let embrace and who they refuse helps to stack the city and the Court with vampires in debt to them. Though the wording in many translations suggest that sire and childer are destroyed, this is not actually a common practice from my understanding. I have myself been wetnurse to a childer whose sire was destroyed for an illegal Embrace. How often does the Prince say things like, 'well, I could have destroyed you, you exist by my benevolence. Serve me loyally and live.' I've seen the reverse as well, sadly, an unwanted childe destroyed in secret before word can reach court and a vampire in good standing is forgiven the slight since the 'problem' no longer exists. Once, I took such a childe in as my own, claimed her, and she lives quite happily here to this night, but that's a risky claim to make for sure.

The Fourth Tradition: The Accounting

Those thou create are thine own blood until release from thy charge. Until that moment, their sins, their blood and their punishments are thine." Thus spoke Caine. - The God-Regent Translation

What you create is yours and your blood. Their blood and their punishment is yours. - Folk Traditions of the Etruscan Tribes, collected by Duras the Dacian

I will admit, of any of the Traditions, this is the one that perplexes me the most. From a purely selfish beast point of view, why this practice would become so common is beyond me. If there's a Tradition with a humane or maybe divine source, it would be this one. In essence, the Fourth Tradition makes a sire accountable for who they have Embraced. While that will of course result in some abuse of these whelps, it also means that the sire must be wise in their actions, their education, and in some ways, reminds them that the other vampires of their city are watching what they choose to do. Creating a child and destroying it before it can be released is suspect behavior to be sure.

I have seen this Tradition used as grounds for punishing a vampire who has created a wayward ghoul, though it not a popular political maneuver, it can be argued effectively in many courts. Sometimes, being a touch litigious comes in handy.

The Fifth Tradition: Destruction

Forbidden art thou to spill the blood of another of thy kind who is elder. This right belongs only to the closest to me and none other. It is forbidden for those of weaker blood to rise against their elders. This is my final covenant." Thus spoke Caine. - The God-Regent Translations

Do not spill blood, for it is precious. All blood, no matter the source, must be used and useful, blood in the soil is an unforgivable waste. - The Lost Traditions of Phoenicia, collected by Duras the Dacian

Do I surely need to spell this out for you, love? I think you're clever enough to see what is written all over this particular Tradition. We are all told that killing other vampire is wrong. I can understand the wisdom of that, aye? Most would agree that killing your own stains your soul, no matter the reasons you take your own, and most people have rules or laws about to remind them all that no matter how irritating or troublesome your neighbor might be, taking a hoe to his head is a foul act. Perhaps with vampires, we need a stronger reminder, as the Beast drives us to kill anything and everything we can.

Where the common translations of the Tradition take an interesting twist, I'd say, is how Caine tells us that the real crime is in the young killing the old. As 'the old' I would prefer not to be killed by the young, but among people with no natural death by old age, that makes for quite the downward pressure from above, aye?

I showed you a variant wording of the Tradition there, an ancient one, that focused on the waste of The Blood. Talking to greater experts on this, scholars, I understand that this is not an isolated reading of this Tradition. Any means to preserve the blood, not killing, retaining the blood in other ways, darker ways. And cultures travel. The Phoenicians, for example, may have brought their dark interpretations to Spain.

The Sixth Tradition: The Silence of the Blood

"Never shalt thou reveal thy true nature to those not of the blood. Doing so shall renounce thy claims to my covenants." Thus spoke Caine. - The God-Regent Translation

Do not reveal your nature. - The Traditions of Mali Empire, as translated by Duras the Dacian

It makes you wonder what happens to lose Caine's covenants? Well. Salvation, obviously if you've been following me thus far. I imagine if you believe that sort of thing, it's a terrifying premise. An endless eternity with no hope for redemption, because if you want anyone's forgiveness, you surely want the forgiveness of the first murderer, right?

A more immediate concern, though, is what your elder things is the consequence of being denied Caine's covenants. In many cities, this puts you outside of the protection of the Fifth Tradition and so, revealing your nature to mortals or whatever lurks in the shadows of the night, means anyone with the fangs to do it can bring you down. Usually, a Prince will still expect to reside over some kind of court to determine how much you revealed, but not always.

Outside of places where the Traditions rest on Caine's commands? I cannot myself say for sure, but I know this, intent is everything, hunters of the Church are almost everywhere, and no matter how you practice the Tradition, letting out our secrets gets us killed. A wise leader, or a selfish one, no matter their religious beliefs, knows that.

Dead Cities

No matter what it may look like from the outside, there are not two cities in the world that operate in the same ways. While there exist some common themes, they flesh out in the same way. And even these commonalities are only so common by region. I'm told when you move out

of Christendom, none of these title apply, and even stepping back in time two centuries, you wouldn't see any cities operate in the way they do these nights. I wonder what we'll see in two hundred years from now. Assuming any of us are left when the Prince's War is over, of course.

Prince

In my London and in many of the cities that neighbor the area we are ruled a Prince Regent, a vampire of considerable age and power who rules the lot of us with as tight a fist as he can get away with. Tradition, and the Traditions say that the Prince ought to be the eldest of all the vampires in a city. I suppose the idea is that the oldest is the closest to Caine, the most powerful, and therefore the most fit to rule. Even in traditional cities like London, the Prince is rarely the actual eldest Cainite. Current, the city is under sway of eldest's childer, she rules as he devotes himself to esoteric studies. He can't be bothered. Truth be told, if we practiced closer to Caine's intent, the city would be chaos. The true eldest lost his mind some fifty years back or more.

There is a value in having the oldest, most horrific monster amongst you as the figure head of the city. The Prince has a target on their head most of the time and it is best that to hold the position and rule for long, you appear indestructible. Otherwise, you face a short life constantly under constant attack by youthful vampires hoping steal your power, elders disgusted with your petulance, other Princes bent on expanding their regency, and who knows what else.

According to my friend the Greek, Athens is not ruled by a Prince. They have long practiced a form of classical democracy in which vampires who control domain may vote for one of three Triumvirate members. The cities unusually large vampire population is a thing that constantly strains order in the system, as so it does them best to allow the average vampire to feel as if they are a part of the process and a part of the status quo.

Keeper

Sometimes I think that the Keeper is meant to die.

Their job seems simple, to keep and maintain the Elysium through the city. That is, places of peace where vampires may gather and show our teeth to one another without biting. Suffice to say, these places are tinder on top of coal. Any place where two or more vampires meet you will have the potential for violence. That may well be violence by the knife or word or deed.

There's expected to be a cultural aspect to it. In those rare cases where a Keeper is good at her job, it is because she has an eye for architecture and art as well as security and secrecy. She's expected to find places that are aesthetically pleasing, stimulating, and occasionally even finds herself responsible for providing entertainment. Or to put it another way, she provides a distraction from the backbiting if you ask me.

And it's to the Keeper to keep the peace, protect the Elysium, and prevent vampire doings from spilling out and giving up the secrets of the blood. It isn't simply Herculean; it's downright impossible. A clever thing, really, to give a position of prestige and power to an enemy you want close, then watch him crumble under the weight of it. The late Prince of London offered me the position once. Once.

My companion in Warsaw, an odd paranoid old bird, told me that 'keeping' Elysium in her city is the duty of neonates. They're expected as a group to maintain the places physically and in terms of security. That communal tie must build strong alliances while weeding out the weak. "They all stand, or they all fall," she said.

Chamberlain

Beside the Prince, at least, beside the wise Prince is his Chamberlain. If the Prince is a force of might and power, then the Chamberlain is finesse. If the Prince is above the mud and stain, granted his position by power, age, and God, then the Chamberlain has dirt under her fingers like the rest of us.

In London and the surrounding areas, only the most formidable elders speak to the Prince. Even if the matter is of the most importance, you can't get near the Crowned Head. Instead, you better hope you can catch a second of the Chamberlain's time. She's the one who knows names, knows sires, knows territories, and if you're very lucky, knows why what you've got to say matters. She's in the thick of it, and it's easy to assume that she's the real power in a Domain.

And she may well be. I know of a Chamberlain in Ireland who has carefully maintained her power base through seven different Princes. When the Prince begins to reach for too much power, she simply arranges for rebellion then overthrow. Then, she returns to her job. It's a pretty thing, so long as you're her or her people.

I'm told that in Paris, the Court's so large and the Prince's Domain so populous that he has a small fleet of Chamberlains that handle different matters each. A fine job he must have, with so many hands handling things for him. Poor Grandmother Penne can't even get a flea to do her bidding, but then, I'm no Prince.

Sheriff

Once, maybe two hundred years ago or more, your good Grandmother Penne spent a while as the Prince's Sheriff. In London, that mostly entails having a full understanding of the complicated common laws that make the London Domain what it is. I spent many a night arguing law and procedure with the rabble as well as the Lords in hopes of keeping the peace and protecting the Domain from chaos and lawlessness. Every now and again I'd be called in to break up a row, but that was rare. The Prince of London's got himself some petty criminals and thugs dressed up as Knights that do his bloody deeds. That was never the Sheriff's job here.

I'm told this is not always the case. Sometime a leader of a Domain will look out at her court, see among her courtiers a brute or a savage or a swaggering tough itching for a fight. If she is wise, she will give that vampire a job breaking necks and spilling blood in a legitimate way. Sometimes that job is called Sheriff, but not always.

Sheriffs, like Chamberlains, can sometimes outlive Princes and I've even heard stories of bloodless revolutions where Prince and Sheriff arranged for a switching of titles and duties. Though I don't imagine the former Prince-come-Sheriff lasted so long in that city.

In almost any Domain, the Sheriff is most likely to have his own territory and private hunting grounds. Even over the Chamberlain.

Once, I talked with a Mongolian silk trade, a hardy type to travel so far while Damned as he did. He told me that in his court, the council of Elders had their own Sheriff, in counterpoint to the Prince's. He has his own words for all of this, mind, and assured me the functions were different, but that ultimately the Sheriffs were charged with looking after the interests of the Elders or the Prince, respectively, an striking a balance to keep peace was their thankless duty.

Harpies, Scourges, and Others

Each Domain has needs unlike any other. In smaller Domains without so many of us lurking about, a city position might do the work of two or three positions on a place like London or Paris, and some cities have needs so unique that the positions they make are like no other. Let me think if I can remember some.

London's Own Rat Catcher: We remember a time when the Romans brought a dole to the humans of London, and we uphold that tradition ourselves. So London's got a rat catcher whose duty it is to heard rats, see them eatable, and corralled in cisterns where London's unfortunate vampires can take their fill.

Quanzhou's Murder of Harpies: In small Domains, rumors and gossip move naturally from vampire to vampire. Or maybe the Chamberland makes himself busy making sure the right people hear the right stories. In cities with incredible populations, like Quanzhou far east of here, I hear that the court elects a group of socially deadly gossips to maintain social order. It's a brutal business, sure as anything.

Free Lances and Scourges: Rough and rowdy, a pack of savage dogs no matter what you call them or who pays for their services. Most cities have a crew of no-good and brazen bloodmongers who gain favor and wealth beating, harassing, and maybe even killing whoever they're paid to. Of these sorts, there's a rare but not unknown special kind of murderer. In London, we call her the Scourge and she moves at the Prince's secret behest. We see no movement, no message, no evidence left behind. We just know that sometimes, an enemy of the Prince simply vanishes. We guess the Scourge, but really, no way of knowing. Mostly, she seems to handle the chores that can't be handled in public. When the Prince needs too much out of his own stables, she's the one disposing of the shite. By the time a blood hunt has been called, she's already reported the death to the Prince. Always in secret, always.

Meeting of Elders

No matter the Prince, or how the court is set up, if there are old monsters in your home, they will meet. And rest assured, there are old monsters in your home, wherever you live. When word gets back to London town about great sweeping changes in a city or even a region, know that old monsters met in the hoary darkness and either struck a deal or declared war.

Sometimes, the Elders in a city meet formally, with acknowledgment or even recognition of the Domain. These Elders may act as a governing body on their own, support the current Domain, or act as vassals in a line of lieges and lords.

Sometimes, these groupings are only does in secret, even forbidden by the Prince, though he would have to be a singularly powerful creature to make that sort of demand. I'm told that in the Holy Land, there is a Regent-Prince so powerful and unknowable that he declared no vampire

past his hundredth year in death can ever meet with another of that age and beyond. That if two Elders find themselves in the same place, one must flee or both die. What's most frightening is to think that this law is somehow enforced. I shudder to think of how.

Tales of Damnation

Aye, where did we come from? Perhaps the most painful question for any of us to ask, and here you are, cheeks red with blood, and you ask it so innocently.

The truth is, we may never truly know. I can tell you only what stories are told, and treated as gospel inside Christendom. Outside of that, the stories are different. As you go about your unlife, you will likely be surrounded by those who believe the story of the First Murder, Always question, my little bird. Always.

Brother Slays Brother

I am supposed to tell you that the first vampire and the first biblical murderer are one in the same. And that's how it's told anywhere the bible is read, even in those places controlled by the Hebrew tribes and even parts of Arabia.

It's a sad, long story where one brother grows jealous of another, or does not know how to make his father happy, and so he slays his brother in frustration. Or else, out of fear of his terrible father. Depending on what translation you read.

You do read... don't you bird?

From there, he is either cursed for his wrong doing, or is transformed by the supreme feeling of loneliness left by his brother's death, and becomes the Dark Father of all of us. From there he wanders, and suffers, and meets many strange and terrible beings, and many awesome beings. While he wandered, he made Childer. The First Generation of the Damned, if you believe the stories. They say he sleeps now, and soon, at the end of the world, he'll rise again to destroy what he created.

Out of love.

Generation

What's what mean, Generation? I say it with a serious weight, don't I? Well, perhaps even more than age, or at least, along with age, it is a measure of the strength of your blood.

Or like the common of us tend to think, your Generation is the thickness of your blood and the strength of your Beast.

Traditionally, we count Generation from Caine and his first direct set of childer. Then their childer, and their grandchilder and so on. But, it's just a number, when you get right down to it. I've heard that given enough age, the blood thickens, no matter how close to Caine your sire was, you can grow to have blood like ice and a beast as terrible as a burning, lightless sun. This of course is rumor and here say, nothing to concern yourself with too greatly.

The Amaranth

There is, I'm afraid, one way that your blood may be thickened, but it a terrible, and unforgivable sin. If we are sin in flesh, than this is the thing that even the most wicked of us shies from. I

would not tell you about it, I dread to say the word out loud, but it is vital you know about it so that you remain very careful who you let close to you and when.

This most vile act we call the Amaranth, and is to drink the blood of another vampire. But not just his blood, the whole of him, even down to his soul. To drink his soul and destroy all that he ever was so that you can rob him of his power and increase your own. Make no mistake, it is not a thing you can do by accident, and even if you found yourself needing to drain another of your kind to unconsciousness, there is still a chance to turn back and leave him in torpor or ashes.

Which is better than the alternative. Believe me. If you so will it, if you push, through your mind and sanity resist, it is possible to complete the act, but never by accident.

It thickens the blood. It strengthens the beast. It may give you powers the likes of which you've never dreamed, but what it does to you is irreversible.

And what we do to you if we find out is very simple. We destroy you.

Understanding the Generations

A Generation isn't just a measure of potency and age, nothing is ever that simple with the likes of us. No, Generation also confers a sort of position and in some cases, a title and a whole set of assumptions to go along with that title.

Second Generation

The childer of Caine are the Second Generation, if you follow the God-Regent translation of the Book of Nod. Most stories say there were only three direct childer of Caine, them that he made to live with him in the great city of Enoch before the flood. One, they say, was an impossibly beautiful woman, and the others are up for debate. Wiser minds than mine look back over the history and assume that these first childer and Second Generation were destroyed in the flood right along with Enoch. Because if not, they would be creatures of incredible age and strength. If you believe that the world will end when Caine and the Antediluvians rise from slumber to fight, you have to wonder, what would the Second Generation, Caine's closest childer, do should any of them have survived? Common wisdom is that the childer of the Second Generation went on to form the clans as we are now. Though there are those of us who make claims that their lineage and clan comes from the second and not the third generation.

Third Generation

Once the childer of Caine began to Embrace, Enoch must have become one very large very dangerous family drama, The Third Generation, they say, is the start of us, the start of the thirteen clans of vampires. We hear in stories that the first thing the Antediluvians did was get into blood feuds with each other and wrestle one another for power. There was killing, mayhem, and maybe the first cases of Final Death and the Amaranth in the streets of Enoch. Is it any wonder we fear them, when so many of the stories are of powerful madmen who seem to know only war and destruction? If the end of nights is the rise of these monsters, the Antediluvians, then those nights will be beyond terrible.

We don't know how many remain tonight. We only know that their touch is present in every trouble and strife any vampire feels anywhere in the world. Is your sire cruel to you? He was

probably made that way as a part of a grand scheme by an ancient that none of us will ever fully fathom. Did your Prince suddenly declare open war with a Prince nearby who had yet been her ally for a century? You can guess that's because an Antediluvian made it be so. They meddle and they interfere and they manipulate out of a need for power and to perhaps, to destroy one another.

I'm told that the myth of Golconda comes from these beings. That if there are any who are seeking redemption and found it, it is likely that they are Antediluvians. I don't know if I believe it, and more, even if they did, it makes no difference, since they'll still wage the wars of the ancients if only to keep the world out of the hands of their more horrific kin. I'm a pawn and disposable no matter how warm hearted and blessed my master may be. I don't assume any of these beings, if they are real, even approach human understanding any more. Gets harder for me, night by night, and I'm still in the thick of it without the eons they have suffered through.

Fourth and Fifth Generation

If we are barely pawns in the games the Antediluvians play, the Fourth and Fifth Generation are the Knights. Useful, powerful, maneuverable, the most potent and dangerous holders of domain in Christendom come from these Generations, and we call them Methuselahs. In Arabia, they have another name, and so I understand, do they in the distant East. Because they are the most powerful waking monster any of us should hope to see, their power and their lives are under constant threat. Of course, we're barely more than gnats compared to the Methuselahs, and so there is a strange balance between power and those what would eat up that power and make it their own. I think it is the Methuselah who started and maintain the War of Princes, but that's only because one told me so.

Sixth and Seventh Generation

These, my dove, are your elders, and you should steer clear of us whenever you can. While the rare Methuselah may rule the large and ancient city, most domains belong to the Sixth or Seventh Generation. Remember dove that even now, I may be your enemy, because I am old and I am hungry in ways you cannot yet imagine. Stay on my good side, stay away from me, or else stay on your guard in my company.

Remember also, that many of us at a certain age and a certain potency of blood can no longer sate ourselves on the blood of the living. For us, the only way to satisfy the hunger is to feed on you. For the eldest, sometimes it is the vampire that is prey. If you find one of us has suddenly become overly kind to you and yours, it may be she is grooming a new herd. Then again, you don't put your cattle on the front lines, so maybe there are worst ways to be used by the elders.

Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Generation

Who doesn't love an upstart, aye? These monsters may well be your sires, and they are lean and hungry. They have been around long enough that they've seen the way the world works, but don't have the age and thickness of the blood necessary to rule. Though from every ancilla I have ever met, they seem to think they all have some greater better way. There is not vampire in all the world more deserving of power and position than whatever ancilla you happen to be

talking to. That said, recall that most of them are young enough to remember being human, and may come close to your way of thinking. If anyone can intercede on your behalf against the dangers of the night, he may be an ancilla. This is until he turns around and uses you against an elder he hopes to usurp, of course.

Eleventh and Twelfth Generation

These are your kin and your rivals, my dove, and there are a great number of them. Is should say that the young, the neonate, outnumber the elder by at least 3 to 1, and that's liable to increase as we make more and more to struggle and die against the countless neonates being created by the our enemies. If you make it ten years, it will be a miracle, but you have things we don't have. You have numbers. You have strong intimate ties with humanity as well as your own morality. Maybe you still have your faith or your wealth or your ability to travel. All in all, we make you because we need you, and don't let any other older vampire tell you otherwise.

Thin Blood

It is possible, I'm told, for the youngest of us to create a vampire themselves, but it is rare as few of you have the strength to do the act, physical or political. Without the physical power, the victim simply dies. Without the political power, some angry elder kills you both for the having the audacity.

We don't tend to bother counting Generation after 12th, as anything further removed from Caine can scarcely be called a vampire at all. Tragic wretches, one and all. We call them Thin Blooded and watch for signs they need to be put down.

Wassail

Signs like reaching their final frenzy, or what we often call, the Wassail. When a vampire entirely loses themselves to the Beast, when the man or woman the once were is gone forever, there is one final frenzy as the Beast seeks to destroy as much and as fast as it can manage. The vampire becomes a raw force of destruction, and in that time, becomes more powerful and dangerous than they could imagine before they kill and eat and kill and eat and nothing else. There is no reasoning with the Beast in this form. There is probably no return. We put these plagued animals down as soon as we find them, that is the only sure way to stop the destruction.

Of course, your Grandmother Penne has heard of a monster in the cold north woods that is a vampire in a constant state of frenzy. It is old and powerful and can seem to plan and reason. It chooses its battles to ensure its survival. Is this what comes of a long time wassail, or a unique expression of the Beast? Who can say? I don't go into the woods. Ever.

Golconda

And so what's the end of your story? Murdered by a fellow? Soul eaten by a nemesis? Become a wild animal to be put down? Fall asleep and never wake?

Maybe there's another way. Here, I'll speak softly as there are those vampires who don't care for these things to ever be discussed.

The story goes that you can make peace with your Beast. That you can find a balance between animal and human, and it grants you a state of beautification. You becomes like a saint among us. You retain your dark powers, but the sun no longer kills. You do not need the blood of others to survive. You cannot be stopped by a stake through the heart.

Those of us who go looking for the blessed state of Golconda likely die in the process of looking. Further, it is possible that the Antediluvians themselves have the secret and seek to keep it from the likes of you and I. So even if you did reach such a blessed state, be assured, you'd be hunted until you were ash.

But maybe it's worth it, even if you only have a moment of peace before the Final Death, aye?

Enemies and Mysteries

I am not your enemy unless I have reason to be. So it is with any vampire. Well and true, we are meant to be like-minded with each other, even as we are territorial and violent. Even as we are a touch cannibalistic we are still first nepotistic.

We are not your only threats and knowing us and of us is not the only mystery to unravel in these dark nights.

Hunters

If you want my honest opinion why it's so difficult to be a vampire in these violent and fiery nights, blame the Cathars. There have always been hunters, humans foolish enough to think that they have right and virtue to put us to ash. Then again, being damned, they have a point. The problem is not that sometimes humans find us and want to kill us. The real problem is that now they can gather and unify under Papal decree. They can use torture and murder to root us out. They can burn whole villages to the ground to get at just one of us. And they will. But somehow we're the monsters.

Werewolves

Here is what I know about the Lupines. Don't go into the woods unless you've made peace with your maker. Lupines are roving packs of wild men that can transform to wolves and rip you to ashes, so they are described. I have never seen one, but a beloved Gangrel friend of mine assures me that I have met a few. He says when they are in the cities, hunting for mates and the unclean, they are impossible to tell from humans. This is, until you bite them and they turn into towering monsters and destroy you. They're wolves in lambs' skins.

Witches

Is there a thing more and wretched than us, then it is the witches and warlocks of this dark time. Your Grandmother can remember a time when those rare humans with magical powers were revered instead of feared. In those days, they lived and were worshipped as servants of gods, if not gods themselves. Like us, they have since been chased into the shadows of humanity, living as a shallow echo of their past glory, fearing the stake and the Inquisitor like us. Unlike us, though, they have only one miserable lifetime to suffer. Unlike us, they cannot hope to survive to wiser more worldly times. Don't assume them automatic allies against the Cross, my love,

because they're greedy for your life and the power in your blood. They will use you in pieces and parts if you don't use them first.

Shining Ones

Now you'll think this old woman mad, but the hours wear on and I think my guard is low enough to tell you about the other things that lurk in the brambles and the thorns. Living in this world and also outside this world are the Others. The Shining Ones whose name you should never speak aloud. They are wild nature embodied, and unknowable to us. They are our opposites in every way, and you do not want to mix with them.

Ghosts

I have told you that you will kill, if you have not already. And when you kill, sometimes the soul of those you've slain will not cross over the judgment. They will linger, to torture you, to finish their lives' works, to protect their loved ones, or out of sheer malice and rage. Whatever the reason, ghosts are as real as you and I, and you will cause of more than one before your Final Death. And believe me when I tell you, ever there was a ghost who was upfront about the cause of their torment. They are no simple puzzles to unfold and destroy, no matter what our Roman cousins might tell us.

Deeper Mysteries Still

Here now, I'll tell you that these are not the only things that share the night with you. Danger and excitement are around every corner, if you go looking for it or not. Dig deep enough in the ground, look to the trees and the deepest wood, under the Holy See or in your local crypt know that there are deeper mysteries than the likes of me hope ever to experience.

Dig, and you'll find something. Always.

Lexicon

Amaranth, the: The act of drinking the heartsblood or soul of another Kindred. Debatable in its ethics, effective as a means to greatly increase vampiric power instantly.

ancilla (pl. ancillae): A middling aged vampire usually somewhere around 10th and 11th generation though age is a more important indicator. Tend to be between 100 and 200 years old and hungry for power.

Antediluvian: Vampires of the third generation. Unknowable and perhaps only myth, the secret motivations behind the War of Princes is often attributed to the Antediluvians.

Beast, the: The tangible manifestation of a vampire's Damnation. The hungry monster that lives in her skin and drives her to hunt, kill and frenzy.

Becoming, the: Either a term for a vampire's Embrace, or the agonizing period just after the Embrace as the human dies and the vampire is born.

Bitter Crusade, the: Events surrounding the Fourth Crusade, which bring about the end of the Long Night.

Blood Oath, the: The bond of blood that enslaves one that's drunk from Cainite vitae.

Book of Nod, The: An often-translated text purported to tell the story of the first vampire. Many translations exist, none agree on every detail.

Cainite: A vampire.

Caitiff: A vampire with no claim of clan, or a vampire who was forced out of his clan.

childe: A vampire's get.

clan: One of 13 great vampire family lines. Each clan has a unique collection of gifts and a unique curse to their blood.

consanguineous: vampires who share a sire. A brother or sister in blood.

coterie: A group of vampires that live and act together for mutual protection.

Damned, the: All vampires in any culture where the Book of Nod is recognized. A society of the dead.

domain: A region of land, industry, wealth and herd ruled over by a vampire. A domain can be as large as the vampire that holds it can maintain. Some are only so big as a building or a farm, some are whole sprawling city states.

domitor: A vampire who possesses another via the Blood Oath.

elder: A vampire over the age of two hundred years old.

Embrace, the: The act of killing a person and birthing a vampire.

Erciyas Fragments, the: A known Book of Nod apocrypha, detailing the Cainite creation myth.

fledgling: A freshly Embraced vampire. Traditionally one that has not yet been introduced to Damned society still under her sire's wing.

Gehenna: The Final Nights when Caine and the Antediluvians will rise and battle each other over the final fate of the world.

Generation: How many steps a vampire is from their progenitor. How potent her blood is.

ghoul: A human tool, empowered by and addicted to vampire blood.

Golconda: A state of balance between the Beast and the soul. A vampire at peace with herself.

haven: a safe place a vampire sleeps to escape the ravages of the sun.

kine, the: Humanity. People. Anything not a vampire or a ghoul.

Kiss, the: The act of feeding. The euphoric feeling in kine when bitten by a vampire.

Laibon: African word for Cainite; this term eschews the Caine mythology.

Lextalionis: The Traditions as handed down in the Book of Nod.

lineage: The family line of a vampire tracing back sire to sire.

Long Night, the: The dark, calmer period prior to the War of Princes.

lord: a vampire ruler of a domain.

Lupine: A werewolf.

Methuselah: Vampires of the 5th and 6th generation. The oldest active vampires.

neonate: A vampire under one hundred years old.

Old Ways, the:

Prince: A traditional city ruler, claiming authority over the Traditions.

progenitor: The first vampire. Thought to be Caine in regions where the Book of Nod is accepted as true.

regnant: A vampire in possession of a ghoul.

revenant: Less a vampire, the offspring of a ghoul family that has developed some strange powers themselves.

Road: A way of surviving the ravages of the ages. Vampiric ethics and spiritual guidance. How a vampire justifies the actions he takes.

sire: A vampire who creates another.

Thaumaturgy: Blood magic.

Third Mortal, the: Another name for Caine in Noddist regions.

thrall: A vampire or kine possessed by a vampire through the Blood Oath.

Traditions of Caine, the: The rules allegedly handed down by the progenitor of vampires through the Book of Nod. The wording and meanings of each is hotly contested.

vessel: Most usually, a kine from whom a vampire drinks.

vitae: Blood.

War of Ages, the: The ostensible war between Antediluvians; fought with entire clans, cities, and nations as pawns.

War of Princes, the: The current war for territory and control between provincial lords.