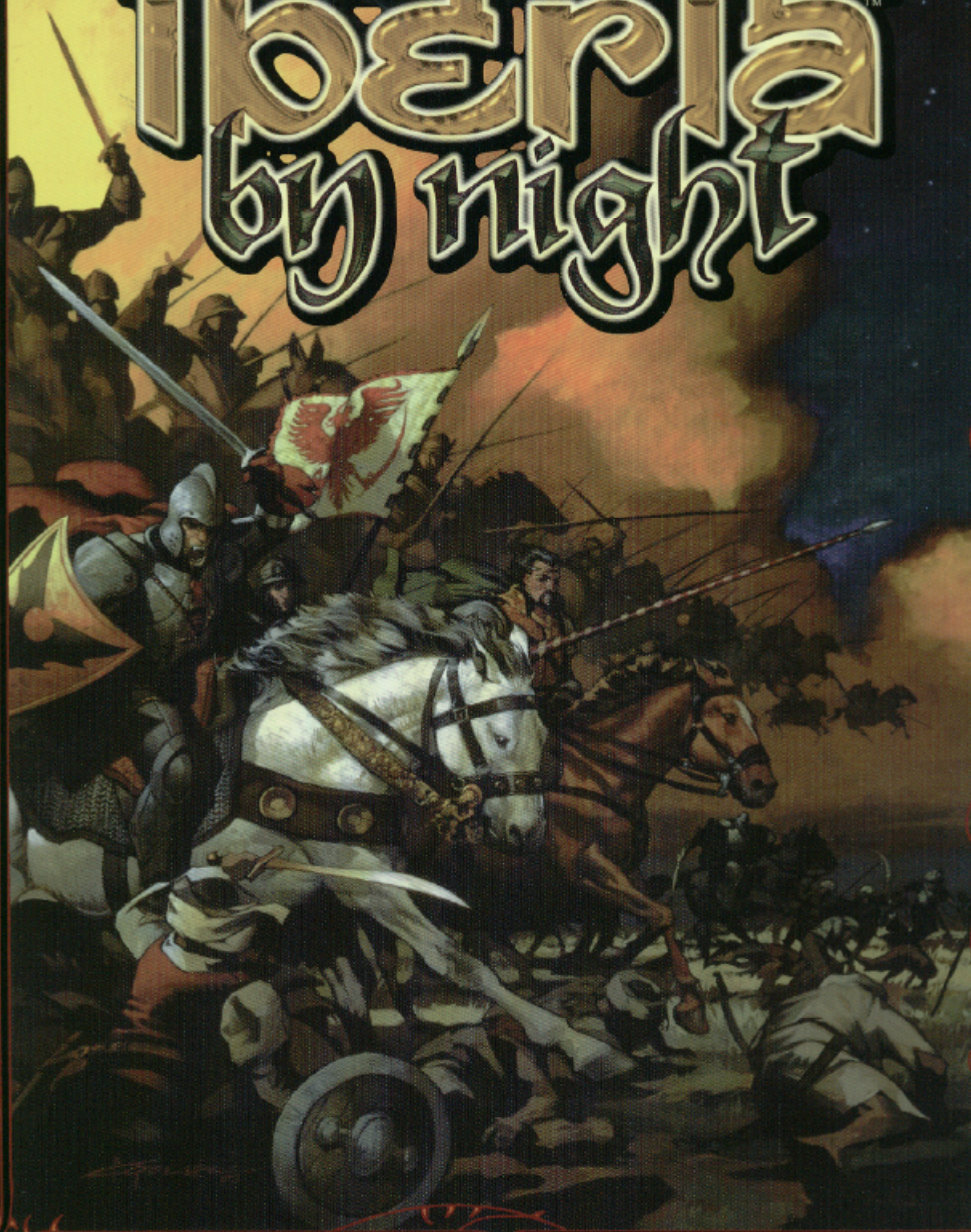
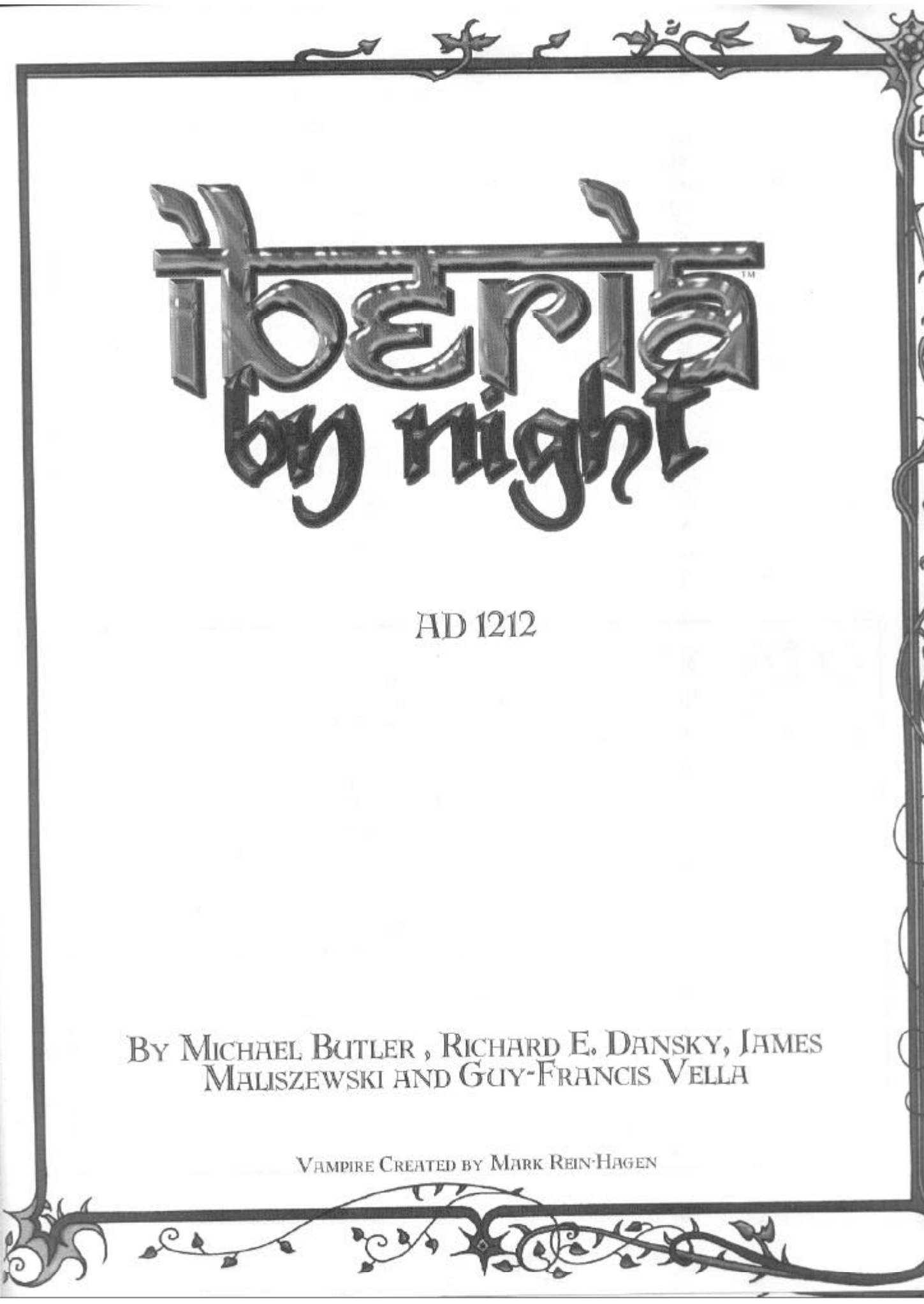


BoeriaTM by night



A SOURCEBOOK FOR
VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES®



iberiaTM by night

AD 1212

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To **MT**, **Justin** "Speed Racer J" **Achilli**, and **Fred** "Où est Sylvie?" **Yelk**, for Friday night foolishness and Saturday pains.



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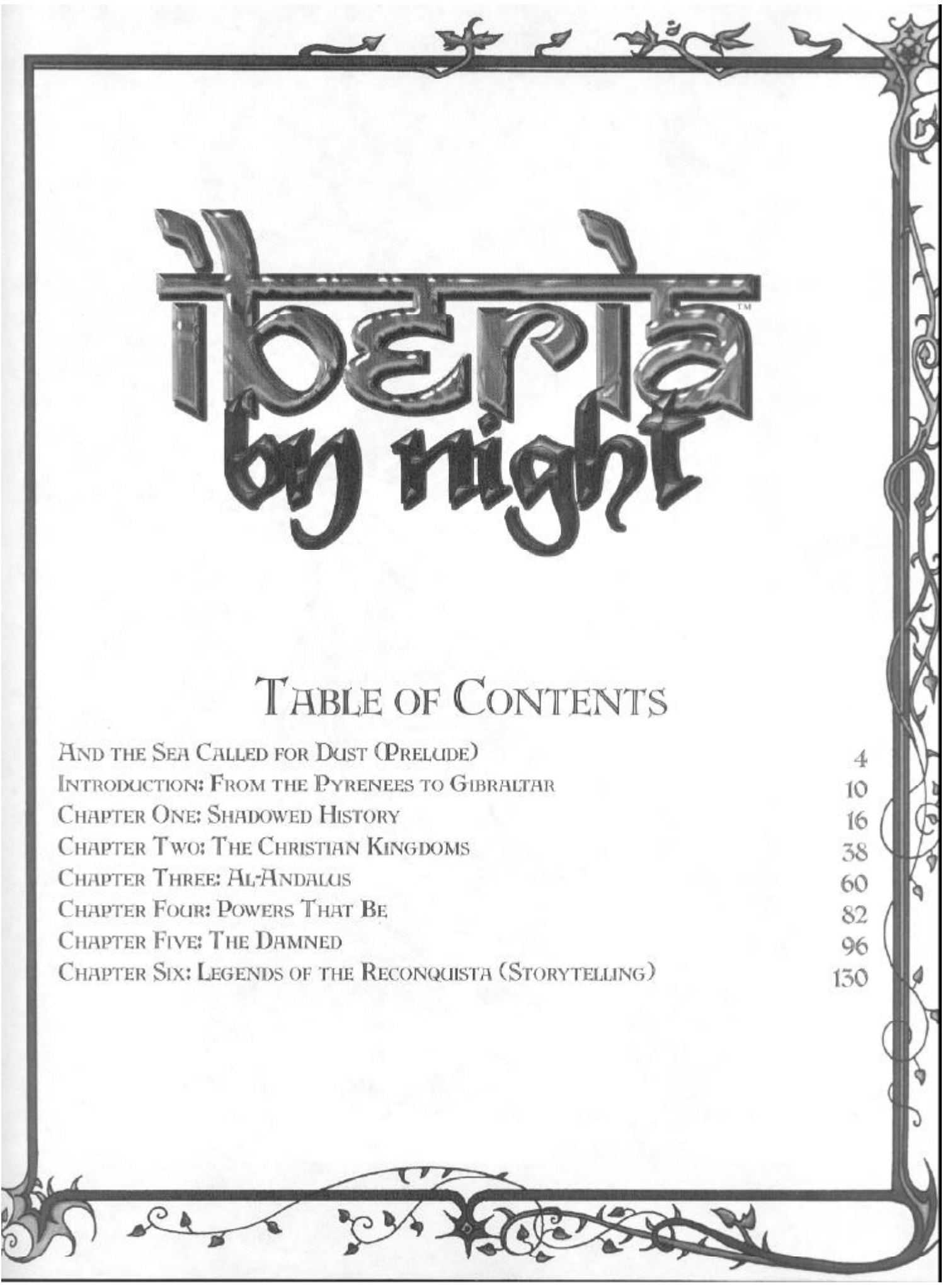
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Iberia by night

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And the Sea Called for Dust

They have a saying about Ceuta, the Cairites do: Careful where you tread or you'll walk on your grandsire. Oh the city is pretty enough and ships sail in and out of its harbor like great, slow birds, but there has been blood here. In 1148 (as the few surviving Christians reckon it) the Almohads swept through it like a breath of fire.

There had been Jews in Ceuta then, wealthy and secure in their ancient residence. They died. There were Christians, who thought that trade and hard labor shared with Muslims on the dock would somehow shield them from the sword. They died. Followers of the Prophet protested when the blood flowed in the streets, and they died, too. The Almohads were not men with a great store of patience, and when they had finished bending Ceuta to their will, they moved on.

If you go to the *sug*, or walk down by the docks, you can perhaps find graybeards who remember those days. For a coin, or perhaps a meal, they can tell the story endlessly — how they hid in alleys, or in barrels, or peeking up from cellars, as the strange fierce horsemen swept by. Every year the tellers of the tales grow fewer, and the tales themselves grow grander, until even those few survivors can scarcely remember how it had really been.

Other eyes watched those nights of blood and fire, eyes of the dead. The sons of Seth and the sons of Caine had suffered equally at the invaders' hands, though no one would sing *Qaddish* for Salomon ibn Jedah ibn Gabirol. After all, no one knew he was there, and the wind carried his dust to the sea. All of the Cainites of Ceuta died, then, save those few who fled. Before the Almohads, the city had been a popular place for the unliving of al-Andalus, a safe port and a welcoming harbor. Mortals call it a haunted city, and they are not far wrong.

†††

Almost a century after that bloody time, two weary travelers surveyed the ashen city and remembered. The first was tall, with the sharp features and sun-darkened skin of one of the Almoravids. Close inspection would reveal that the cut of his robe was perhaps a hundred years out of date, but close inspection was not something this man encouraged. No sword hung at his belt, but still, the cutpurses and thieves of Ceuta let him pass unmolested. "The man who is a sword," said one of the thieves, "has no need to carry one." The others nodded and left to seek easier prey.

The second traveler was in all ways the opposite of his companion. He was short and heavy, and his steps were frequent as he hurried to keep up. A casual observer would have seen the bag he carried slung over one shoulder and decided that he was a physician, and they would not have been entirely wrong.

"How much further is it, Ibrahim?" said the shorter of the two men. "We're short on time, especially if that devil ibn Sa'id finds us here."

"Isaac, my friend," said the other man quietly, "he has much less of a chance of finding us if you find it in your heart to embrace silence. And he's no devil. I know; I've met him. He's as much a man as you or I."

IBERIA BY NIGHT

"All things considered," snorted Isaac, "that is small comfort indeed." The two moved through the night with the pace of tired hunters on the trail of wounded prey. They moved through the narrow streets with inexorable purpose, though now and again Ibrahim stopped, examined some intersection or fallen piece of stone, and then set off on his way again.

Eventually, the two found themselves in what a generous man would call a cemetery, what an unkind man would call a field. Here and there stones poked through the weeds, though more had been kicked over than still stood upright. "This is the place," Ibrahim said, and folded his arms across his chest. "Hurry."

"You're sure?" Isaac looked around, sniffed the night air and began clearing brush away from one of the stones. "It doesn't look like the histories said it would, not at all."

"That's because the histories were written by a handful of terrified refugees who were too busy running to take notes on the scenery, Isaac. Now by the Prophet's beard, would you please do what you have to? I dislike being here almost as much as you do, and I'm not the one they're trying to kill."

Isaac muttered under his breath. "That's just a matter of timing, Ibrahim. Now hush." With that, he knelt down in front of the grave marker, taking care not to brush off the pebbles on top of the stone. Humming to himself, Isaac placed both hands on the stone, closed his eyes and concentrated. Behind him, Ibrahim turned in slow circles, keeping a watchful eye out for interlopers. In the distance, he could hear the seabirds whining into the night. Otherwise, Ceuta slept silently. Even the thieves and lovers had gone to bed, and Ceuta had been left to the dead. For that, the dead were profoundly thankful.

Perhaps a minute later, Isaac moaned and stumbled back from the stone. "Merciful God," he said, and sank back to his knees. "Oh, Lord, why?"

With two strides, Ibrahim was next to him. "Did you see what you needed to?"

Isaac nodded as the other man helped him to his feet. "Saw that, and more. The dust we need is over there," he said, and gestured to the southeast. "If you could see what I just saw, Ibrahim, you'd want to pluck out your eyes. It was ibn Sa'id, Ibrahim. The Almohads had already razed the *juderia* and moved on. They were dead, of course, but they'd moved on. Salomon had brought them here and hidden them, and they thought it was safe. And then Sa'id came, and he tore away the shadows Salomon was hiding them with, and he made him *watch*..." Isaac straightened and shook himself, then strode purposefully forward. His companion followed. "The sooner we're away from here, Ibrahim, the better. Let's get the dust and go."

"Is it Salomon's dust we're after?"

"No, that's long since been scattered. I just want the dust from where he bled and fell. There's still something there that I can use, or more accurately, that a seer I know in Burgos can use."

"Wonderful," Ibrahim grumbled. "And what are you hoping for from this dust? Directions to the gates of Paradise, perhaps?"

Isaac snorted. "Hardly. Salomon ibn Gabirol was a scholar and a poet. In his living days, he wrote a book. It was called *Fons Vitae*."

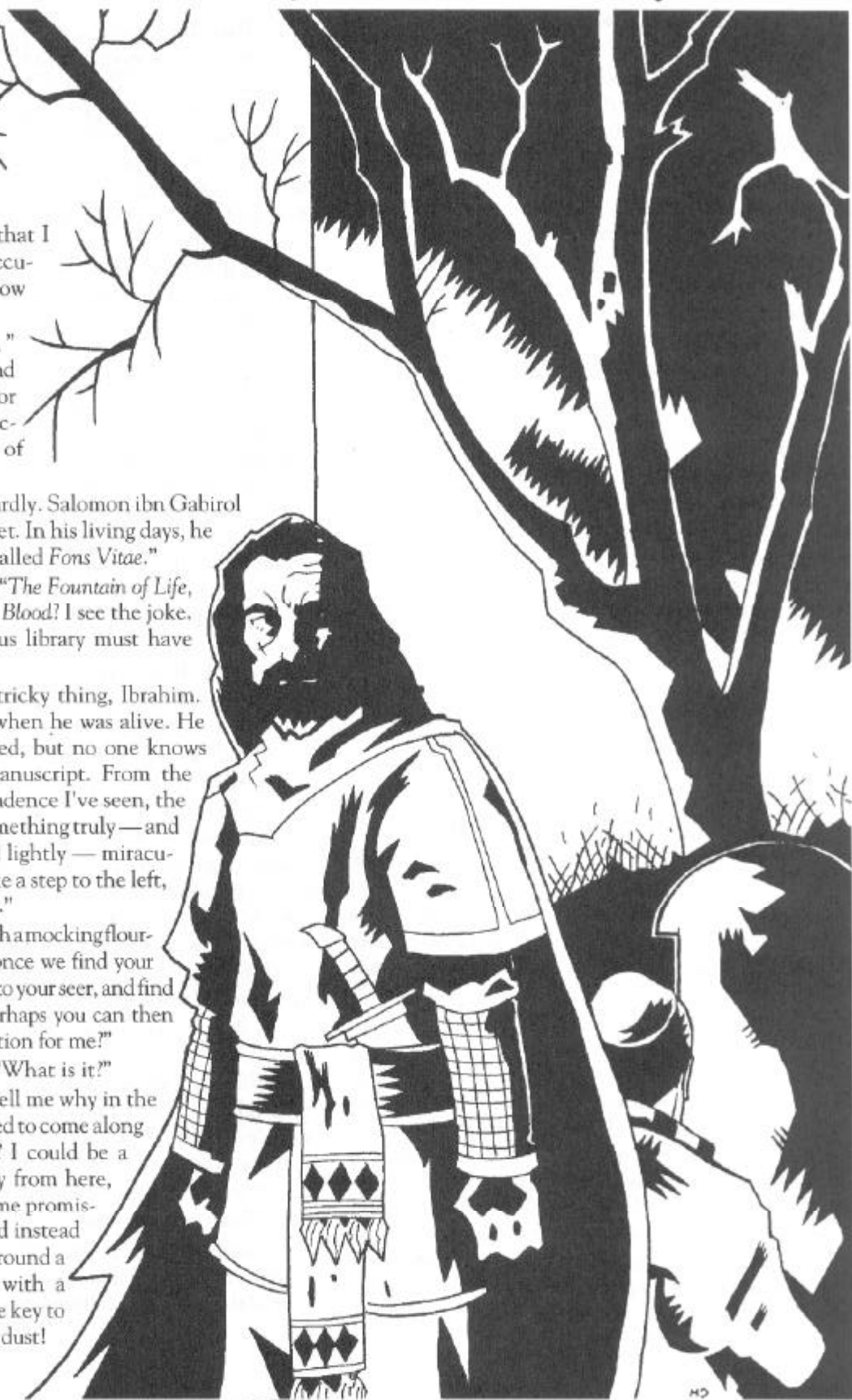
Ibrahim laughed. "The *Fountain of Life*, or is it the *Fountain of Blood*? I see the joke. But surely your famous library must have had a copy, yes?"

"Ah, there's the tricky thing, Ibrahim. He wrote *Fons Vitae* when he was alive. He rewrote it after he died, but no one knows where he left the manuscript. From the scraps of his correspondence I've seen, the second version was something truly — and I do not use this word lightly — miraculous. Here we are. Take a step to the left, if you please, Ibrahim."

Ibrahim bowed with a mocking flourish. "Of course. And once we find your magic dust, and take it to your seer, and find your magical book, perhaps you can then answer one small question for me?"

Isaac looked up. "What is it?"

"Can you please tell me why in the Prophet's name I agreed to come along on this fool's errand? I could be a hundred leagues away from here, playing chess with some promising young scholar, and instead I find myself poking around a dead man's abattoir with a lunatic who thinks the key to his library lies in the dust!"



AND THE SEA CALLED FOR DUST

Allah, save me from madmen, and save me doubly from dead ones."

Shaking his head, Isaac ran dust through his fingers. "You are here, Don Ibrahim, because you are a man of honor, and because I saved your noble neck when you were younger, weaker and less tactful than you are now. And now you will do me the great and good favor of respecting your elder in blood, and remaining silent for one moment while I find exactly what I need. Then we can leave this misbegotten plague pit of a city, you can consider your debt to me discharged, and then you never have to see me again. Unless, of course, you want to see how it all comes out."

"Right now all I want to see are the walls of Ceuta receding in the distance. Hurry."

"Patience, my friend. You wouldn't want me to rush this and make an error. We'd have to come back and do this all over again, you know. Ah, here we are," Isaac said, and drew a pinch of gray dust from the ground between his fingers. Gingerly, he reached into his physicians' bag and brought forth a ceramic flask. With long, thin fingers, he unstopped it and let the dust trickle in. He repeated the operation three times while Ibrahim, at first interested, grew bored and returned to scanning their surroundings.

Finally satisfied, Isaac stoppered the last of the flasks and put them back in his pouch. "I am quite ready to leave this place, Ibrahim. Ibrahim?"

"Sssh!" The taller man motioned for silence. "What do you hear?"

Isaac listened for a moment. "I hear nothing."

"That," said Ibrahim, "is exactly what I was afraid of. Let us depart."

"Indeed," Isaac said, and ran. Ibrahim followed, a half step behind. They bolted through the cemetery gate as a low, rumbling laughter drifted up over them. "Thunder?" Isaac panted.

"There are no clouds," Ibrahim replied, and redoubled his pace. Ahead of them, a man — or something that had once been a man — jumped out of an alley, brandishing a wicked-looking knife. With just the merest hint of a break in stride, Ibrahim reached out and clenched his fist. A frisson of cold knotted his stomach, even as a rope of shadow reached from the alley from whence the man came. In an instant it wrapped around his throat, and there was a sudden, sharp sound of something hard cracking. Then the tentacle dissipated, and the man's body slumped to the ground. Before it hit, Ibrahim and Isaac were already past it.

"There'll be more where he came from, I'm sure," shouted Ibrahim, even as two more rose up from behind a peddler's cart and leaped forward. Isaac somehow twisted in midair, dodged, and then brought his hand around on the back of his assailant's neck. The man fell to the street and did not move again. Ibrahim, meanwhile, caught his assailant as the man leaped then threw him aside. He landed against a wall with a shuddering crunch, and upstairs a dog began barking. Ahead, more figures filled the street. An arrow whizzed past, and shouting could be heard behind them as well.

"We can't fight them all and hope to get past ibn Sa'id," Isaac shouted. "There's too many."

Ibrahim looked wildly left and right, then suddenly gestured. "Down this alley. Hurry!" He ran, and Isaac followed. In the street behind, men and things that were not quite men bellowed defiance. The pursuers ran past locked doors, past empty barrels and heaps of moldering trash. The alley was so narrow that the sky above was reduced to the thinnest strip. The hard-packed dirt and stone of the alley floor echoed under their footsteps, and behind them, the pursuit still came on.

Inevitably, perhaps, the alley ended in a wall. At the top of the wall crouched a half-dozen grim-faced men with swords. Behind them hovered a cloud of blackness that promised something terrible hiding in its depths. All Ceuta, it seemed, was waiting for them.

"Well," Isaac said, and turned to Ibrahim, "that turned out poorly. Do you have a plan to get us out of here?"

Ibrahim nodded. "I do," he said, and with absolutely no expression he watched a tendril of shadow tear off Isaac's head. Blood fountained out and the body collapsed to the alley floor. Ibrahim felt the soulless inner cold he had come to know as his Beast grow that much stronger. Then he took a step back and waited.

He did not have to wait long. "Ibrahim!" boomed a voice from the wall. "I see you have something for me."

"I do," he replied, quietly. "Come down here and take it."

With that, a figure leaped down, landing lightly and gracefully even in the muck of the alley. He was tall — taller even than Ibrahim — and he wore all white. "You cost me three of my childer," he said.

"Two. The one I struck will recover."

"Three. He failed me. I don't want him to recover."

Ibrahim shrugged. "Bismallah. In any case, Isaac ibn Mushad is dead, and his blood is spilling on my boots. My part of the bargain is fulfilled. Is yours?"

Ibn Sa'id nodded. "They are already on their way back across the water. Damn the old ones for giving this land back to the Christians. They don't deserve it."

"With all of the plotting the taifas did against one another, neither did we. The old ones have spoken. You've gotten more for your cooperation than many. Be content."

"Oh, I am, I am." Ibn Sa'id kicked the corpse, then leaped back up to the top of the wall. The men who had stood there had already faded into the night. "I do wonder, though, Ibrahim. He seemed to think you owed him a debt of honor, and yet you killed him. Why?"

Ibrahim began walking back out of the alley, slowly. "A promise made to an infidel is no promise at all, ibn Sa'id. You should know that well enough."

Laughter drifted down. "Well said. This, then, is farewell to thee, Ibrahim. I won't see you again." There was a rustle of cloth, and then suddenly, Ibrahim was alone. He waited for what would once have been a dozen heartbeats, and then a dozen more.

Satisfied that he was indeed by himself, Ibrahim turned back to the quickly decomposing corpse on the alley floor. In a matter of minutes, it was nothing but some dust. Gently, he reached down and took the physician's satchel from the dirt, and with a cough slung it over his shoulder. Then, he took a handful of the gray dust and cast it into the air. There was a night breeze off the water, which caught the dust and wafted it off into invisibility. Before it vanished completely, Ibrahim began chanting. The language he spoke was almost familiar, the words uncertain. But even as Farouk ibn Sa'id led his childer to the docks, to the ships that awaited them, the man who answered to no name but Ibrahim sang *Qaddish* to the night.

And when he was done, he walked out of the alley and set forth for the city of Burgos. There were promises one need not keep to an infidel, after all, that one could still keep to a friend.







Introduction: From the Pyrenees to Gibraltar

A LAND DIVIDED

The Iberian Peninsula, which will one day become Spain and Portugal, is the flash point of Christian-Muslim conflict in the early thirteenth century. Indeed, while the Crusades for the Holy Land are fought in Outremer (literally, "across the sea"), the battle in Iberia is in Europe proper. The Christians have gradually pushed the Muslims south for centuries, but the battle is now in its most chaotic and decisive stage. And where there are kingdoms to be won and vengeance to be had, the childer of Caine are never far away.

THE CHRISTIAN RECONQUISTA

The Christian north is united behind the concept of a reconquest — in Castilian, *Reconquista* — of the peninsula from the Muslims who invaded it in the eighth century. This philosophical unity is hardly secure, however, as a variety of ambitious kings vie for influence in the Christian north. Once the Kingdom of Navarre was supreme, now León and Castile are on the rise. Yet, the Crown of Aragon and the Kingdom of Portugal are expanding as well. These kings and their knights are hardly above fighting one another. **Chapter Two: The Christian Kingdoms** details these lands.

THE MOORISH TAIFAS

The situation is much the same in the Muslim south, known as al-Andalus. Many of these lands have been Islamic for centuries, but various dynasties have come and gone. Once the Cordoban Caliphate stood as the apex of Moorish Iberia, but now it too is a patchwork. The Almohads, a Berber dynasty that rules North Africa, claim to rule al-Andalus from their capital at Sevilla. The truth is that most of the territory is divided between dozens of petty kingdoms called *taifas*. Faced with a dynamic Christian threat, they choose to fight among one another and hence seal their doom. **Chapter Three: Al-Andalus** covers the *taifas*.

IN THE SHADOWS

With its heady combination of religious fervor, Byzantine intrigues and martial exploits, Iberia makes the ideal nesting ground for Clan Lasombra. The Magisters reign preeminent among the many local clans, and they intend to keep it that way. But the religious and political conflict of the *Reconquista* divides them as well — as fervent Muslim Lasombra try to save al-Andalus, while their Christian clanmates embark on the Shadow *Reconquista*. In the chaos, many others are trying to position themselves to cut at the Magisters' power. **Chapter Four: Powers That Be** and **Chapter Five: The Damned** detail many of the vampiric intrigues within and around Clan Lasombra.

FURTHER COMPLEXITY

The divide between Christian north and Muslim south is a facile one that hides much of the richness of Iberia. Indeed, as the *Reconquista* nears its endgame, it's easy to forget that there are more than just two sides to this war. There are far more to Iberians than that.

MINORITY GROUPS

Indeed, Christian Iberians do not think of themselves as "Spanish" but as Aragonese, Navarese, Castilians or any other local affiliation. The divisions among the Muslim *taifas* are even greater, leading to similar local identifications. Even beyond this localization, there are many minority groups whose unique cultures tend to get pushed to the sidelines of history. Storytellers looking to add flavor — and pathos — to their chronicles might consider using these groups. Some of the most important minorities are:

- **Basques:** The Basque (or "Euskaldunak" in their native tongue) speak Euskera, one of the oldest languages in Europe and very different from any other on the peninsula. For the most part, they live in Navarre and are ethnically distinct from the peoples who surround them both inside the kingdom and in France and Iberia, having preserved their identity among the waves of invaders that have passed through the region since prehistoric times. The Basques have many unique traditions, including the game of *jai alai*, which plays an important role in many of their festivals and celebrations. At the turn of the thirteenth century, the Basques still retain much of the identity and culture, although as Navarre's position becomes weaker relative to other Iberian states, their culture also comes under threat.

- **Jews:** There has been a Jewish presence in Iberia since Visigothic times. Despite notable incidents of persecution, it has remained very healthy. In much of Muslim Iberia, Jews enjoy status as *dhimmi*, or protected persons, and can continue to worship relatively freely (although they must pay a poll tax for this right). In some Christian cities, Jews enjoy similar status, but in others they have been compelled to convert to Christianity (either in the face of actual threats or socioeconomic incentives). These converts are called *conversos*. Those *conversos* who secretly keep up private Jewish worship are known as *marranos*.

- **Mozarabs:** The Mozarabs are the Christians of Muslim Iberia. They form a separate community and retain a certain degree of independence as *dhimmi* under Muslim rule. The Mozarabs have their own rulers, called counts, who are directly responsible to the Muslim caliph. Special agents, who ensure they are kept separate from those of the Muslims, collect their taxes for the Muslim rulers. They are allowed to maintain their religious hierarchy, and they use Visigothic canon law. Their liturgy, called the Mozarabic

rite, is similar to that of ancient Gaul and shows influence from the Byzantine Empire. Although reasonably well protected, the Mozarabs have suffered persecution in Muslim lands at various points in their history.

The chief Mozarab centers are Toledo, Sevilla and Córdoba. These Christians speak both Arabic and Mozarabic, and retain many cultural traditions from the Visigothic era. As the *Reconquista* heats up, more and more Mozarabs have fallen under Christian rule, where their exotic ways often make them the objects of suspicion and distrust.

- **Muwallads:** While many Jews and Mozarabs continue their religious practice under Muslim rule, many others have converted to Islam over the centuries. As in Christian lands, reasons for doing so vary from the threat of pogrom to simple economic incentive (Muslims need not pay the *dhimmi* poll tax). The *Muwallads* and their descendants maintain an ethnic identity largely separate from the Arab and Berber aristocracy that rules over them in the Cordoban, Almoravid and Almohad dynasties. They have risen to positions of leadership in several kingdoms and even were in open revolt against the Cordoban state at the end of the ninth century.

LANGUAGES

The Iberian Peninsula is a melting pot of cultures and religions. The region is likewise home to numerous languages, each one associated with a particular culture or kingdom.

- **Arabic:** Arabic is still widely spoken throughout Iberia, being a language used in common by all Muslim — and many non-Muslim — cultures. Both the Jews and the Mozarabs frequently use Arabic, even within Christian territories. Likewise, many scholars have learned Arabic as a means of reading the ancient texts that survive in Muslim libraries throughout the peninsula.

- **Aragonese:** The language of Aragon, it is spoken in the older parts of that kingdom, including Zaragoza and Lérida. It is quite similar to Castilian, and will eventually be absorbed by it.

- **Castilian:** The Romance language that will become modern Spanish, Castilian emerged around Burgos in Old Castile and spread with the *Reconquista* to Madrid, Toledo and the rest of New Castile. It will eventually absorb Aragonese and Leonese as the three kingdoms merge in the centuries to come.

- **Catalan:** Spoken in Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia, Catalan is another Romance language with similarities to both Castilian and French. Continued contact with Provence and the rest of France maintains that distinction.

PUTTING IT INTO DOTS

For most purposes, learning each language requires one dot in Linguistics. Many of the languages in the Spanish group are similar enough to be mutually understood with some effort. A speaker of Castilian, Aragonese, Leonese, Catalan or Portuguese can understand and get by in those other languages if the player makes an Intelligence + Linguistics roll (difficulty 5). The same character could understand Mozarabic with the same roll (difficulty 7). An Mozarabic speaker faces that difficulty with any other Spanish language. In all these cases, the roll allows understanding and very accented speech; for a character to speak properly, a player needs to have a dot in that language.

Remember to use the automatic success rule to determine when the player no longer needs to roll. For example, a Castilian character with Intelligence 3 and Linguistics 2 need not roll to understand and communicate in Aragonese, Leonese, Catalan or Portuguese.

- **Euskera:** The language of the Basques, Euskera is spoken in Navarre and several of the surrounding areas. It is a distinct language from all others on the peninsula, and one of the last healthy remnants of the languages spoken before Roman times. It shares very little with any of the Spanish languages. Learning it can be a real challenge.

- **Hebrew:** Although not spoken as widely as many other languages, Hebrew remains an important tongue of Iberia. Jewish communities — both under Muslim and Christian rule — continue to use Hebrew in both religious services and scholarship. In some instances, Jews use Arabic script to write in Hebrew, requiring skill in both languages to decipher its meaning.

- **Leonese:** Like Aragonese, Leonese (or, more precisely, *astur-leonés*) is bound to be absorbed by Castilian in the centuries to come. It began in Asturias and is now spoken in most of León, except in the northwest, which uses Galician, from which Portuguese is derived.

- **Mozarabic:** The Mozarab language, Mozarabic is an archaic dialect of Castilian Spanish that borrows heavily from Arabic. Always a minority language, Mozarabic is slowly dying out as the *Reconquista* brings the Mozarabs under Catholic rule.

- **Portuguese:** Another Romance language with common roots with Castilian, Portuguese is spoken in the expanding Kingdom of Portugal and in the Leonese territory directly to its north (in the form of Galician).

How to Use This Book

Iberia by Night is your guide to the peninsula from the Pyrenees to the Rock of Gibraltar. Set just as the Christian mortals are celebrating their decisive victory at Las Navas de Tolosa, it captures a region in the midst of massive change. This is, of course, a lot to cover in these pages, but you will find plenty of material to bring your **Dark Ages** chronicle to the peninsula.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Chapter One: Shadowed History presents a survey of Iberian history from ancient times to Las Navas de Tolosa and beyond. It provides information of the Carthaginian and Romans settlement, on the Visigothic era and on the histories of the current Muslim and Christian powers at play. The chapter focuses on human history but provides plentiful information on vampiric goings on.

Chapter Two: The Christian Kingdoms covers geography and society of the Kingdoms of Navarre, León, Castile, Portugal and the Crown of Aragon. It provides descriptions and details on all the major cities and their key vampiric inhabitants. Important intrigues come to light across the Christian north.

Chapter Three: Al-Andalus provides the same treatment for the Muslim south. It covers all the regions still under Muslim control, including Valencia, Córdoba, Sevilla, Granada and the Balearic Islands.

Chapter Four: Powers That Be Examines some of the key vampiric and mortal institutions at play in Iberia. These include the doings of the Lasombra's secret council of *Amici Noctis*, the Knights of Santiago, and the cabal of witch-hunters called the Sword of St. James.

Chapter Five: The Damned provides background and game statistics for some of the most influential and involved Cainites in Iberia. This chapter does not attempt to catalog all the unliving of the peninsula, of course, only the key players.

Chapter Six: Legends of the Reconquista provides tools and advice for setting a chronicle in Iberia. It includes

THE ASHIRRA AND VEIL OF NIGHT

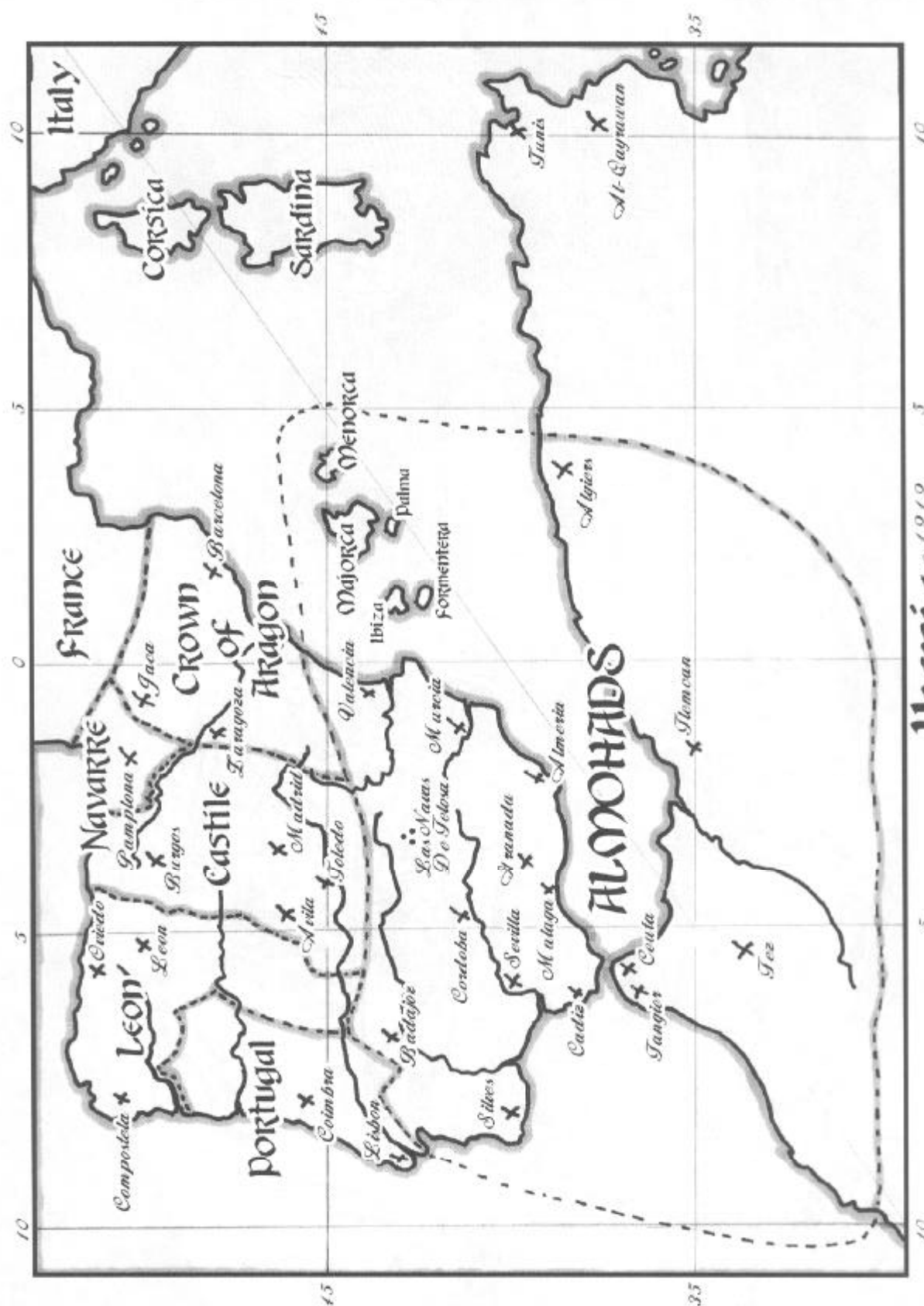
Iberia by Night serves as an excellent complement to **Veil of Night**, the sourcebook on the Cainites of the medieval Muslim world. That tome includes some basic information on al-Andalus that this book expands and updates. **Veil of Night** also includes a great deal of information on the philosophies and cultures of Cainites in Muslim lands, most notably the Ashirra sect that believes in an Islamic path through vampirism. These details can only enrich a chronicle set in Iberia, even one starring Christian characters. **Veil of Night** is not required reading to enjoy **Iberia by Night**, however. Not only is all the required information between these pages, **Iberia** keeps the Arabic terms to a minimum, using the European clan and Road names readers are more familiar with. Those who have **Veil of Night** can easily substitute Bay't Mushakis for Clan Brujah and Tariq el-Umma for Road of Humanity.

a description of several options, including running a centuries-long *Reconquista* chronicle or ruling a *taifa*.

DATES

Iberia by Night is set in AD 1212 instead of the standard **Dark Ages** date of AD 1197. This is so for two reasons: The chronicle supplement **Bitter Crusade** recently charted major vampiric events in the period from 1202 to 1204 or so, and this allows **Iberia by Night** to follow up on some of those plot threads. More importantly, however, 1212 is simply a more dramatic time than 1197 for the *Reconquista*. It is the year of the great Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa, which essentially breaks the back of the Moorish presence on the peninsula (although their retreat takes many more years). It's more interesting to play a chronicle set at a moment of transformation than one set 15 years before.

If you wish to set your games in 1197 or even in the decades after 1212, you'll have no difficulty doing so. Use the history in **Chapter One** and the destinies of various characters in **Chapter Five** to adjust the setting to your heart's content.



Iberia c.1212

FROM THE PYRENEES TO GIBRALTAR





Chapter One: Shadowed History

*Let the night pass and morning come
Look that ye ready be*

*With arms and horses. We will forth
that host of theirs to see.*

*Like men gone out in exile into a strange
empire,*

*There shall it be determined who is wor-
thy of his hire.*

- The Song of the Cid

The history of the Iberian Peninsula is a long and complicated one, filled with multiple waves of invaders, each impressing their culture upon the region. Since the tenth century, the battles between the Christian states of the north and the Muslim empire of the south have complicated matters further. In addition, the various Christian kingdoms have long and intricate relationships, often joining one another as the result of political alliances or marriages. Those unions then collapse and new kingdoms are born. Consequently, it is almost impossible to do proper justice to the history of the peninsula. What follows is a necessarily abbreviated and simplified version of Iberian history for the benefit of setting chronicles in this dynamic region of the Dark Medieval age.

ANCIENT HISTORY

The oldest histories claim that the children of Tubal and Tarsis first settled the Iberian Peninsula. They were, so the stories go, the son and grandson of Japheth, himself the son of the patriarch Noah. The peninsula takes its name from the Iberians, a Mediterranean Bronze Age culture that settled the east coast. Some claim the Basques are descendants of ancient Iberians, but the truth of these claims a matter of conjecture, even among Cainites. Over the course of several centuries, the Iberians and the Celts — who occupied much of France, Britain and Ireland in ancient times — came into close contact. With the Celts may have come solitary members of Clan Gangrel. If true, the Animals would have been the first vampires to inhabit the peninsula — although no trace of such ancient Gangrel remains. The meeting of the Celts and Iberians produced the region's first multicultural civilization — a harbinger of the mixing and fusing that was to become a hallmark of the peninsula.

The Phoenicians were the first true empire-builders to come to Iberia. They colonized its Mediterranean coasts, establishing several settlements (called "factories") in the south. The most significant of these factories was Gadir (later Gades under the Romans) on the site of what would become Cadiz. Gadir was the center of Phoenician power in Iberia as well as the heart of their cult of Melqart (a Phoenician god later associated with Hercules). Although the worship of Hercules has long since disappeared from Iberia, its presence still echoes in place names, most notably the Pillars of Hercules at the edge of the peninsula. Legends among the later Cainite population suggest that Followers of Set once inhabited Iberia, based on maritime contact with Egypt and the rest of the Mediterranean basin.

After the Phoenicians came the Greeks, who established several colonies and outposts, including Rodhe (modern Rosas), Emporium (Ampurias) and Saguntum (Sagunto). Both the Phoenicians and the Greeks suc-

ceeded in bringing Iberia into the mainstream of Mediterranean culture. Consequently, the peninsula soon drew the attention of other imperial powers — and the Cainites who traveled in their wake.

CARTHAGINIAN IBERIA

The next people to set their eyes on Iberia were the Carthaginians, who first settled the Balearic Isles in the seventh century BC. In the sixth century, they took possession of Cadiz from the Phoenicians and set up trading outposts in the south. Following in the wake of the Carthaginians came Cainites from several clans, most notably Brujah and Lasombra. Unlike their North African counterparts, these Brujah seemed not to equate the idea of a Cainite utopia with any one place, believing it transcended both place and time. The Lasombra who accompanied them seem to have held similar ideals, although elders of the clan sought to found a society where Cainites ruled openly over mortals. Both the Brujah, led by the prophetic Yzebel, and Lasombra neonates who found common cause with the Zealots opposed the Magister elders. Infighting thus marked the first few centuries of verifiable Cainite presence in the peninsula. The Brujah and younger Lasombra usually held the upper hand, but the arrival of the Lasombra elder Zinnridi around 300 BC shifted the balance. Zinnridi was an accomplished warrior who rallied his followers against the Brujah and rebellious Lasombra. Only his Final Death at the hands of Yzebel herself prevented the Lasombra from gaining total dominion over Iberia.

Unfortunately, Zinnridi's defeat was a Pyrrhic victory for the Brujah. Their losses to Zinnridi's attacks made them easy targets for Roman Ventrue, who arrived later in the third century BC. Mortal Rome's victory against Carthage in the First Punic War emboldened the Ventrue, who began to appear in larger numbers. The mortal Carthaginians responded to their loss by attempting to conquer the whole of the Iberian Peninsula, believing it would compensate them for their losses in Sicily and elsewhere. Their conquest was begun by Hamilcar Barca, and ultimately extended as far as the Ebro River, but it met with stiff local resistance. Istolacius and Indortes, two Celtiberian chieftains, raised an army of 50,000 men to fight against the Carthaginians. In the end, the rebellion was crushed and the leaders were put to death. But Orison, another Iberian chief, defeated Hamilcar at Helike (modern Elche), killing the general and throwing the Carthaginians into disarray.

As the Punic Wars heated up, the childer of Zinnridi abandoned their Carthaginian brethren and supported the Roman cause. They did this not out of newfound love for Ventrue Rome, but for purely pragmatic reasons. They saw that Carthage's days were numbered. Only by supporting Rome could they ever hope to achieve the dominion their sire sought to achieve.

Moreover, these Cainites saw military prowess as the highest form of achievement. From this point on, they slowly began embracing key military leaders as part of their ultimate plan for ruling the peninsula.

Meanwhile, a slave assassinated Hasdrubal, the founder of the city of Cathago Nova (now Cartagena), causing further chaos. Hasdrubal's brother-in-law Hannibal then took control of the army to deal with the worsening situation. He quickly defeated the rebels and conquered much of the peninsula, except for the Roman dependency of Saguntum. Hannibal hated the Romans and believed taking the city would consolidate Carthage's power in Iberia against them. Instead, it drew their ire. The Romans decided to strike back against their rivals. The Second Punic War resulted in Carthage's defeat and the complete loss of Iberia. The Romans were now the peninsula's new masters — ones who would not be dislodged for centuries to come.

ROMAN IBERIA

The Carthaginian Brujah remained in Iberia. Indeed, they were joined by many more of their clanmates after the final destruction of Carthage in the Third Punic War. The Iberian Brujah were of a sober disposition. They believed in subtlety, lying in wait for the right opportunity to strike back against the Ventrue who'd orchestrated the destruction of their beloved city. For that matter, they were equally happy to harm the Lasombra as well, whose presence they also sensed during the Punic Wars. Thus, the Brujah encouraged resistance against Roman rule, a plan that worked for many years.

In the end, the Brujah miscalculated, believing the Romans would retaliate against the resistance movement in the same way they'd defeated the Carthaginians. Instead, the resistance was defeated not only by strength of arms, but through "romanization." The peninsula assimilated the culture and civilization of Rome to such a degree as to produce rhetoricians like Quintilian, poets like Lucan, Martial and Silius Italicus, philosophers like Seneca, and emperors like Trajan, Hadrian and Theodosius.

Roman civilization proved an invincible weapon. Its influence changed life in the peninsula forever. Medieval Iberia is still covered with Roman ruins, particularly aqueducts and bridges. Yet, the most lasting Roman influence is linguistic. Today, most inhabitants of the region speak a Latinate language, whether it be some dialect of Spanish or Portuguese. Only in those regions in which the Basques flourished was there any significant resistance to the Latin language. Of course, since the Moorish invasion, Arabic has proven influential as well, also affecting the development of Spanish and Portuguese.

Under Roman rule, Iberia first received Christianity — and with it a new wave of Lasombra. There is an ancient tradition that the Apostles Paul and James

came to the peninsula, as well as the so-called "Seven Apostolic Men" (named Torquatus, Ctesiphon, Secundus, Indalecius, Caecilius, Hesychius and Euphrasius), to whom the foundation of various churches is attributed. Connected with the coming of St. James is the equally ancient tradition of "Our Lady of the Pillar" (*la Virgen del Pilar*) of Zaragoza, an appearance of the Virgin Mary to St. James himself. Some of the Damned claim that among or alongside the Apostolic Men were some of the earliest followers of a Christian path of the Road of Heaven.

The Iberians were fervent believers in the new faith, suffering martyrdom during nearly every persecution the Romans instituted. The most famous of these martyrs suffered the persecution of the emperor Diocletian, which began in AD 302. Some local Ventrue elders, most notably Prince Flavius Sidonis of Zaragoza, subtly encouraged the persecutions. Sidonis and his fellows believed that Christianity threatened the unity of the empire during a critical time in its history. Thus, vampires who converted to the Way of Christ likewise suffered at the hands of their elders — a wound that festers even today.

Despite the persecutions, many Church councils were held in Iberia, the most important being those of Elvira and Zaragoza, as well as the First Council of Toledo. At the Council of Elvira in AD 324, the celibacy of the clergy was insisted upon — a practice that would not become common throughout the Church as a whole for centuries. At the Council of Toledo at the end of the fourth century, the *Filioque* ("and from the Son") clause was added to the Nicene Creed, a practice that would likewise spread throughout the Church in time, much to the consternation of the Orthodox Churches, for whom such an addition is illicit at best, heresy at worst. Nevertheless, this was a time of Christian flowering in Iberia, some of whose greatest inhabitants would rise to positions of prominence, most notably, St. Damasus, who became pope in AD 366. At the insistence of Damasus, St. Jerome undertook the translation of the Bible into Latin, producing the Vulgate used by the entire medieval Church.

VISIGOTHIC IBERIA

When the Germanic peoples invaded the Roman Empire beginning in the fourth century AD, even Iberia was not spared their depredations. Among those who invaded the peninsula were the Alani, a Scythian people, the Vandals and the Suevians, both Germanic in origin. The Alani were, for the most part, quickly defeated by the inhabitants of Iberia. The Vandals, after establishing themselves in Baetica, passed on into Africa, while the Visigoths hemmed in the Suevi in Galicia until the latter were also defeated.

THE LEGEND OF ST. JAMES

After the death of Christ, His disciples dispersed to different parts of the known world, spreading the Gospel as the Lord had commanded them. According to Christian tradition, Saint James went to Spain, where he spent a several years preaching the Good News without much success. He then returned to Jerusalem where he suffered under the persecution of Herod. In AD 44, he was captured and beheaded. Immediately following his martyrdom, his followers are said to have taken his body to the coastal city of Jaffa, where a ship miraculously appeared and carried them — and the Apostle's body — back to Spain.

The boat landed at Iria Flavia on the coast of Galicia, some fifty miles from what would one day become the city of Compostela. The entire journey from Jaffa in the eastern Mediterranean to Spain is said to have taken only one week — proof of the divine assistance his followers received on their way. Saint James's body was then buried in a hillside tomb, where it lay undisturbed and largely forgotten for the next 750 years.

Early in the ninth century, Pelagius, a hermit living in that part of Spain, had a vision, which he subsequently reported to Theodomir, bishop of Iria Flavia. In his vision, the hermit saw a large bright star, surrounded by a ring of smaller ones, shining over a deserted spot in the hills. The bishop took Pelagius at his word and ordered that the spot be investigated. After some time, the investigators unearthed three bodies buried in a tomb.

The bodies were soon identified as those of Saint James (or "Santiago" in Spanish) and two of

his followers. When Alfonso II, King of the Asturias (791-824), heard of this discovery, he went to the site of the tomb and prayed there. Afterwards, he declared St. James to be the patron and protector of the entire Iberian Peninsula. He ordered the construction of a church and a small monastery over the tomb in the saint's honor.

The contemporary city of Compostela grew up around these edifices. The origin of the site's name is another element of the legend. One theory argues that the site was originally known as *Campus de Primae Stellae* ("Field of the First Star") or *Campus Stellae*, later shortened to Compostela. Another theory is that the name derives from the Latin word *componere* ("to bury"), as a Roman cemetery or early Christian necropolis is known to have existed under the site of the present day cathedral in Santiago. The relics of St. James were then moved to that necropolis after being unearthed in the ninth century.

Once the body of St. James was securely in the hands of the Asturians, they went to great lengths to promote the site. The archbishop and the local Cluniac monks aided them in this endeavor. Both felt that the existence of a major pilgrimage site on the peninsula would lend support to the struggle against the Moors — by focusing attention and wealth in the region. When the Turks seized the Holy Sepulcher in 1078, Compostela's fortunes increased considerably. With Jerusalem now in the hands of Muslims, the final resting place of St. James became more attractive to pilgrims throughout Western Christendom. Its place — and that of the legend of St. James — has been secure ever since.

These Visigoths, originating in the east, had sacked Rome itself in AD 410 under the leadership of Alaric and turned toward the Iberian Peninsula. Their leader was Ataulf, and they occupied the northeastern regions, which thereafter received the name of Gothalandia. The Visigoths eventually extended their rule over most of the peninsula, keeping the Suevians trapped in Galicia. Finally, the chieftain Euric put an end to the last remnants of Roman power in the peninsula in AD 466. In this way, he may be considered the first monarch of Iberia, although the Suevians still maintained their independence in Galicia. Euric was also the first king to give written laws to the Visigoths.

The Visigoths were Arian heretics. That is, they believed that Christ was not God but rather a creation of God, like any other creature. However, the Iberian populace was Catholic and opposed their Visigothic

rulers in matters of religion. Thus, the Frankish kings of France (who were Catholics) attempted to establish themselves as the protectors of Iberian Catholics, leading to frequent disputes between the Franks and the Visigoths. These disputes provided an opening for the Cainite Heresy, which made a play for dominion in the peninsula. Though largely rebuffed, the Heretics put down roots in what would one day become Portugal, thereby laying a groundwork for the future.

The early years of Visigothic rule were thus characterized by both political and religious quarrels. This created substantial instability in the peninsula — which played into Lasombra hands. In the end, King Recared achieved both religious and political unity by accepting Catholicism at the Third Council of Toledo in AD 589. The religious unity established at this council was the basis for a fusion of the Goths with the Iberians, which would eventually produce the Spanish people.

A SHADOWED LAND

Brujah, Lasombra and Ventrue vampires used the cover of the Visigothic invasion to make war upon one another. Each hoped to take advantage of the chaos in Iberia to further their goals. The Ventrue hoped to restore Roman rule and a semblance of order. In keeping with their ideals, the Brujah hoped to forge a new Iberian identity that transcended all the elements that had come before. Meanwhile, the Lasombra refused to commit en masse to any one faction, instead letting their rivals destroy each other and keeping the hands on the pulse of mortal institutions across the land. This strategy can well be called cynical, but it was well advised and ushered in a era of Magister supremacy on the peninsula. In AD 585, the Final Death of the Brujah elder Yzebel at the hands of Ventrue raiders, in what would become northern Portugal, sealed the fate of both Zealots and Patricians in Iberia. Indeed, although the Ventrue claimed Yzebel's blood, they did so only with Lasombra support. The raiders all met untimely death soon thereafter. Although vampires of every clan would be found across Iberia, the peninsula was from that point on Magister land.

MUSLIM IBERIA

In the second half of the seventh century, the Byzantine resurgence begun under Justinian I fell before the expansion of Islam. By AD 698, most of North Africa was in Muslim hands, including Egypt. In 705, al-Walid I, caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, appointed Musa ibn Nusayr governor of these new territories of the empire. Musa then conquered the rest of North Africa as far as Tangiers. He also used his new position to begin converting the Berbers to Islam—a slow and difficult undertaking at which he succeeded beyond all expectations.

As Musa's armies advanced, the Assamites advanced with them, using the fog of war as a cloak for the activities of their clan. Likewise, some of the surviving Carthaginian Lasombra, as well as new arrivals, saw the march of Islam as the perfect opportunity to advance their own schemes. By the time Musa's armies reached the farthest edge of North Africa, both clans had ensconced themselves in the new Muslim society. But Cainites of both clans hoped the brilliant leader would not be content with his victories and seek out new conquests across the sea.

Those hopes were realized when the Christian ruler of Ceuta, Count Julián, reached an agreement with Musa to launch a joint invasion of the Iberian Peninsula. The invasion was thus the result of both a Muslim readiness to conquer and a call for aid from the Visigothic faction loyal to the family of King Witiza. These partisans had lost their positions of power in 710 when the usurper Rodrigo assassinated Witiza. The Muslims seemed to be the perfect allies against the supporters of Rodrigo. In 711, Musa sent a Berber army under Tariq ibn Ziyad across the strait whose modern name, Gibraltar, derives from his own.

Upon their arrival, the Berbers fought against Rodrigo and defeated him in battle.

Instead of returning to Africa, however, Tariq marched north and conquered Toledo, the Visigothic capital, where he spent the winter of 711. The following year, Musa led another army deeper into the peninsula and conquered Mérida after a lengthy siege. He reached Tariq in Toledo in the summer of 713. From there, Musa advanced northeast, taking Zaragoza and invading the country up to the northern mountains. He then moved from west to east, forcing the natives to submit to Muslim rule or flee. Both Musa and Tariq were recalled to Syria by the Umayyad caliph; they departed the region in 714. By then, most of the peninsula was in Muslim hands.

The rapidity of Muslim success resulted in large part from the fact that Visigothic society had not succeeded in achieving a genuine synthesis of its various elements. It was still rent by doctrinal and political disputes stemming from the Visigoths' own conquest of the peninsula centuries before. In fact, some elements of society, such as the Jews, were particularly hostile toward the Visigothic government—and with good reason: legal strictures against them were exceedingly harsh in places like Toledo.

Moreover, the Muslim conquest brought advantages to many. The tax burden, for example, was less onerous under the Muslims than it had been under the Visigoths. Likewise, serfs who converted to Islam became freedmen and were dependents of the nobleman who had conquered the territory to which they were attached. Jews were no longer persecuted and were placed on an equal legal footing with those Christians who did not renounce their faith.

The situation was somewhat different for the Cainites living in the area. The Brujah and Ventrue who had survived their wars during the Visigothic era fought against the invaders (including some Muslim clanmates), but were ultimately displaced and fled north. Many Lasombra also fled, fearing the wrath of the Ashirra (as the Muslim Cainites called themselves). However, many stayed, understanding that they could use Muslim society as a veil just as easily as they could Christianity. When Ashirra Lasombra moved into the region from Africa and the Middle East, they found Iberian clanmates ready to accept them. The divide between those Lasombra who accepted the Moors and those who fled north has never healed.

THE DEPENDENT EMIRATE

The first half of the eighth century saw the birth of a new society in Iberia. The Arabs formed the ruling class. Below them were the Berbers, who made up the majority of the troops used to invade Iberia, and beneath them were Iberians who had converted to Islam. This latter class formed the majority of the region's native population because social and economic motives induced many to

convert. Christians and Jews who retained their religions came next in the social hierarchy. For this privilege, these "People of the Book" paid a small tax to the Muslim government. At the bottom of the class structure were slaves, whose numbers came primarily from captured northerners and black Africans. The Ashirra mirrored their mortal counterparts in their hierarchy, although ghouls rather than slaves formed the lowest rung.

The period between 711 and 756 is called the "dependent emirate" because Muslim Iberia, or al-Andalus, was a dependency of the Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus. These years were marked by continuous hostilities between Arab factions as well as between the social classes. Despite these upheavals, the Muslims continued their expansion into Europe — as did the Cainites who traveled with them. Muslim expeditions made forays across the Pyrenees regularly until 732. At that time, the Franks, led by Charles Martel, defeated the Muslims, led by the emir 'Abd ar-Rahman al-Ghafiqi, at the Battle of Poitiers. This was the furthest reach of the Moorish conquest in Europe. It is also marked the beginning of serious Christian Cainite resistance to the Ashirra.

Events elsewhere also contributed to the Muslim retreat. For example, a Berber rebellion against the Arabs in North Africa proved disastrous for Iberia. It brought about the depopulation of the northwestern portion of the peninsula, whose primary inhabitants had been Berbers. Likewise, the rebellion brought a Syrian army and its leader Balj to al-Andalus, thereby creating yet another faction for this strife-torn region. This unfortunate situation changed for the better with the establishment of an independent emirate in 756 by 'Abd ar-Rahman I ad-Dakhil. 'Abd ar-Rahman was the only Umayyad prince to escape the slaughter of his family at the hands of the 'Abbasids, who took over the Muslim empire from the Umayyads. Safe in al-Andalus, he declared political independence from the 'Abbasids, although he continued to recognize their authority in religious matters.

THE INDEPENDENT EMIRATE

The Andalusian Umayyad dynasty ruled Iberia from 756 until 1031. During this time, science and learning flourished, as did the arts. Al-Andalus achieved a level of sophistication unmatched in Europe at that time. In the shadows, it attracted significant numbers of Brujah (or Mushakisin, to use their Arabic name), who had begun to believe the Moors could create the utopia of which they dreamed. The rift between the Muslim and Christian branches of the Lasombra grew as the Ashirra arrogantly pressed their claims over their Christian brethren. Certain Assamites also gained a greater measure of domain in al-Andalus during this period. Indeed, shortly after the mortal 'Abd ar-Rahman fled Damascus, the ancient Assamite warrior Hilel al-Masaari

arrived in Córdoba. One of the first of Haqim's brood to convert to Islam, he was a powerful force and quickly established himself as Sultan of Córdoba, with a claim to domain across Moorish Iberia. Al-Masaari had been a warrior before he became a schemer, however, and was happy to let his sultanate's affairs be managed by Assamite viziers and Lasombra aids.

'Abd ar-Rahman based his power upon an Arabic aristocracy affiliated with his dynasty and lavished riches and power on these allies. At the same time, he was ever mindful of the slightest sign of rebellion or any undermining of his authority, both of which he punished with great ruthlessness. 'Abd ar-Rahman was also a champion of Muslim orthodoxy, protecting the faith against all opponents. Thus, he launched a series of campaigns against the Christian state of Asturias. In the eastern part of Iberia, he was troubled by intrigues of the 'Abbasids, while in the north he had to cope with the ambitions of Charlemagne. Fortunately for al-Andalus, Charlemagne proved incapable of taking control of Iberia. The Franks had to be content with occupying only the Spanish March in modern Catalonia. While far less than they had hoped for, this occupation hemmed in the Muslims, which emboldened Ventrue and Lasombra.

'Abd ar-Rahman I's successors, Hisham I and al-Hakam I, spent much of their reigns dealing with unrest among the Arab nobility. A massive rebellion in Toledo required the hiring of large numbers of Berber and Slav mercenaries — as well as new taxes to pay for them. Unsurprisingly, such a move proved almost as disastrous as the rebellion itself, creating further instability. Despite the best efforts of both the Brujah and Christian Lasombra to take advantage of the situation, the Muslims were able to regain their footing, proving once more that mortals determined the destiny of Iberia, not Cainites.

'Abd ar-Rahman II's reign is remembered as a time of political, administrative and cultural regeneration. During his time as emir, he embarked upon an impressive program of "easternizing" Iberia, that is, turning al-Andalus into a proper Muslim country like those in the Middle East. While largely successful, this program met with resistance from the Mozarabs, or Arabic-speaking Christians. Encouraged by the leaders Álvaro and St. Eulogio, they sought to encourage resistance to the Muslims through acts of martyrdom. Most commonly, this involved publicly reviling the Prophet Muhammad, an offense punishable by death from 850 onward. The emir reacted remarkably calmly to this wave of blasphemy by encouraging those accused to repent and thereby avoid the penalty. Nevertheless, a conservative faction within the Mozarabic community kept this resistance active for nearly a decade, resulting in 53 executions before ecclesiastical authorities stepped in and discouraged any further martyrdom. The Christian Lasombra took advantage of these persecutions to Embrace several Mozarabs, who formed a corps of anti-Muslim firebrands to battle against the Ashirra.

In foreign policy, 'Abd ar-Rahman II showed a concern for diplomacy. He exchanged ambassadors with both the Byzantine Empire and the Frankish king Charles II the Bald. He was also able to confront the constantly growing incursions of the Vikings, whom he defeated in the vicinity of Sevilla. Finally, 'Abd ar-Rahman II established permanent defenses against these northern invaders (and the *einherjar* vampires who traveled with them) by the creation of two naval bases, one on Atlantic at Sevilla and another on the Mediterranean at Pechina. These bases curtailed the Viking threat to Iberia.

However, the great emir's successors were confronted with a new problem, which was just as dangerous: Muslim converts known as *muwallads*. The *muwallads* formed the majority of Iberia's population, but they lacked political power commensurate with their overwhelming numbers. Consequently, they rose in revolt in both the north and the south of the peninsula in 879. The revolt lasted, in one form or other, for 50 years. In order to nip a similar problem among the Ashirra in the bud, Sultan Hamid al-Dossadi initiated reforms within his domain of Sevilla. He liberalized the hierarchy, allowing non-Arabs to gain positions of power within his realm.

By 930, the *muwallad* unrest had ended and the Umayyads were once more safe on their thrones. During this time, the Muslim Lasombra (called the Qabilat al-

Khayal, literally the "Clan of Shadows") likewise consolidated their grip on Iberia, to the chagrin of both their Christian and Muslim rivals. This fact also weakened the Assamites (or Banu Haqim); without a threat to the survival of Islam in the peninsula, the Saracens seemed almost anachronistic. Their influence in the region reached a low point — a position from which they would not recover for some time.

THE CALIPHATE OF CORDOBA

Although very much concerned with Iberian matters, 'Abd ar-Rahman III did not neglect international diplomacy. In particular, he found himself dealing with the issue of Iberia's relationship to the 'Abbasid Caliphate at Baghdad. Until 910, there existed religious unity among the Muslim domains, each one acknowledging the ultimate authority of the caliph in Baghdad. Once the Fatimids declared their own caliphate in Tunis, this situation changed and 'Abd ar-Rahman III took advantage of it. Thus, he adopted the title of caliph in 929, proclaiming a new regime, known as the Caliphate of Córdoba, which would rule al-Andalus for more than a century. Ironically, Christian Cainites saw this action as positive for their own cause, for it assured them that Islam was no longer united. They rightly believed they could use the dissent within its ranks to wreak havoc.



SHADOWED HISTORY

Meanwhile, the Christian kingdoms of the north continued to make war on al-Andalus. 'Abd ar-Rahman III suffered a severe defeat in 939 at Simancas. Fortunately for him, the internal weakness of the Kingdom of León enabled him to restore his domination of the peninsula through political means. He consolidated his position through several embassies to Holy Roman Emperor Otto I, to the Christian sovereigns of the peninsula, to the pope and to Byzantium. The corsair enclave in Fraxinetum in southern France likewise acclaimed his sovereignty.

From Tunis, the Fatimid Caliphate endeavored to establish an empire that would reach as far as the Atlantic — and would include al-Andalus. In order to prevent Fatimid hegemony in the Maghrib, the Cordoban caliph occupied the North African ports of Melilla and Ceuta by 931. Intense naval warfare between the two caliphates coincided with clashes on land and attempts at subversive wars in northwest Africa. In fact, 'Abd ar-Rahman almost succeeded in overthrowing the Fatimid Caliphate by supporting rebel factions. The conflict dragged on for years, ending only when the Fatimids conquered Egypt in 969 and lost interest in the Maghrib. This created a power vacuum that was rapidly filled by the Umayyads.

As the Christian Lasombra had suspected, Islam was now hopelessly rent with internal conflicts, both in day and night. The Iberian Ashirra now spent as much time fighting one another as they did fighting against Christian enemies, despite the best efforts of Hilel al-Masaari and other charismatic sultans. The Sultan of Sevilla, the Toreador Haytham ibn Jakeem, formed a short-lived movement within the Ashirra that advocated unity in the face of the Christian threat. Unfortunately, Haytham fell to the same infighting he hoped to end — an ironic fate for so forward-thinking an Ashirra.

'Abd ar-Rahman III was succeeded by his son al-Hakam II in 961, who also adopted the title of caliph. His reign was peaceful; he succeeded in resolving the problem of the Maghrib thanks to the incredible strategic ability of his general, Ghalib, and the policies of his advisor, Abu'Amir al-Ma'afiri, who was known as al-Mansur, "the Victorious One." Upon the death of al-Hakam, his young son, Hisham II al-Mu'ayyad, occupied the throne. Hisham II grew up under the tutelage of his mother, Aurora and the vizier Ja'far al-Mushafi. In 978, al-Mansur eliminated the vizier and seized control of the government. He then used his influence to weaken the position of the caliph, delegating all real authority to himself, becoming the true power behind the throne.

Al-Mansur used his newfound power to conquer most of the Maghrib, which he transformed into the viceroyalty of Córdoba. He likewise prevented the growth of the Christian kingdoms of northern Iberia by attacking their domains with great regularity — approximately every six months. He showed no mercy toward them, sacking their capitals as often as possible. With the support of a professional army consisting

predominantly of Berbers, who obeyed him without question, al-Mansur sidestepped the Arab aristocracy, who were largely opposed to his weakening of the caliph's authority. He likewise avoided dealing with the slaves, many of whom had achieved positions of authority within the government. The result was an extremely efficient, dynamic kingdom, but one that depended almost entirely upon his continued rulership.

Al-Mansur was everything the Lasombra could want in a leader: strong, decisive and rational. He understood the strengths and weaknesses of his position and used them wisely. He surrounded himself with the greatest poets and artists of his age, as well as great philosophers and religious thinkers. Al-Mansur likewise continued his program of regular raids against the Christian kingdoms, winning over 50 battles by the time of his death in 1002. The question of whether to Embrace al-Mansur occupied many nights among the *Amici Noctis*, especially those with Muslim sympathies. Ultimately, it was decided that such a man would have to be drawn into the clan willingly, through a slow exposure to the hidden truths. The Muslim Lasombra Ibrahim is said to have led the effort to bring al-Mansur into the shadow. That he failed is taken by most to mean the great man refused the offer.

When al-Mansur died, his son, Abd al-Malik Al-Muzaffar, continued his policies. He further weakened Hisham II and fought against the Christians, but had the misfortune to die prematurely. His brother 'Abd ar-Rahman Sanchuelo lacked the skill and determination necessary to maintain the structure built by his father, and an uprising that sought to restore the political rights of Caliph Hisham II resulted in Sanchuelo's death. It also spelled the end of the Umayyad dynasty in Iberia, although no one yet knew it, least of all the Muslim Lasombra. They were still smugly satisfied with the greatness of the empire al-Mansur had managed to create through his unorthodox actions.

THE KINGDOMS OF THE TAIFAS

'Abd ar-Rahman Sanchuelo's death resulted in years of unrest, most notably from 1009 to 1031. During this time, the social and political unity among Andalusians began to unravel — with unfortunate consequences for all. The result was anarchy and the formation of numerous independent kingdoms, or *taifas*. The political history of the period reads like an uninterrupted series of civil wars. Preeminent is the confrontation between the Arab factions, under the leadership of Sevilla and the Berbers, led by Granada. Over time, Sevilla succeeded in uniting southern al-Andalus under its banner. Only Granada and Málaga resisted this rising state. This regime was ruled by al-Mu'tadid, a thoroughly unscrupulous man who pretended to have found the vanished Hisham II al-Mu'ayyad.

Al-Mu'tadid was succeeded by his son al-Mu'tamid, who was known as a poet as well as a ruler. In the east, except for a brief period when the small state of Denia built a powerful fleet that enabled it to stage incursions throughout the western Mediterranean, the *taifas* preserved a certain equilibrium. Farther to the north, the *taifas* wasted their time in interminable internal quarrels, much to the chagrin of the Muslim Lasombra.

The Christian states took advantage of the breakup of the Umayyad Caliphate. They slowly began to expand their borders, retaking lands lost centuries before. However, the Christians lacked the populations necessary to hold huge conquests. Thus, they moved conservatively and acted to build up the gains they did make. They imposed various taxes and tributes on the *taifas*, most notably the *parias*, a form of annual tribute by which the *taifa* kings could buy immunity from attack for another year. In point of fact, the *parias* were nothing more than protection money, but his tribute revitalized the economy of the Christian states. It also created friction between the Muslim rulers of the *taifas* and their own subjects, because the kings continually imposed more burdensome taxes to generate sufficient funds to buy off the Christian kingdoms for another year. When cash was lacking, the *taifas* devaluated their currency, minting new coins. The Christians would not accept this, however, and the *taifa* kings were then forced to increase taxes yet again, alienating them from their subjects even more. The extravagant luxury in which the kings maintained themselves only added to popular resentment and further destabilized the Muslim hold on Iberia.

AT NIGHT AMONG THE TAIFAS

The rise of the *taifas* was a heyday for the Lasombra on both sides of the religious divide. With the collapse of Cordoban central authority, the Assamite Hilel al-Masaari's claim to overall domain became impossible to enforce, and other sultans rose to places of prominence. In Granada, the Lasombra Badr made his presence known, although his power would only rise to shake the peninsula in later centuries. More troubling was the rise of Miriam hint Aisha in Córdoba. A Lasombra mistress of intrigues, she claimed no official domain (and even publicly supported al-Masaari as sultan), but in private she began to weave a web of influence. The instability of the *taifas* suited her needs, the good of the Muslim cause be damned.

Unsurprisingly, this course of events suited the Christian Lasombra quite nicely. The whole of the eleventh century was a splendid time for them, as they both strengthened their hold on the Iberian Church and weakened their Muslim rivals. As they did so, they displaced the last Ventrue with any real authority, whose antiquated approach to the Muslim occupation had weakened them greatly.

During this time, the Gangrel elder Shabaqo the Nubian also announced his conversion to Islam. The Animals had rejected Muslim faith just as they had Christianity, as a weak calling for mortal sheep. Shabaqo, an ancient of the clan, however, had found some strong and faithful allies among the Ashirra and listened to their stories of the Prophet. Hilel al-Masaari, both a Muslim and a terrible warrior, was the closest thing Shabaqo had to a friend. It was he who guided Shabaqo to an Ashirra imam when he was ready to convert in 1005. Although some Gangrel called him weak and some Ashirra called him blasphemous, he and his childer became an important part of the unliving mosaic of al-Andalus. The term "Taifa Gangrel" soon came to mean those Animals who followed a Muslim warrior's code and spread beyond the peninsula to the rest of the Muslim world. In Iberia, they preyed only on Christians and Jews, a fact that marked them for particular hatred by Cainites promoting the *Reconquista*.

THE ALMORAVIDS

Just how vulnerable Muslim Iberia had become became clear with the Castilian occupation of Toledo in 1085. Toledo was the key to the Meseta Central Plateau and therefore to the entire peninsula, and its fall rightly alarmed the remaining *taifa* kings. For help stemming the rising Christian tide, they looked to a powerful Berber confederation in northwestern Africa called the Almoravids (literally, "Those Dwelling in Frontier Fortresses"). The Berbers were quite willing to help restore Muslim hegemony over Iberia. Their ruler, Yusuf ibn Tashufin entered the peninsula from North Africa and eventually reached the fields of Zalaca, north of Badajoz, where he defeated a Castilian army under Alfonso VI in 1086. Although a blow to Christian confidence, this battle had no lasting consequences, as Yusuf was unable to capitalize upon it and returned to North Africa. Almoravid policy in Iberia remained indecisive over the next two years, but the siege of Aledo in 1088 convinced Yusuf that he needed to put an end to the *taifas* if he were to rescue Islam in Iberia.

From 1090 onward he deposed the rulers of the *taifas*, beginning with those of Granada and Málaga. In 1091, he did the same to the rulers of Almería and Sevilla, and he followed in 1093 with the ruler of Badajoz. Only Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, known as El Cid ("the Lord" in Iberian Arabic usage), was able to resist the Almoravids. El Cid had established himself in an independent kingdom centered on Valencia.

The figure of El Cid is an anomaly of Iberian history. At first, he served as a mercenary in the *taifa* of Zaragoza. Later, he became an independent prince in the east, ruling over lands that were mainly inhabited by Muslims.

El Cid had the good fortune, however, of finding efficient administrators among the Mozarabs in his



domain, thereby enabling it to prosper in these difficult times. In addition, his superb grasp of Almoravid tactics enabled him to overcome their greater numbers, leading to several glorious victories. Upon his death in 1099, Valencia fell into the controls of his followers, who held it until 1102. At that time, they were forced to evacuate and seek refuge in Castile. With the fall of Valencia, the Almoravids were able to expand their conquests in the peninsula, culminating in the fall of Zaragoza in 1110.

Ironically, the fall of Zaragoza, marked the beginning of the end for the Almoravids. The Aragonese king, Alfonso I, and his stepson, Alfonso VII of Castile, began a series of attacks against the frontiers of the Muslim domains, many of which were quite successful. Moreover, the Almoravids found themselves distracted by religious uprisings in North Africa. Consequently, they were unable to fight back against the renewed assaults of Aragon and Castile. So precarious was the Almoravid position that they were forced to hire Christian mercenaries to mount even a feeble defense against their enemies. In 1118, Zaragoza fell to Aragon, which likewise conquered a large part of the valleys of the Jalón and the Jiloca. The Almoravids managed to defeat the Aragonese at Fraga in 1134, but their victory proved ephemeral because the Muslims lacked

the resources to exploit it properly. Throughout Aragon's battles, Christian Cainites attacked their Muslim counterparts. Led by warriors such as Tercio Bravo and Elieser de Polanco, they struck major blows against the Ashirra and furthered the cause of the shadow *Reconquista*.

UMAR AND EL CID

For the Cainites of Iberia, the Almoravid period is notable for two major factors: the arrival of the Assamite Umar al-Rashid and the life of El Cid. Umar was a prominent member of the vizier caste who had been preying among the Berbers for many years. He saw in them the potential to reinvigorate the Muslim drive toward conquest and helped set the stage for the Almoravid invasion. Umar set himself up in Sevilla, where he quickly helped end a period of vampiric instability by supporting the Brujah Gerusah bint Yoav for the position of sultan. There he has remained, but his dreams of unity and drive among the Ashirra were quickly undone by the machinations of the Lasombra Miriam bint Aisha. The two remain rivals to this night.

As for El Cid, like al-Mansur before him, he became the subject of fascination among Iberian Lasombra. Indeed, they almost worshiped him as a living embodiment of their ideals: decisive action and a willingness to

do what needed to be done, whatever the cost. Just like al-Mansur, the clan ruled that he had to be brought to the Embrace if he were to come under the shadow, and just like al-Mansur he seemingly refused. Since his bones have been moved to Burgos, the tomb of El Cid serves as a rallying point for the shadow *Reconquista* against the Ashirra. Cainites like Tercio Bravo — a former companion of El Cid — still use his memory to inspire a new generation of vampires to take up his mantle in the fight against the Moors. (For more on El Cid, see sidebar.)

THE ALMOHADS

Umar al-Rashid was not an Assamite to be easily thwarted. He knew that other Berber dynasties were on the rise and he bided his time. He used catspaws in North Africa to back the rise of one such dynasty — the Almohads (“Those Who Affirm the Unity of God”) — most notably through the instrument of zealous young warriors of his clan. He knew the dynasty would turn its sights on Iberia at last. This hope was justified when ‘Abd al-Mu’min became leader of the dynasty in 1130. He decided that the only way to restore Muslim power in Iberia was first to conquer the remaining *taifas* and impose direct Almohad dominion over the region. Only then, he reasoned, could Islam triumph over the Christian states of the peninsula. Umar quietly supported this policy, working behind the scenes to weaken any *taifa* that stood in the way of the Almohads, such as that of Ibn Mardanish, ruler of Valencia, Murcia, Jaén, Granada and Córdoba. The Assamite warriors rode the wave of Almohad progress, displacing stubborn Lasombra. Miriam bint Aisha saw some of her pawns fall in this wave but set about enacting her own counterintrigues.

The Almohads assumed the title of caliph and used their newfound religious authority to introduce severe new laws and measures. Their intention was to strengthen their empire through religious unification. Thus, they compelled both Christians and Jews in their domains to convert to Islam or emigrate — a decision that greatly bolstered support against them in Iberia. Nevertheless, these strictures seemed to have a beneficial effect, as the Almohad empire reached heights of power unseen in western Islam since the days of the caliphate of Córdoba.

The Almohads then renewed the war against the Christians by defeating the king of Castile, Alfonso VIII, in 1195 at the Battle of Alarcos. The victory was a great one for the Almohads. Unfortunately, they proved no more able to capitalize on it than had their predecessors, the Almoravids. This gave the Christians the time they needed to regroup for another series of battles, culminating in the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212.

LAS NAVAS DE TOLOSA

Beginning in 1210, Alfonso VIII of Castile was preparing to launch a renewed attack against the Almohads. He launched numerous deep raids into Muslim territory, some of which finally drew the attention of the Almohad caliph, Muhammad al-Nasir. The caliph struck back hard, eventually taking Salvatierra, a castle of the Order of Calatrava in 1211. News of this counterattack alarmed Pope Innocent III who promptly summoned a great crusade against the Almohads, which brought thousands of reinforcements across the Pyrenees (under the command of the bishops of Narbonne, Bordeaux and Nantes). In addition, there came the troops and personal leadership of Sancho VII of Navarre, Pedro II of Aragon and Alfonso II of Portugal.

The result of Innocent’s summons was the largest Christian army in Spanish history, which assembled in Toledo in June of 1212, with the intention of retaking Salvatierra — but whose destiny was far greater. The huge army left Toledo on the 20th of July and entered the town of Malagón, where the French crusaders razed and killed the entire population (despite the opposition of Castilians). Shortly thereafter, they entered Calatrava, where Iberian leaders signed an armistice with the Moors. At this point, most of the foreign crusaders left, disappointed in the Iberians’ desire for peace over conquest. Nevertheless, the remaining troops moved on toward Salvatierra.

Meanwhile, the Almohad troops were encamped on the level plain of Las Navas de Tolosa, just to the south of the Despeñaperros pass through the Sierra Morena. The Almohads had blocked a narrow canyon known as *el Muradal*, through which the Christian army would have to pass. The Christian army considered retreating, but soon found an unknown pass, known as *el Rey*, thanks to the efforts of a local shepherd. Thus, the two armies finally met on July 16 and the battle erupted.

The Castilian king, Alfonso VIII, commanded the center of the Christian army, while Pedro II commanded the left wing and Sancho VII of Navarre the right. The Castilian militias were equally distributed among the three divisions. These infantry detachments were mixed with cavalry forces, a move King Alfonso believed would protect his flanks from envelopment. The Moors also protected a conventional arrangement of their troops in three units along a line with a reserve held back. They also had an advance line of light skirmishers, whose thrust against the Christian lines opened the battle. Archers and North Africans occupied the center, while local Andalusian troops occupied the two wings.

The battle began in earnest when Christian forces began an advance against the Muslim skirmishers and scattered them while moving toward the main body of the Moors. The two armies then engaged in chaotic

EL CID

Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar was born in 1043 near Burgos, in Castile. The son of a minor noble and a wealthy mother, he was brought up in the household of the boy who would grow to be Sancho II of Castile. An excellent soldier, at age 22 he was named *armiger regis* (commander of the royal troops) by his friend Sancho, and two years thereafter helped negotiate the treaty that made Zaragoza a tributary of Castile. By that time, his reputation as a general who would never lose was already firmly in place.

Unfortunately, the Cid's patron Sancho died while attempting to annex León to the Castilian crown, and in an ironic turn of events, was succeeded by his brother Alfonso — the former king of León. Recognizing talent, however, Alfonso invited de Vivar into his court, albeit at a reduced rank, and arranged for a marriage to his niece Jimena, daughter of the Count of Oviedo.

However, de Vivar never fit in well at court, and in particular his rivalry with his replacement as *armiger regis*, one Count García Ordoñez, proved to be his downfall. In 1079, de Vivar was on a mission to the kingdom of Sevilla when it was invaded by an army from Granada, supported by García Ordoñez. De Vivar won a resounding victory for Sevilla at Cabra. This set the stage for further conflict with Alfonso VI, and in 1081, after an unauthorized raid on Toledo, de Vivar was banished.

Alfonso's rivals saw this as a tremendous opportunity, and for the next few years, de Vivar served in Zaragoza. During that time he won victories over Lérida in 1082 and Aragon in 1084. It was during this time that El Cid acquired his other most famous epithet, *El Campeador* ("The Champion"), and learned enough of politicking to lay the groundwork for his future ambitions. By 1090, he was well on his way to having Valencia as a tributary, and by 1092 he besieged the city after an act of rebellion by its *qadi*, ibn Jahhaf, resulted in the death of the city's ruler. Despite Almoravid assistance, ibn Jahhaf surrendered in May 1094. When the situation was settled, de Vivar had him burned alive. Over the next few years, while putatively a tributary of Alfonso VI, El Cid turned Valencia into his private kingdom, status cemented by the strategic marriages of his daughters to other potentates.

The Christian kingdom of Valencia did not long outlast its king, however. De Vivar died in 1099, and by 1102 the city was in Almoravid hands. Alfonso VI had judged it indefensible and burned what he could to the ground. De Vivar's body was removed and reburied in the monastery of San Pedro de Cardena, outside of

Burgos. His legend, however, lived on long after his death. The images of the unbeatable general, revered by Moor and Christian alike, coalesced into *El cantar de mio Cid* ("The Song of the Cid"), the epic poem of Castile. His resting place became the center of an energetic "tomb cult" among mortals, and in death de Vivar became eulogized and transformed into the symbol of the *Reconquista*.

AMONG THE SHADOWS

For good or for ill, Cainites have not been immune to this process of mythicization. Perhaps because (as it is said) he turned down their offer of eternity, perhaps because they were genuinely awed by his achievements and bearing, the Lasombra of northern Iberia have formed their own tomb cult around the man. It is considered fitting for a young Lasombra who is on the verge of being introduced to Cainite society — or the *Amici Noctis* — to stand a day's vigil at the Cid's tomb in hopes of being able to emulate his statecraft, nobility and military prowess. Members of the Shadow *Reconquista* do so as well, though their purpose in the vigil is more to identify with de Vivar as *Reconquistador*. Regardless, the tomb of the Cid is considered the nearest thing to a shrine for many martial and Christian Lasombra on the peninsula, at least those less than a century and a half under the shadow. This, of course, means that equally young and hotheaded Ashirra make it a point to disrupt vigils whenever possible. Normally the attacks are carried out just before dawn; other times the Muslim Lasombra influence mortals to interrupt the vigils during the day in hopes of a fatal accident.

It has been suggested that Archbishop Monçada himself has intervened with the head of the monastery to ensure that the vigils are undisturbed, and that he did so even before his Embrace. In any case, the grounds of the tomb are always mysteriously empty of mortals when a Cainite arrives to pay his respects. A few brothers of the monastery are posted as discreet watchers at a respectful distance, but they serve mainly to keep the curious away at inappropriate times. Cainites, however, find that they can always pass with no difficulty.

As important a symbol as de Vivar's tomb might be, no one has dared yet attack it personally. Even the most hotheaded Ashirra knows that the Cid is better left as a symbol of reverence than as a rallying cry for vengeance. As the *Reconquista* pushes southward, however, this may change, and if it does, all hell will break loose shortly thereafter.

combat. Then, al-Nasir committed a portion of his reserve with the effect of buckling the Christian lines, causing some of their forces to retreat. In fact, the retreat was so disheartening that King Alfonso considered ending his life by entering the combat directly rather than face so humiliating a defeat. However, Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada of Toledo sent his portion of the Christian reserve into battle, which stabilized the lines. This turned the tide in favor of the Iberians, and the arrival of King Sancho's wing finally broke the Moorish lines — including the caliph's personal guard — sending al-Nasir into flight toward Jaén. Their leader's retreat shattered Moorish morale and they turned and fled, pursued by the Christians for the rest of the night.

The Christian army spent the next day regrouping, assessing the number of Muslim dead and counting the booty. In the end, the treasure collected was so great that it took over two thousand donkeys to haul it away. In a letter, Alfonso VIII vividly described the Christian victory to Pope Innocent III: "In order to show how immense were the numbers of the enemy, when our army rested after the battle for two days in the enemy camp, for all the fires which were needed to cook food and make bread and other things, no other wood was needed than that of the enemy arrows and spears which were lying about, and even then we burned scarcely half of them."

From that point, the tide of the *Reconquista* had turned irrevocably in favor of the Christians.

JEWES IN IBERIA

While the great struggle of the *Reconquista* takes place between Muslims and Christians, the Jews of Iberia play an important part that far outweighs their numbers. However, their position is an awkward one, as they can not be easily aligned with one side or the other. Indeed, there is evidence of a Jewish presence on the Iberian Peninsula as early as the third century. While there are some anti-Semitic laws passed during the Visigothic kingdoms (most notably by the seventh century king Egica, who was convinced there was a Jewish conspiracy against him), Jews were fairly well integrated into society under Visigothic rule.

In the early eighth century, when Tariq ibn Ziyad's forces entered the cities of Toledo, Córdoba, Elvira and Sevilla, they entrusted the care of those cities to the resident Jews. The same went for Granada, which earned the name *Ghamata al-Yehud* (Granada of the Jews) because when the Muslim armies arrived, only the Jews of the city remained to greet them. As *dhimmi*, or "protected persons," Jews enjoyed a fair bit of tolerance and prestige under the Umayyad emirate, and in many cases Jews were chosen to oversee the Jewish and Christian communities in occupied cities (though prohibitive taxes kept them

QABBALAH

While the formal codification of Qabbalah takes place in Provence in the late twelfth century, its study spreads rapidly across the Pyrenees. By the mid-thirteenth century, Granada and Toledo host academies of Jewish study devoted to the new mysticism in its many forms. There is no codified Qabbalah at this point, though scholars point to the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (an almost unintelligible collection of fragments that nonetheless did much to codify the notion of the *sephirot*) as the first true Qabbalistic text. However, as the academies in Iberia flourish, elements of Neo-Platonism and other schools of thought are added to the heady mix of philosophies. It is from this that modern Qabbalah will be born.

from owning land). In some rare cases, Jews even rose to high station under Islamic rule; the ibn Nagrella family, for example, provided two viziers of Granada, and Hasdai ibn Shaprut (915-970) served the Cordoban caliphs as vizier, diplomat and doctor.

However, as various invasions surged back and forth across the peninsula, the status of Jews became less stable. In some cases, the Almoravids incited pogroms; in others, they turned temporary authority over to Jews as a means of divorcing the area from the Arab rulers who had just been displaced. While Jews were often early settlers of areas reconquered by Christian kings (their facility with Arabic often serving to make them useful administrators), in most regions they were actually regarded as the property of the king rather than landholders and citizens in their own right.

Jews frequently served as tax collectors under both Christian and Muslim authorities, in large part because the job was a particularly undesirable one. They also played a major role in trade, a role that remained unchanged regardless of whether Visigothic, Spanish or Muslim rule was entrenched, and they served as bankers to both sides. Most notably, El Cid himself did business with the Jews of Córdoba, though as early as 1081, the Pope had been pressured to warn Alfonso VI of Castile about his tendency to put Jews in positions of authority over Christians.

The conquests of the twelfth century finally destabilized the position of the Jews in Iberia. They produce more anti-Semitic legislation and pogroms, although the progression to the ultimate expulsion of the Jews in 1492 remains uneven.

GEOGRAPHY

While they are found across the length and breadth of Iberia, Jews tend to concentrate in cities such as Granada and Córdoba, and in the ports along the southern and

eastern coasts of Spain. However, the growing oppression of the Almoravid and Almohad regimes has caused waves of mass migration to various Christian cities, most notably Toledo. There is also a reasonably solid population of Jews in the Christian north, with a strong agricultural history dating back to at least the fifth century. Jewish merchants also do a great deal of traveling, both along the coasts and through the interior of the peninsula. Most large population centers across Iberia boasted at least a small Jewish population, and certain cities (especially Córdoba, Granada, Zaragoza, Sevilla and Toledo) are vibrant centers of Jewish culture.

CHRISTIAN IBERIA

Soon after the Muslim invasion, fleeing Visigothic nobles and the mountain-dwellers of Asturias united in opposition to the invaders under the leadership of the Gothic lord Don Pelayo. Later generations would regard Pelayo's victory over the Muslims at Covadonga as the beginning of the *Reconquista*. King Alfonso I expanded the Asturian kingdom by occupying Galicia after the withdrawal of the rebellious Berbers stationed there. He also devastated the Duero River valley to the south, thereby creating an extensive buffer between the domains of Muslims and Christians. Many battles took place within this no-man's land over the following centuries.

Meanwhile, the Basques regained their independence in the western Pyrenees, while the Franks drove the Muslims from Septimania in southwestern France and occupied northeastern Spain. Although Charlemagne failed to capture Zaragoza in 778, the Franks captured Barcelona in 801 and occupied most of Catalonia. Later known as the "Spanish March," this occupied region consisted of several counties under Frankish rule. Consequently, Catalonia maintained strong ties with both the Frankish empire and, later, France, both in terms of culture and politics. This long association eventually brought the region to the attention of French Toredor, some of whom ventured from the north to this area.

THE BEGINNING OF THE RECONQUISTA

While the Catalans looked northward, the Asturians were firmly fixed on the south. Alfonso II placed his capital at Oviedo and attempted to restore the Visigothic kingdom that had existed before the Muslim invasion. In the late ninth century, his descendant Alfonso III took advantage of dissension within the Muslim ranks to attack and plunder their domains. He even succeeded in seizing the powerful stronghold of Porto. Alfonso III also initiated the repopulation of southern lands that had been deserted since the time of the invasion. Alfonso constructed numerous forts and castles throughout the region as a defense against further Muslim incursions. So great were the

numbers of these fortifications that the region was eventually called Castile. During this time, the first chronicles of Iberian history were written, most of which emphasized the historical connection between the Asturian monarchy and the Visigothic kingdoms that had come before them. Thus was born the myth of the *Reconquista* as a "reconquest" of what had been unlawfully taken by the Moors.

Naturally, this myth suited the purposes of Clan Ventrue, whose own authority had been usurped in the aftermath of the invasions. The Ventrue kept close watch over the Asturian dynasty, hoping to use them as a mortal *fer de lance* to restore their domain to its Roman heights. However, such a plan proved shortsighted. As the Lasombra and even Brujah realized, the *Reconquista* was likely to take centuries and would be filled with many reversals and changes of fortune. The prudent course would therefore be to spread one's influence as widely as possible.

Yet, the Ventrue continued in their belief that Islam was weak and required only a strong push to topple it. They may well have taken this belief from the mortals they moved among, seeing as the Asturian king García I transferred his capital southward from Oviedo to León — a sign of his confidence in ultimate victory. His confidence was altogether premature, and the caliphs of Córdoba proved far more vigorous than anyone had anticipated. They restored Muslim power in Iberia and renewed their raids against Christian lands. Thus, the tenth century was not the dawn of a new era for Christianity, but one of both victory and defeat. Even the triumph of Ramiro II over 'Abd ar-Rahman III at Simancas in 939 was a hollow one. Ramiro found his Castilian subjects chafed under Leonese rule. The Castilians were a hard and independent people and bore the brunt of the wars between the Asturians and the Muslims. Consequently, they resented having Leonese laws and traditions imposed upon them. Fernán González, the count of Castile, led the resistance against Ramiro II and laid the foundations for Castile's eventual independence.

The late tenth century proved even more problematic for the Christian states, as the power of the Muslims increased tremendously. Ambassadors from León, Navarre, Barcelona and Castile all eventually journeyed to Córdoba in order to do homage to the caliph. Nevertheless, the Christians did not abandon their dreams of an Iberian empire that would one day govern the entire peninsula. The Asturians in particular continued to dream of a Christian state centered on León. This idea proved especially comforting during the time of al-Mansur, when the Muslim general succeeded in conquering numerous Christian strongholds. He defeated Count Ramón Borrell in 985 and burned Barcelona. Three years later, he plundered León, the center of Asturian power. Finally, in 997 he sacked the great Christian shrine of Santiago de Compostela — a

blow from which it took the Christians many decades to recover. Fortunately for them, al-Mansur's death marked the effective end of the Caliphate of Córdoba, allowing them the time to rethink their strategies and marshal their forces for the next stage of the *Reconquista*.

SANCHO THE GREAT AND THE NAVARESE HEYDEY

Little is known of the earliest history of Navarre, but it is certain that neither the Romans nor the Visigoths nor the Muslims ever succeeded in permanently subjugating the inhabitants of the western Pyrenees, the Basques. These Basques thus retained their own unique language and culture well into the Middle Ages. The capture of Pamplona by Charlemagne in 778 was not a lasting victory. In the same year, the Basques defeated him at the Pass of Roncesvalles, a defeat commemorated in the epic poem *La Chanson de Roland*. In 806 and 812, the Franks again took Pamplona. When, however, the Frankish emperors were no longer able to give their attention to the outlying borderlands of their empire, Navarre began its development as an independent kingdom.

The first King of Pamplona was Iñigo Arista. His elder brother, García Semen, had been duke of Vasconia. After the death of Iñigo Arista in 852, the two territories were united although the long captivity of one of the succeeding kings (in Muslim hands for 22 years) complicated matters. In 905, however, the Navarrese chose Sancho Garcés (who was married with a granddaughter of Fortún, the previous king) to be monarch. Sancho had fought against the Muslims with repeated success and had joined large portions of the peninsula to his personal dominions. Before his death, he completed the *Reconquista* in Navarre, having driven all the Muslims from the region. One of his successors, García Sánchez, surnamed the Trembler, likewise engaged in a number of conflicts with the Muslims. During the rule of his grandson, Sancho III, called the Great, Navarre attained its greatest prosperity. He seized Pisuerga and Cea, which belonged to the Kingdom of León. He also conquered Castile and ruled from the boundaries of Galicia to those of Barcelona. However, as was traditional at the time, at the time of his death, his holdings were divided among his sons, so that Navarre, Castile and Aragon became independent kingdoms. The country was never again united — and neither was it ever as influential.

CAINITES OF NAVARRE

Navarre did not attract substantial attention from either the Ventrue or the Lasombra, both of whom were more concerned with affairs elsewhere, until well into the Christian-Muslim conflict across the peninsula. Consequently, Navarre became home to some other clans without a significant presence elsewhere in the

peninsula. Chief among these were the Malkavians, thanks to the Madman Roque, who became Prince of Pamplona shortly after the Frankish conquest of 812. He quickly established a sizable domain within Navarre, one that has attracted others of his clan in the centuries since. The rugged terrain of the region also attracted the attention of the Nosferatu. By the year 1000 or so, these Cainites were particularly numerous, thanks to the leadership of Ezkerra, a Basque patriot who claimed the countryside as his personal demesne.

Sometime around the year 1000, Navarre became the haven for a breakaway group of Cainite Heretics. Known as the Apostles of the Third Caine, these true believers felt Narses, then Archbishop of Nod, was a profligate hedonist without any concern for the well being of the Heresy. Under the leadership of Bénézet, the Apostles used Navarre as the base from which to expand deeper into the Iberian Peninsula. Even in the thirteenth century, they retain a sizable presence in Navarre.

THE RECONQUISTA CONTINUES

The first battles of the next stage of reconquest included those launched by Ramón Borrell, who sacked Córdoba in 1010 in revenge for past incursions into his own realm. Alfonso V of León likewise took advantage of the situation and restored his kingdom to prominence. In 1017, he held a general council in which he enacted the first set of laws for his realm. Unfortunately, the Christians squandered the time of Muslim weakness by resuming their old squabbles — just as the Lasombra had feared. A Ventrue leader named Gutierre attempted to displace the Malkavian Roque as Prince of Pamplona during this time. Although he failed (and met Final Death), it marked a time of Ventrue resurgence in many Christian realms.

Navarre's hegemony under Sancho the Great brought greater ties to northern Europe, especially France. French pilgrims became more and more common, as the route to Compostela became an important religious site for the whole of Europe. Monastic reform according to the French Cluniac model was introduced, as were French feudal customs previously unknown in Iberia. This contact with the rest of Europe brought Cainites of other clans to Iberia for the first time, as well as strengthening the Toreador in the region. Iberia was no longer an isolated backwater, but was slowly entering the mainstream of European society — which proved both a boon and a bane to the vampires who had called the peninsula home for so long.

THE GROWTH OF CHRISTIAN POWER

By extending his rule over all the Christian states except Catalonia, Sancho the Great made the first steps toward the unification of Christian Iberia, but they

SHADOWED HISTORY



would prove fleeting ones. Sancho treated his empire as his private property and ordered that, upon his death, it be divided among his four sons as their inheritance. Doing so set back the cause of Iberian unity and created further instability on the peninsula. Each of Sancho's sons bore the royal title, and Castile and Aragon were thereafter regarded as kingdoms. Vermundo III recovered León after Sancho's death, but Fernando I defeated and killed him in 1037. Taking possession of León, he also assumed the title of "emperor," a bold move that implied a greater degree of control than he possessed. During the next thirty years, Fernando attempted to gain control of the entire peninsula by defeating his brothers and reducing the nearby Muslim states to vassal status.

Meanwhile, Count Ramón Berenguer I of Barcelona was actively fostering Catalan interests and relationships among the lords of Languedoc in southern France. He also published the earliest legal texts included in the compilation of Catalan law later known as the *Usatges de Barcelona* ("Usages of Barcelona"). This relationship between Catalonia and southern France continues well into the thirteenth century, leading to the involvement of Catalonia in the conflict with the Cathars and

other heretics. Likewise, it guaranteed the continual presence of the Toreador, whose interest in cross-cultural exchanges has always been strong.

Following in the footsteps of his father, Fernando I divided his realms between his sons, Sancho II, who received Castile, and Alfonso VI, who received León. The two brothers quarreled often and, after Sancho's murder in 1072, Alfonso VI gained the crowns of Castile and León. Before recognizing him as their new king, the Castilian nobility demanded that Alfonso swear that he had not brought about the murder of his brother, which he readily did. As to the truth of his vow, none can say, although there is circumstantial evidence linking him to the deed. Among Alfonso's new Castilian vassals was Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, better known as El Cid. Rodrigo suffered because of jealousies at the court of the new king and was driven into exile. He then used his considerable skills as a mercenary, first for the Muslim king of Zaragoza and then for the king of Valencia, both of whom he served admirably. His exploits inspired both mortals and Cainites — as they do even after his death.

Initially, Alfonso VI made the Muslim states his vassals, demanding rich tributes from them. However, his

IBERIA BY NIGHT

desire for self-aggrandizement was so great that he eventually set out to conquer them all and achieve Iberian unity. The surrender of Toledo in 1085 not only extended his frontiers to the Tajo River but also had great symbolic value. Possession of Toledo, the ancient seat of the Visigothic monarchy, enhanced Alfonso's claims to peninsular supremacy. He then proclaimed his power by taking the title "Emperor of Toledo" as well as "Emperor of Spain." His might was so great that thousands of Muslims and Jews decided to remain under his protection rather than flee. Among the many Lasombra who flocked to Toledo was Elieser de Polanco, who has remained a dominant power in the city ever since.

The fall of Toledo frightened the Muslims of southern Iberia. They appealed to an ascetic sect of Berber zealots known as the Almoravids for assistance. The Almoravids entered the peninsula and defeated Alfonso at Zalaca in 1086. They likewise conquered the independent Muslim kingdoms in an attempt to restore unity to Muslim Iberia. In this they were only partially successful. Their military might was such that they kept Alfonso on the defensive for the remainder of his reign, thereby halting the advance of the *Reconquista* for a time. It was during this time that El Cid successfully repulsed the Almoravid attack on Valencia, securing the city for himself and his followers. Nevertheless, his untimely death in 1099 eventually led to the fall of the city to the Almoravids.

Almoravid successes widened the *Reconquista*, bringing assistance to Iberia from many northern European countries, especially France. French knights and crusaders took up arms and stood beside their Iberian counterparts to fight against the Muslims. In doing so, they brought Iberia into even greater contact with the wider world around it. For example, the reforming Pope Gregory VII demanded liturgical uniformity by requiring the acceptance of the Roman liturgy in place of the Mozarabic one that had been used for many centuries. Some Lasombra, such as Silvester de Ruiz, believed this uniformity would serve Iberia well as it continued to press the *Reconquista*. Others feared it might create a backlash against the Church that would ultimately undermine its authority. Gregory also attempted to exert papal sovereignty over Iberia, but few of the countries there were willing to capitulate; Gregory did not press the issue. Nevertheless, the Church became increasingly important in Iberia, a fact Cainites did not fail to notice. In the following decades, most clans Embraced a larger number of priests and clerics in an attempt to ensure they had a voice in the future. It was during this time that the infamous Archbishop Ambrosio Luis Moncada first came under the Curse of Caine.

Alfonso VII became king of León in 1126 and restored the prestige of his realm. His coronation as emperor in the cathedral of León in 1135 was intended to assert Leonese claims to ascendancy throughout

Spain. However, the newly formed federation of Aragon and Catalonia as well as the newly independent kingdom of Portugal soon offered a daunting challenge to these claims. Once again, the few Ventrué still playing their imperial hopes in Iberia found their attempts to arrange a single Iberian kingdom thwarted by the very mortals they hoped to manipulate. This served the interests of the Lasombra, who had no desire to see a Ventrué-dominated state gain power in the peninsula. Thus, the first half of the twelfth century saw yet more infighting among the Christian kingdoms rather than the success of the *Reconquista*.

Meanwhile, Alfonso I of Aragon extended his frontiers to the Ebro River by capturing Zaragoza in 1118. He then proceeded to march deep into the heart of Muslim territory, where he liberated the Mozarabs of Granada and resettled them in Aragon. From that point on, few Mozarabs remained in Muslim territory. Consequently, the Toreador took an increased interest in Aragonese affairs, Embracing several Mozarabs as a means of preserving their ways in the face of Aragonese centralization. These Mozarabic Cainites thus served the Toreador as unliving memories of a lost culture — another casualty of the *Reconquista*.

Before he died, Alfonso willed his realms to the military orders of the Hospitalers and the Templars as well as to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. However, his people rejected this arrangement, fearing that these French-dominated orders would exert even more control over their country. The Navarrese, who had been ruled by the kings of Aragon since 1076, chose their own monarch, García IV Ramfrez in 1134, while the Aragonese asked the deceased king's brother, Ramiro II, to leave the monastic life and accept the crown. Ramiro was reluctant to do this but felt some obligation to his native land. Therefore, he left the monastery long enough to marry and father a daughter, Petronila, who could then inherit the kingdom after him. Shortly thereafter, he returned to the monastery and again took up the life he had abandoned.

In 1137, Petronila was betrothed to Count Ramón Berenguer IV of Barcelona, who took up the administration of Aragon. Their child, Alfonso II, united the kingdom of Aragon and the county of Barcelona, creating yet another united crown. There were numerous obstacles to this union, chief among them being the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of each realm. Among the vampiric courts, rivalries between Lasombra and Toreador also worked to undermine unification. Nevertheless, the union has endured and given Aragon access to the sea, making it a maritime power whose reach extended far beyond the confines of the Iberian Peninsula. Nevertheless, the "Crown of Aragon," as it became known, did not become a unified state. Instead, it consisted of two distinct regions, each with its own laws and traditions.

As the Almoravid empire collapsed, the Christian states attempted to take advantage of the situation. They increased their raids against the Moors and played one faction against the other. The peninsular kingdoms also received aid from other European states. It was this more than anything that characterized the middle of the twelfth century: cooperation on the part of Christian states. Whereas the Muslims warred among themselves and seemed more interested in settling internal scores, the Iberian Christians regularly appealed to solidarity in the face of the Muslim threat. Under the leadership of dynamic leaders like de Ruiz and his childe Monçada, Christian Cainites followed suit.

THE RISE OF CASTILE AND ARAGON

The appearance of the Almohads initially put many Iberian Christians on the defensive, but they were not willing to give up their dreams of the *Reconquista*. Thus, King Alfonso VIII of Castile and King Alfonso II of Aragon signed a treaty in 1179 that indicated which parts of Muslim territory they would have jurisdiction over as the *Reconquista* expanded. Castile gained rights to Andalusia and Murcia, while Aragon gained Valencia. Unfortunately, Alfonso VIII of Castile was unsatisfied with limiting his conquests in such a fashion. He therefore turned his attentions to his Christian neighbors, who resisted him, but not without weakening the coalition that had been so united for decades. Thus, in 1195 Castile suffered a disastrous defeat by the Almohads at Alarcos, just south of Toledo.

Despite the Castilian king's ambitions, the strength of the Almohads forced the other Christian states to seek accommodation with him, and with renewed cooperation came renewed success. Sancho VII of Navarre and Pedro II of Aragon joined Alfonso VIII and Portuguese and Leonese troops in 1212, when they triumphed over the Almohads at the epic Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (see p. 27). This remarkable victory marked the beginning of the end of the Almohad empire in Iberia, as it opened the territories of Andalusia to the Christian armies for the first time in centuries. It was only a matter of time before they would overwhelm their Muslim enemies and usher in the endgame of the *Reconquista*.

THE RISE OF CATALONIA

The Crown of Aragon is a double kingdom, consisting of two united but separate realms. As King of Aragon, its ruler takes a leading role in the *Reconquista*. As Count of Barcelona, however, he maintains strong ties to southern France, where several French lords were their vassals. Thus, when Pope Innocent III proclaimed a crusade against the Albigensians in 1209, Pedro II became embroiled in the conflict. He had no love for the dualist heretics, but he rightly worried that

the presence of so many French crusaders in the area would eventually undermine his own feudal power. Thus, he acted on behalf of his French vassals, some of whom were sympathetic to the Albigensians. This contributed to Catalonia's importance to both the Cainite Heresy and the Apostles of the Third Caine, each of which maintains havens in the country.

THE DOWNFALL OF NAVARRE

After the murder of Sancho IV in 1076, Alfonso VI of Castile and Sancho Ramírez of Aragon ruled jointly in Navarre. The towns south of the Ebro and the Basque provinces went to Castile, while the remainder went to Aragon, which retained them until 1134. Alfonso the Fighter, brother of Pedro Sánchez, secured for the country its greatest territorial expansion. He wrested Tudela from the Moors in 1114, reconquered the entire country of Bureba and advanced into Burgos. In addition, Alfonso added numerous other possessions to his realm, once again enlarging Navarre's border — though never to its former extent.

When Alfonso died in 1134 with issue, Navarre and Aragon once again separated. In Aragon, Alfonso's brother Ramiro became king. In Navarre, García Ramírez, a grandson of Sancho the Great, took the throne. García was a weak king who was obliged to surrender Rioja to Castile in 1136 and Tarragona to Aragon in 1157. Furthermore, he was compelled to declare himself a vassal of King Alfonso VII of Castile. García was utterly incompetent and at various times was dependent upon the revenues of churches and convents. During García's unfortunate reign, the power of both the Malkavians and Nosferatu grew, and significant numbers of Ventrue and Lasombra left the country.

His son, Sancho García the Wise, a patron of learning and the arts, as well as an accomplished statesman, fortified Navarre within and without. He also gave charters to a number of towns and was never defeated in battle. The reign of his successor, Sancho the Strong, was more troubled. He appropriated the revenues of churches and convents, granting them important privileges instead. In 1198, he presented the See of Pamplona with his palaces and possessions in that city, this gift being confirmed by Pope Innocent III in 1199. While he was in Africa on an expedition against the Almohads, the Kings of Castile and Aragon invaded Navarre. Consequently, the kingdom suffered further degradation, losing territories to both of its Christian neighbors. The greatest glory of Sancho the Strong was the part he took in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212. Through his valor, the victory of the Christians over the Caliph Muhammad al-Nasir was assured — although Navarre's own future is less than bright.

PORTUGAL

Alfonso Henriques, first King of Portugal, achieved through equal parts warfare and diplomacy the political



independence of the country, as well as the enlargement of its boundaries by conquests of Muslim territories. When Alfonso assumed the throne, the Muslims occupied more than half the kingdom he would one day rule. Although he declared himself king in 1139, it was only years later that he was able to obtain recognition of his kingship from Alfonso VII of León, to whom the territory of Portugal had formerly belonged.

Early in his reign, Alfonso Henriques resolved to protect himself against the claims of León upon his realms. Thus, in 1143 he offered his kingdom to the Church, declaring himself the pope's vassal. In addition, he promised, for himself and his successors, to pay an annual feudal tribute of four ounces of gold to the Holy See. Pope Lucius II ratified this agreement, taking Portugal under his protection and recognizing its independence. In 1179, another pope, Alexander III, confirmed Alfonso Henriques as King of Portugal, marking the true beginning of this new nation upon the Iberian Peninsula.

Having won this confirmation from the Pope, Alfonso Henriques gave up the idea of extending his dominions beyond the Minho and the Douro Rivers, which formed its boundaries to the north and the east. After all, doing so would draw the ire of his former lord, the king of León — a situation he worked hard to avoid. Instead, he focused his attention on the southern lands held by the Muslims. He launched regular attacks and used a wide variety of strategies to catch his enemies unawares, including late-night assaults on their settlements. In 1147, he took the almost impregnable city of Santarém. Later the same year, after a four-month siege, the great city of Lisbon fell to his arms. In this great victory, Alfonso Henriques was assisted by a fleet of 164 ships on their way to the Second Crusade. Once Lisbon was safely in Portuguese hands, he declared that city his new capital. Alfonso then appointed an Englishman named Gilbert its bishop and transported the body of St. Vincent to the cathedral.

The capture of Lisbon marked the beginning of a long and successful partnership between the Portuguese and the crusaders, many of whom stayed in the region to assist with the *Reconquista*. Indeed, Alfonso Henriques did not even attempt to take the Muslim city of Alcacer do Sal until another group of crusaders arrived in 1158. With their help, the cities of Evora and Beja fell under his control. Unfortunately, Alfonso's skill at arms exceeded his ability to govern his conquests. Therefore, the Muslims soon recaptured all the lands south of the Tejo River (the Tajo, in Spanish). Alfonso's last days of life were spent attempting to hold his kingdom together — often without success. Nevertheless, Alfonso's reign can hardly be called unsuccessful. When he died in 1185, the independence of Portugal had been secured, its area doubled and the name of his kingdom was famous throughout Europe for its persistent struggle

against the Muslims. Alfonso had thus achieved far more than many of his contemporaries.

From the Cainite perspective, Alfonso Henriques had freed the westernmost portion of Iberia from the domination of the Ashirra. This served Brujah elders quite well, as its elders on the peninsula had been seeking their utopia since before the coming of the Muslims. However, Alfonso's alliance with the Church drew the attention of the Christian Lasombra, who began to infiltrate Portugal in small numbers. This led to squabbles between the Magisters and the Zealots, which in turn gave an opening to the Cainite Heresy.

Alfonso Henriques's successor, Sancho I continued the work of *Reconquista* and a large part of the Algarbe region fell into his hands. Sadly for Sancho, the successes of the Almohads again pushed back Portuguese borders, this time to the Tejo River. Nevertheless, Sancho was a hard man not given to defeat. He resolutely resisted the Almohads and, as a show of his contempt, he was active in building towns and settling his hard-won territories, thereby earning himself the nickname the Populator. Sancho was also renowned as an avaricious man. During his reign, he amassed great wealth from his frequent forays into the rich territories of the Muslims.

Upon his accession to the throne, Sancho asked for and obtained papal confirmation of his royal title, which protected him against his Christian neighbors, many of whom eyed Portugal as covetously as they did the lands of the Moors. Sancho himself was slow to pay the Holy See the tribute promised by his father, and the practice ended altogether after his death — a sign that Portugal's position was no longer so precarious as to make papal protection crucial. Portuguese Cainites put up additional obstacles against clerical influence to prevent further spread of the Cainite Heresy or the influence of Lasombra with their claws in the church. Portugal became a land in which vampires gained influence through soldiers and warriors rather than churchmen.

Sancho continued to rely heavily on crusaders in his wars against the Muslims. In addition, he also relied upon military orders such as the Templars and Hospitalers, to which he gave great wealth and influence in return for their protection of border castles and settlements in his domain. Sancho was also a superstitious man given to consulting with astrologers and seers for advice on many matters of state. In fact, a wise woman regularly traveled in his company, much to the consternation of the clergy, who worried that his Christian faith might suffer because of her presence.

Such worries were well founded — but not for the reasons the clergy suspected. Sancho's chancellor Julian had studied Roman law at the University of Bologna and aimed to increase royal authority at the expense of the Church. For example, Sancho intervened in a dispute

between the Bishop of Oporto and that city's inhabitants, ruling against the bishop. Pope Innocent III reversed the decision and punished Sancho by placing Portugal under an interdict — a punishment the king promptly ignored. He likewise came into conflict with the Bishop of Coimbra, whom he imprisoned and treated with great cruelty. In this way, Sancho proved to be the most venal of the Iberian rulers, pursuing the *Reconquista* for purely personal rather than religious reasons.

Throughout the rest of his reign, Sancho attacked the rights and privileges of the Church. In particular, he refused to recognize the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts. He also did not accept the immunity of clerics from military service, a situation that led to many conflicts with ecclesiastical authorities. Though he made some concessions before his death, the disputes he began lasted through the reigns of two subsequent kings. For nearly a century, the clergy and the crown were involved in a struggle over the limits of their respective powers. These disputes ultimately weakened Portugal's vibrancy and made it easy prey for the growing power of its Iberian neighbors, some of whom still eyed its lands and riches.

Portugal's early kings rewarded honorable service by extensive grants of lands. In these lands, they gave up royal jurisdiction. When their holders died without heirs, they often passed into the hands of the Church. In time, so much of the country was held by monasteries or had passed into the hands of nobles that the rest did not produce enough revenue to meet the increasing expenses of government. The Portuguese monarchs tried to overcome the difficulty by a revocation of grants, which naturally met further resistance from both the nobility and clergy. Despite his father's quarrels with the Church, Sancho's son Alfonso II took care to obtain the confirmation of his title from the Holy See in 1211. Though Alfonso II remains a generally peaceful king, his followers fought beside the Castilians at the great Christian victory of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212.

THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

The years after Las Navas de Tolosa see the Christian frontier move south at a rapid pace, but they are hardly years of simple surrender. In Muslim lands, the battle creates a power vacuum into which step some of the remaining *taifas*, the most significant being Murcia and Arjona. Murcia becomes a center of resistance against the Christian states — and thus a haven for Ashirra bands hoping to strike a blow against the enemies of their faith. Arjona, on the other hand, becomes a vassal of Castile, even going so far as to aid the Castilians against other Muslim states. This practical approach enables Arjona to expand its borders to

include other surrounding domains, most especially Granada. By the end of the thirteenth century, it is the only remaining *taifa* on the peninsula — and a buffer state between the rising Christian powers and the Almohad Empire in North Africa.

In the north, 1213 sees the death of Pedro II of Aragon at the hands of a crusading army at Muret after he goes to the aid of his brother-in-law, the Count of Toulouse. Pedro's death is a blow from which Catalan power in southern France never recovers, much to the chagrin of the Toreador. As the Almohad empire slowly collapses, the *Reconquista* nears completion. Jaime I of Aragon uses Catalan naval power to conquer the corsair kingdom of Mallorca in 1229, which marks the first time the Crown of Aragon takes advantage of its newfound naval power to expand its influence into the Mediterranean. The conquest of the kingdom of Valencia proves more difficult, especially as Jaime becomes distracted by events in Navarre. Its king, Sancho VII, has no heirs, and the growing presence of French pretenders to his throne becomes a growing subject of concern.

Elsewhere, Alfonso IX of León expands southward toward the Guadiana River. He captures Mérida and Badajoz in 1230, preparing the way of his eventual conquest of Sevilla later that same year. With the help of crusaders, Alfonso II of Portugal recovers Alcacer do Sal in 1217, but by 1221, the old disputes reappear. Alfonso seizes church property and compels ecclesiastics to plead before secular justices and serve in the wars of the *Reconquista*. The Archbishop of Braga thus convokes an assembly of prelates in which he accuses the king of numerous crimes, including the renunciation of his Christian faith. The king replies by confiscating the goods of the archbishop, who flees to Rome. Pope Honorius III dispatches three Spanish bishops to speak with Alfonso and resolve the situation. Unfortunately, this meeting achieves little, leading to Alfonso's excommunication a year later. The Pope then threatens to absolve the king's subjects from their allegiance and hand over the realm to any prince who cares to take it. Threatened with the loss of the kingdom for which his grandfather had fought so hard, Sancho eventually relents, making concessions to the Church shortly before his death in 1223.







Chapter Two: The Christian Kingdoms

*Sorth from Castile the noble
unto this place we sped;*

*If with the Moors we fight
not, they will not give us bread.*

- The Song of the Cid

The Christian kingdoms of Iberia are the product of centuries of invasions and conquests. This fact has colored these lands in profound and lasting ways, making Iberian Christians a militaristic people, oftentimes given to resolving disputes through force of arms rather than diplomacy. They can also be dark and brooding, those who know all too well that progress comes at a cost, often paid in suffering.

The dawn of the thirteenth century sees this region's people band together and chart their own course for the first time since men first inhabited this unforgiving land. After centuries under the rule of outsiders — whether they were Carthaginians, Romans, Visigoths or Muslims — Iberians have seized control of their own destinies and forged a new civilization here, one that is the inheritor of all these cultures while at the same time transcending them. The kingdoms are a unique fusion of cultures that is simultaneously wonderful and terrifying. Such contradictions are the purview of young and vibrant kingdoms, of course. Even the oldest among them is scarcely 500 years old. Many — such as Portugal — have existed far less than that. Consequently, these realms possess a dynamism lacking in their contemporaries elsewhere on the continent. But they also have a legacy of bloodshed, civil wars, invasions, betrayals and conflict.

Christian Iberia draws mortal men and women for many reasons. They have come to experience the birth of a new age and a new civilization, to witness the great victories of the *Reconquista* — and to enrich themselves in the process. With each year, the Christians push back the Muslim threat and absorb new territory and learning. These gains draw scholars, soldiers, merchants and priests to Iberia. In addition, the wealth of the Moorish kingdoms is only exceeded by the avarice of those who would seize it. Cloaked in the veil of faith, adventurers and opportunists flock to Iberia, seeking their fortunes beneath the banner of a holy crusade.

Wherever mortals go, Cainites follow. Like a flame attracting moths, the Christian kingdoms of Iberia draw their share of unliving visitors as well. Many, particularly neonates, come to the peninsula for the same reasons as their mortal counterparts: to witness God's plan unfold before their eyes and claim reconquered territory for themselves. Adventure beckons across the arid plains and craggy terrain, making it an ever more popular destination.

Likewise, the strength of faith in these realms is contagious. Cainites of a spiritual bent cannot help but feel that the hand of God is at work in this place, offering the promise of redemption to all who seek it earnestly. Yet faith is a powerful tool for manipulation as well; not all who toil beneath the shadow of the cross do so for the love of Christ. Many mortals and Cainites have less than pious goals, and the chaos of Iberia offers them the chance to achieve them.

Behind the scenes, vampiric factions clash, each attempting to use the vibrancy of these kingdoms for their own purposes. A loose alliance of Christian Lasombra clearly has the upper hand. Over the centuries, the Magisters' willingness to bide their time and seek out the proper moment to strike have helped them to displace powerful Ventrue lords. Some Brujah also command respect, especially in areas like Portugal, where new thinking has firmly taken hold. The Toreador are likewise intrigued by the new ideas bubbling from beneath these blood-soaked lands. Meanwhile, other Cainite clans and groups struggle to find a place for themselves, mirroring the efforts of mortal groups crushed beneath the armored foot of the *Reconquista*.

Yet, for all their dynamism and vibrancy, the Christian kingdoms also evoke a palpable sadness, a realization that their bright future has been purchased in blood and tears. Unlike Cainites, mortals exist only for a brief while. Although they are quite willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of future generations, they do not do so without the regret that they shall never see the fruits of their labors. Thus, while the Lasombra scheme and the Brujah plan their utopia, the mortals of these kingdoms struggle to make a better present for themselves and a better future for their children.

ARAGON

Aragon derives its name from a tributary of the Ebro near Alfaro. The river forms an irregular ellipse, bounded on the north by the central Pyrenees, on the east by Catalonia and Valencia, on the south by Valencia and Castile and on the west by Navarre and Castile. The country possesses some of the most mountainous terrain in the Iberian Peninsula — perhaps in all of Europe. Aragon is surrounded on the north by the Pyrenees, on the west by the Moncayo Mountains and on the south by the Montes Universales and the Sierra de Gúdar.

The Ebro crosses the country from northwest to southeast. Nearly all of the other rivers in this country are its tributaries. These topographical conditions have made the soil of Aragon very fertile. In addition, the mountains are covered with great forests and fruits grow abundantly. Contrasting this are the many parts of the country that are extremely arid and lacking in water, which has led to a relatively low population density in some areas.

LÉRIDA

The city of Lérida goes back to Roman times, but the exact date of its founding is in question. A pre-Roman city called Ilerda existed in the general vicinity of modern Lérida. During the Punic Wars, it sided with the Carthaginians. At the time, the city possessed a small population of Brujah with strong ties to Carthage, but that all changed with the Roman general Scipio's

defeat of Hanno in 216 BC. After that, Roman Ventrue moved into the city, either driving out or destroying their Brujah rivals. For centuries after that, the Brujah waged a low-level battle against the Ventrue. However, this battle ceased when the Moors captured the city in the early eighth century. Muslim Lasombra took advantage of the conquest to displace both the Ventrue and Brujah elders.

They retained uncontested control of the city until 1149, when Ramón Berenguer IV took the city for the Crown of Aragon. When the city became the residence of the Aragonese king, ambitious and uncompromising Christian Lasombra entered the city and decided to clean house. Under the leadership of Anchel de Melgarejo, these Cainites systematically destroyed their Muslim brethren, despite appeals to the *Amici Noctis* for intervention. Since then, Prince Anchel has exerted complete dominion over the vampires of the city. Rumor abound of Ashirra who survived the purge, which drives the prince to distraction. He has thus set up an inquisition to find these Muslim Cainites — if they exist at all — and eliminate them once and for all.

DESCRIPTION

Because of its strategic position, Lérida has always been an important (and heavily fortified) holding, first to the Moors and then to the Christians. Its primary fortress is La Alcazaba, built in 1149, which dominates the portion of the city built on the right bank of the Segre River. The current structure is a development of an earlier Muslim citadel. Indeed, *alcazaba* is an Arabic word meaning roughly "fortress." During Moorish rule, the Cainite sultan of the city used La Alcazaba as his haven, a practice the Christian prince has not continued. Instead, Anchel and his court occupy a series of buildings near the city's new cathedral.

The cathedral shows both Byzantine and Gothic influences (as opposed to the Arabic influence of most of Lérida's other public architecture) and is under a constant state of construction. The foundation was laid only in 1203 and it is unlikely it will see completion any time soon. This monumental undertaking has brought artisans, masons and engineers from across Europe to participate. Among them have come Cainites as well, including displaced Ventrue seeking to regain their former status within the city. This has only added to Anchel de Melgarejo's concerns about the stability of his rule — a concern shared by elders of Clan Lasombra.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Lérida's importance derives from the presence of the court of King Pedro II. Pedro's goals are to extend Aragonese influence beyond the confines of Iberia and into the wider world of Europe. In this, he is strongly supported by his advisors, many of them manipulated by the Lasombra. For his part, Pedro has been seeking alliances with southern French lords. Indeed, the king

hopes to secure himself a French wife as a way of further cementing his presence north of the Pyrenees. Some churchmen question their king's interest in southern France, worrying that his advisors may include hidden supporters of the Cathars.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Many members of the Cainite Heresy wish the Church's concerns about King Pedro were warranted. Thus far, the Heresy and its allies have been thwarted in their efforts at gaining influence over the Aragonese court. To some extent, this is a testament to the power of the Lasombra in Aragon. The elders of the clan seek to prevent anyone — even Heretical members of their own clan — from upsetting their plans for Aragonese growth and expansion. The Embrace of Pedro's half-sister Lucita in 1190 is only part of this agenda. Although Lucita has traveled across Europe as part of her service to her sire Ambrosio Luis Moncada and other members of the *Amici Noctis*, she keeps agents in Lérida and at the royal court. Anchel, the local prince, has thus far been her ally, but he fears that the neonate has the making of a dangerous rival.

Even more infuriating to the Heresy is that one of its offshoots, the Apostles of the Third Caine, have succeeded in placing one of their own within Pedro's court. This member, Guillem Savall, acts neither directly nor through mortal agents. Instead, he observes events within the king's palace, looking for evidence that the mortal ruler might be the Apostles' long awaited messiah. The Heretics would dearly love to have the access to the king that Guillem possesses, but the Apostles have rebuffed every effort to co-opt them. In this, Lasombra like Lucita seemingly aid them — although her motivations for doing so remain mysterious.

King Pedro himself is uninterested in ecclesiastical matters. His fascination with southern France is driven more by politics than theology. Nevertheless, this has neither soothed the concerns of mortal clerics nor kept agents of the Cainite Heresy from attempting to gain a foothold here. Consequently, the Apostles of the Third Caine currently hold the balance of power. Both the traditional Lasombra and the Cainite Heresy are attempting to influence this small group to support their own cause as a defense against their opponent's gaining too much power. Yet both factions are hampered by inflexible hard-liners. Lucita cannot deal too closely with the Apostles, as her sire Archbishop Moncada has nothing but contempt for the Cainite Heresy — whatever its form. Likewise, Nikita of Sredetz, the new Archbishop of Nod, is hard-pressed to make accommodations with the Apostles, for fear of seeming too conciliatory toward the schismatics. Thus, Guillem Savall finds himself in the enviable position of being courted by two inimical factions — and having little interest in supporting either.

ZARAGOZA

The great city of Zaragoza is situated on the Ebro river. Before the Roman period, the site of Zaragoza appears to have been occupied by Salduba, a small Celtiberian village of little consequence. In the first century BC, Augustus founded the colony of Caesar Augusta, making it the capital of a district and an important military outpost. Pomponius Mela called it "the most illustrious of the inland cities of Hispania Tarraconensis." This new colony attracted Cainites of Clan Ventrue, who claimed it as their own.

Zaragoza's ecclesiastical diocese is one of the oldest in Iberia; its origin dates back to the coming of the legendary mission of St. James — a fact of which there had never been any doubt among the Christian population of the city. Closely related to the tradition of St. James's founding of the church of Zaragoza are those of Our Lady of the Pillar and of Saints Athanasius and Theodore. The two saints were disciples of St. James, who are supposed to have been the first bishops of Zaragoza.

The city was the site of several Roman persecutions of Christians. St. Valerius was bishop of the city in the early fourth century and suffered martyrdom during the persecution of the emperor Dacian,

along with his deacon St. Vincent. The Ventrue prince of the city, Flavius Sidonis, encouraged this persecution. Flavius was a devotee of Neoplatonic philosophy and was more than happy to see Dacian and St. Vincent suffer at Roman hands. Local legend has it that Dacian captured many early Christians by means of a ruse. The emperor announced he would give freedom of religion to any Christians who left Zaragoza at a certain fixed time through designated gates. When the Christians did so, he had them put immediately to the sword and their bodies burned to ashes. These ashes were mixed with those of criminals, so that no veneration might be paid them, as Dacian was well aware of the powerful cult of martyrs already in the city. The legend goes on to say that a miraculous rain fell upon the ashes, separating those of the martyrs from those of the criminals, forming white masses in the case of the martyrs. These, known as the "holy masses" were deposited in the crypt of the church dedicated to St. Engratia, where they are still preserved. St. Vincent was taken to Valencia, where he suffered a long and painful martyrdom at Roman hands. Meanwhile, St. Valerius was exiled to a place called Enet, near Barbastro, where he died. Although the faithful transported his relics to Roda for safekeeping during the Muslim invasions, his head and



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arm were brought back to Zaragoza when Christian forces had reconquered the city.

In the fifth century, Zaragoza fell first to the Suevi and then to the Visigoths. Nevertheless, St. Isidore of Sevilla extolled it as one of the greatest cities of Iberia during the reign of the Goths, while Pacensis called it "the most ancient and most flourishing" city of the region. The Gothic invasion did little to harm the fortunes of the Ventrué. Nevertheless, Flavius was appalled by the rough nature of the barbarian invaders, who cared little for Roman sophistication. Consequently, the prince swallowed his pride and quietly supported the Church as a means to preserve something of Roman ways in Zaragoza. His gambit paid off, as the laudatory passages quoted above attest. However, Flavius's move also gave the Church untold power — at the expense of his own.

While under Muslim occupation, Flavius and his brood attempted to court their opposite number among Moorish Cainites. The prince saw these Ashirra as cultured people with whom he could come to an agreement. He hoped that he could use them as a means of weakening the strength of the Church in Zaragoza — all the while rebuilding his own shattered authority.

Initially, this rapprochement worked to the Ventrué's advantage. At his suggestion, several churches were converted for use as mosques. However, the will of the Christian population only grew stronger. The Ashirra eventually concluded that Flavius' advice had only invigorated the cause of Christianity in Zaragoza. Flavius soon found himself ignored by his Muslim brethren, who established a separate Cainite sultanate in 912, flouting his claim of domain. For the next two hundred years, Flavius Sidonis was prince in name only.

Alfonso I of Aragon defeated the Moors and took the city on December 18, 1118. The newly appointed Archbishop of Zaragoza first resided at the Church of the Pillar, but on January 6, 1119, he consecrated a mosque, rededicated it to the Savior and moved the episcopal throne there. This Cathedral of St. Savior holds a great deal of symbolism for the people of Zaragoza because it was built on the site of an older church, which itself had been built on the site of one of the first mosques erected in the Iberian Peninsula. In local eyes, it represents not only the liberation of their city from the Moors, but also the progress of the *Reconquista*. Even some of the city's Cainites hold the cathedral in similar awe — though few dare to approach it too closely.

The decision to move the episcopal throne to St. Savior was unpopular with the canons of the Church of the Virgin of the Pillar, who since 1135 have reclaimed the title of cathedral as well. Zaragoza is thus unique in having two such churches. The second cathedral is dedicated to the Virgin of the Pillar. The church commemorates the appearance of the Blessed Virgin

Mary on a pillar erected in honor of Saint James the Greater. Since the establishment of the episcopal throne in St. Savior, this church has seen a sizable decline in its congregation. Except on feast days, such as the commemoration of the Virgin's apparition in January, the cathedral is often devoid of many mortals. Consequently, neonates and Caitiff sometimes find the cathedral a convenient meeting place.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Zaragoza is a strongly Christian city. Its former Muslim inhabitants have largely been driven out or have converted (typically under coercion). The city's small number of Jews suffer under numerous laws that restrict their movements and occupations. The people of Zaragoza have thus adopted a triumphalist attitude toward the *Reconquista*. They are certain not only of its ultimate victory against the Saracens but also that God is clearly on their side. This attitude makes it almost impossible to convince them of the danger still posed by the Almohads — which frustrates their fellow Iberians to no end. Indeed, they show no greater inclination to actually taking up arms against the Saracens than any other on the peninsula, and they are even somewhat lackluster in their support when it comes to doing more than simply praying and speaking about the wars.

Instead, the inhabitants prefer to engage in scholarship and study. Ironically, this is a tradition begun under the hated Muslims, who made Zaragoza a city of learning. That reputation continues even today, although the Aragonese have as yet made little effort to improve the city's college near the Plaza de Maria Magdalena — a fact that rankles its inhabitants. The school attracts visitors, both living and unliving, and its grounds hide the haven of Alfonso Palacios, a Cainite physician fascinated by Arabic medical texts.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Since the expulsion of the Muslims, Flavius Sidonis has regained his domain. The subsequent flight of the Ashirra left him the most powerful Cainite in Zaragoza, as well as the most experienced. His ability to survive during the Muslim occupation has earned him the grudging respect of the younger Lasombra who now flock to the city. However, Flavius' disdain for Christianity has not been softened over the centuries. If anything, he is even more fervent in his hatred, but he keeps his opinions to himself for fear of giving the Lasombra an excuse to depose him. He has suffered the loss of his position once; he has no desire to do so a second time.

CATALONIA

Catalonia is the other major principality within the Crown of Aragon, located in the northeast corner of the Iberian Peninsula. The name derives either from the

compound "Goth-Alania," referring to its historical occupation by the Goths and Alans, or from "Gothalandia," supposedly the name of an early people indigenous to the surrounding area. Other legends suggest the name stems from that of Orger Catalo, a hero of the eastern Pyrenees who defeated the Muslims in battle in 756. This last legend is especially popular among the locals, who see it as evidence of their willingness to fight against the Moorish invaders.

In any event, Catalonia forms a right triangle, of which the smallest side lies along the eastern Pyrenees, another side forms the boundary of Aragon and the final side is the Mediterranean coastline. Its terrain slopes gently from the Pyrenees down to the seacoast on the one side and to the basin of the Mediterranean Sea on the other. Catalonia's eastern regions drain directly into the Mediterranean through several rivers, most notably the Ebro. The Ebro is the primary river in Catalonia, although the Segre is used as a waterway to transport timber and produce from the upper portions of the country.

BARCELONA

Barcelona is one of the most ancient cities of Iberia—and one of the most important. Founded by the Hamilcar, it was in the possession of the Carthaginians until the Romans drove them out. Despite the connection to Carthage, the Brujah never had a strong presence in Barcelona, apparently preferring other locales on the peninsula. Even after it passed into Roman hands, Barcelona continued to enjoy a position of prominence in Iberia. Julius Caesar bestowed on it the name of Julia Augusta Faventia Pia in recognition of the support the city had given him in his struggle against Pompey. Later, Caesar made it a Roman colony, an act that bestowed on its inhabitants the full privileges of Roman citizenship.

As it has elsewhere in the peninsula, this honor increased the city's population—both mortal and Cainite. In the early days, the bulk of the vampiric inhabitants were Lasombra and Ventruë, with a small number of Malkavians. The position of prince was hotly contested for decades but ultimately fell to the Lasombra, who have retained it ever since. The current prince is Mireia Subira, the child of the original ruler of the city, Ramón Vera. She has initiated a policy of tolerance within her domain, a move that has won her the respect of neonates at the expense of elders, who would prefer she assume a less flexible approach.

Barcelona went into a decline after the fall of Rome until Ataulf, King of the Visigoths, chose it for his residence in the fifth century AD. Later, Barcelona passed successively into the hands of the Arabs and the Franks. Finally, Wilfrid the Hairy declared independence for the city and surrounding territory, calling it the "County of Barcelona." It remained under an independent government with its own counts until the marriage of Petronila, daughter of King Ramiro the Monk of Aragon, to the Count of Barcelona in 1137. The marriage united the two

realms under the Crown of Aragon, a situation that has prevailed ever since.

Barcelona, being situated on the shores of the Mediterranean and on a Roman military road between Iberia and Gaul, was always in contact with the rest of the empire. The city received Christianity early, having been evangelized by disciples of the Apostles themselves, and the See of Barcelona thus became an important bishopric within Christendom. Indeed, numerous councils have been held within its confines, most recently in 1125, and there's every reason to believe more will follow. The thirteenth century is a time of great tumult in the Church, and as Iberia comes into closer contact with the rest of Western Europe, it can hardly expect to be spared.

DESCRIPTION

Among the many monuments that distinguish the city, the most important is the cathedral, built in the early days of the Church and dedicated to the Holy Cross. Damaged during the Muslim occupation, the cathedral was rebuilt by order of Count Berenguer I and reconsecrated in 1058. Barcelona is committed to a program of impressive expansions and improvements for the cathedral that are likely to continue throughout the thirteenth century and beyond. Elsewhere, the ancient church of Santa Maria del Mar is a beautiful specimen of Gothic architecture, while Santa Maria del Pino has the most spacious and lofty nave of all the Gothic churches in Barcelona. The church of Saints Justo and Pastor was the first dedicated to Christian worship in Barcelona, giving it cachet with pilgrims and churchmen alike.

Barcelona also possesses archives of great value in which many precious documents, saved from the Almohad conquest under al-Mansur, are preserved. Among the archives are priceless books called *Exemplaria* that relate important ecclesiastical events and include records of royal oaths and the like. Consequently, they are some of the best archives in Iberia, and scholars from across Europe consult them. Because these archives are rumored to hold hitherto unknown works relating to *The Book of Nod* and other dark tomes, they have attracted the interest of Cainites as well as mortals. Mireia herself has taken an interest in these rumors. She employs several Cainite and mortal pawns in her efforts to discover these supposed tomes. Given the size and disarray of the archives, this may be a long undertaking indeed.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Barcelona is a city at odds with itself. On the one hand, it represents the success of the union known as the Crown of Aragon. On another, it seethes with resentment at the absorption of Catalonia within a "foreign" state. Neither attitude is strong enough to tip the balance, so Barcelona exists in a twilight realm between open-minded acceptance of its place and outright rebellion.

This attitude is reflected in its Cainite population as well. The prince is a Lasombra, but she grants no special privileges to her clanmates. Indeed, she regularly consults with Ventrue and Malkavian advisors — much to the chagrin of some Lasombra elders. They fear something else is at work other than simple broadmindedness. The most regularly voiced concern is that she has been co-opted by a group such as the Cainite Heresy. The problem with such theories is that they provide no insight into why Mireia acts as she does, let alone what a group like the Heresy would have to gain by her actions. For now, the elders merely grumble and allow her to rule as she has since the destruction of her sire in 1164.

In a similar vein, Barcelona's relationship with the Church is unusual as well. For centuries, Barcelona has been an important Christian center, notable both for its churches and for its strength of belief. However, Catalonia has always been a fertile breeding ground for dissent against Rome. The fact that the Church has a history of supporting efforts by foreign powers to conquer Catalonia has certainly not helped its cause. Likewise, the Aragonese have installed several of their own clerics into positions of power in Barcelona, adding to the consternation within the city.

LIFE IN THE CITY

Barcelona is the key to Catalonia's — and therefore Aragon's — plans to expand beyond the confines of the Iberian Peninsula. The city is a major seaport, offering ready access to the Mediterranean and the maritime cities of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Consequently, life in Barcelona revolves more and more around trade. Merchants from France, Italy and as far away as Outremer make regular visits, exchanging their wares for the best that Catalonia has to offer. The city is often the first port of entry for outsiders seeking to journey on to the interior of the peninsula.

Barcelona's seaport gives the city a cosmopolitan flavor that is unmatched in Christian Iberia. Naturally, this makes the city a popular destination for foreign Cainites. Among them are refugees from the Byzantine Empire, recently divided up during the Fourth Crusade. In the aftermath of the crusade, Byzantine Cainite society has been rocked by turmoil and dissension, as various factions vie with one another for the favors of the new Latin overlords. The refugees have chosen to flee Byzantium rather than bow before the invading westerners. Among their number is a Brujah named Nerea, who fled a blood hunt in Barcelona some 40 years ago after she destroyed her sire Guzmán Bravo in a jealous rage. Nerea now goes by the name Andrea since Bravo still has friends in the city. (For more on Nerea, see *Constantinople by Night and Bitter Crusade*.)

As noted above, Barcelona is well known for its many fine archives and collections of books, and a small portion of the local industry revolves around these

pursuits. Copyists and scribes can be employed for reasonable fees in order to locate and transcribe tomes of ancient knowledge. Representatives of Europe's great universities, like those in Paris and Padua, visit the city in order to purchase books for their own collections. Likewise, seekers after esoteric — even arcane — knowledge sometimes venture into the city on their own quests for wisdom. Among these visitors are Cainites, including a handful of Tremere. These young vampires are certain that the archives hold untold knowledge of value to both their clan and their mortal allies. Mireia's policy of tolerance does not extend to the Usurpers, however, and she has forbidden them to consult the archives. The prince's reasons for this action are unknown, but they seem to revolve around her own quest for forbidden lore. Consequently, the Tremere act through surrogates to obtain the knowledge they seek.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

The city's proximity to southern France has also brought it into contact with various Gnostic heretical groups like the Cathars. Under vampiric influence, agents of the Cainite Heresy have infiltrated Barcelona. However, the Heresy has thus far met with little success among either mortals or Cainites. Only a few minor Church officials have joined the secretive cult — a great disappointment. This failure is partially due to the presence of the Apostles of the Third Caine, who oppose the mainstream Heresy. Even more significant in checking the Heresy is the vigilance of Barcelona's mortals, including members of the Sword of St. James. One important member of this mortal group, Mateu Agustí, has his primary residence in Barcelona. Consequently, the Heresy acts cautiously here; it doesn't wish to risk exposure either to other Cainites or to mortals.

GIRONA

Girona is bounded on the north by the Pyrenees and on the south and east by the Mediterranean Sea. The surrounding region is mountainous, with forests of pine, oak and chestnut, as well as many mineral springs. The mountains are the site of many mines, particularly of coal — an important part of the city's economy. Agriculture exists but is of limited value. Thus, Girona relies heavily on imported foodstuffs to feed its population. In times of war, this reliance is a significant weakness, which is why soldiers regularly patrol on foot and on horseback the roads leading to the city.

The city is situated at the confluence of the Ter and Ona Rivers. The most ancient portion of the city stands on a steep hill and includes the dilapidated remains of once formidable battlements. In ancient times, Girona was known as Gerundia, a city of the Ausetani tribe. Local legend has it that Saints Paul and James first preached Christianity here when they arrived in Iberia after the death of Christ. Legend also holds that the city's first bishop was St. Maximus, a disciple of St.

THE CHRISTIAN KINGDOMS

James. The city's inhabitants therefore pride themselves on their ancient Christian heritage.

DESCRIPTION

Girona is a city of walls; its impressive battlements have withstood numerous attacks over the centuries. In fact, the city has survived twenty-five separate sieges and has been captured seven times, making it one of the most fought-over cities in the peninsula. In the time of Charlemagne, it was wrested temporarily from the Muslims, who were not decisively driven from the city until 1015. Since then, Girona has remained firmly in Christian hands.

The Muslims used the city's ancient cathedral as a mosque. Once the Moors were expelled for good, a new cathedral was rebuilt on the site of the old one. The contemporary church although still under construction, is quite beautiful, showing influences both from the surrounding area and from the Muslims who once held sway here. The cathedral can be reached by ascending eighty-six steps. Its 73-foot stone arch opens into the body of the church and is one of the largest in all of Christendom. Among its many beautiful interior decorations is a retablo that is the work of a Valencian silversmith. The retablo is divided into three tiers of statuettes and reliefs, each framed in canopied niches of cast and hammered silver. The high altar possesses a

gold and silver frontal that is equally impressive. The cathedral contains the tombs of Ramón Berenguer and his wife, making it an important pilgrimage site for those who revere their memory.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Girona is one of many cities under Christian control that retains a sizable Jewish population. The Jews settled in Girona well before the Muslim invasions, making themselves an important part of the city's culture. As they became more successful, their initially small settlement spread, encompassing many houses and shops along the Via Augusta, the old Roman road that runs through the city. In time, the Jewish quarter became known as the Call and included 300 Jews. Under both Muslim and early Christian rule, the Call functioned like an independent government. Its inhabitants recognized the ruler of Girona as their liege and paid taxes to him in return for the right to retain their own ways.

Beginning in the eleventh century, though, that situation changed for the worse. Since that time, the city's inhabitants have persecuted the Jews, seeing them as a threat to the stability of the new Christian domains. Many Jews have decided to leave the city, seeking out safer havens elsewhere. No faction within



IBERIA BY NIGHT

Girona officially sponsors the persecution, but it does receive the tacit support of both Church and state.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Harpalion, Girona's Cappadocian prince, is a devout Christian and claims to have converted to the faith during the mission of St. James himself. Few of his fellows take this boast seriously, but there is no question the prince fervently believes the Gospel, looking to Christ as the only source of eternal life. Yet, he also believes that his vampiric existence is a divine gift, one that allows him to plumb the depths of both life and death. Despite these idiosyncrasies, Harpalion is a just prince who rules his domain fairly and with good judgment.

Meanwhile, a Lasombra named Melquiado Casamayor has used incidents of anti-Semitic outbreaks to target assets of his old rival, Menahem de Samaynigo. He believes that Menahem, a Brujah of Jewish stock, has several agents among Girona's Jewish merchants. Thus far Melquiado has been unable to identify more than a few likely catspaws, but he is growing increasingly frustrated and is willing to try anything to strike back at his enemy. Moreover, these attacks provide an excellent cover for his feedings, an added provocation he hopes might draw Menahem out — and into his trap.

CASTILE

Castile (or "Castilla" in Spanish) derives its name from the vast numbers of castles and fortifications that dot its landscape. It is a kingdom in flux, constantly merging with and separating from León. The kingdom stands in the forefront of the *Reconquista* and was recently the site of the decisive battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, at which the might of the Almohad regime was finally broken. Prior to that, it was invaded by its erstwhile allies in Navarre and León, but rebuffed them decisively under the leadership of Alfonso VIII, annexing Álava and Guipúzcoa from Navarre in the process.

Unofficially, Castile is divided into Old Castile, formerly known as Vellagia or Vetula, and New Castile, territory that has been taken from the Moors since the beginning of the eleventh century. The dividing line is the Carpetano-Vetónica mountain range, and above it Old Castile forms a rough triangle. Its boundaries are León to the west, the Sierra de Gredos to the southeast, and in the northeast, the river Ebro. The Duero and Pisuerga Rivers also flow across the plateau. The climate varies extensively, but the varied weather produces excellent crops of wheat and other grains. Notable points within Old Castile include Burgos, Valladolid, Segovia and Ávila.

"Castilla Nueva" is a different matter. Resting on a slightly lower plateau, it is warmer and drier than Old Castile and is correspondingly less fertile. Its boundaries are the mountain chain of the Carpetano-Vetónica

to the north, the Sierra Morena to the south and the mountains of Cuenca to the east. New Castile is divided into two massive river valleys, the Tajo in the north and the Guadiana to the south. The two are separated by the mountains of Toledo, which join the Sierra de Guadalupe in Extremadura. The third major river of New Castile is the Júcar, which flows through the southeast from its origins in the Cuenca.

In the wake of Las Navas de Tolosa, Castile's boundaries have been extended southwards as far as Baeza and Úbeda. The terrain consists primarily of farmland dotted with intermittent fortifications. Until the *Reconquista* this land was used for grazing, but with the land grants given out by the conquering Christians to their faithful vassals, agriculture has overwhelmed the region. Castile also stretches out to encompass the cities of Toledo and Madrid. Its kings have been relentlessly expansionist, and as such have absorbed a great deal of land relatively rapidly.

MADRID

The sometime residence of the King of Castile, Madrid is a city of miracles. Located on the Manzanares River, the city was originally constructed as a simple fort during the Cordoban emirate. Its purpose was to serve as the midpoint in a defensive line that ran from the Guadarrama to Toledo, and to watch the north-south traffic on the road from Gredos. It initially comprised nine hectares of land within a walled boundary, a fortress of the *almudena* style that was guarded on the north and west by rocky crags. However, its central location, rich neighboring territory and eminently defensible position quickly encouraged the city to grow. Because of Madrid's strength as a fortress, Alfonso VI and the Cid bypassed it in their wars of conquest, instead choosing to capture Toledo and allowing Madrid to wither on the vine. It finally fell in 1083, after Ramiro II of León destroyed the city's original walls a century and a half earlier.

The city's name means "rich in waters," primarily because of the lushness of the river valley. It first entered history as "Majerit" in 932, during the accounts of Ramiro's siege, and quickly transformed to the modern "Madrid." The earliest settlements on the site were along the river's banks, which featured abundant game. Waters have always been tied intimately to the city's history, especially when a miraculous source of fresh water allowed the Christianized city to withstand an Almohad siege.

The city itself is located on a promontory overlooking the river, in the middle of the vast plateau called the Meseta. Resting over 2,100 feet above sea level, Madrid is often buffeted by high winds, especially in the traditionally cold, sharp winters. Summers, on the other hand, are frequently extremely hot. The nearby Carpetovetónica Range of mountains also plays hob

ALFONSO VIII OF CASTILE

The King of Castile since 1158 — when he was crowned at the tender age of three — Alfonso the Noble has been a strong hand steering the ship of state for over half a century. Despite his crushing setback at Alarcos in 1195, he has been a relentless scourge of the Almohads, and it was he who forged the coalition of his former Christian enemies that took the field at Las Navas de Tolosa.

Near the end of his life, Alfonso is still an able field general and a canny politician. He is devoted to safeguarding the future of Castile and expelling the Almohads from Iberia, not necessarily in that order. Married to Eleanor, daughter of Henry II of England, Alfonso has fathered several children, including Enrique (who will succeed him in 1214), the noted poetess Blanche, and Berenguela, who has married Alfonso IX of León and whose son Fernando III will eventually unite Castile and León.

with the city's weather, and the resultant wind patterns cause heavy rains during the late fall months.

Inhabitants of the city are called "*Madriñenos*" and are proud of their city's burgeoning growth and increasing stature. Madrid is the boastful youth of the cities of Castile, and a *Madriñeno* has no shame about living up to his city's reputation.

DESCRIPTION

As is appropriate for a city in the land of castles, Madrid was built around a fortress, and all of its subsequent expansion has been done with an eye toward the needs of defense. It is not a coincidence that the central construction of the city originally bore the name the Almudena — "The Citadel." It rested within the original walls, along with the training field now called the King's Camp (or Prado del Rey), and the small citadel, which served as a residential section. The small citadel was kept to the south primarily because the southern section opened more easily to the outside world.

The city walls date to the ninth century and are anchored on the southwestern angle of the central citadel. The wall extends along the precipice overlooking the so-called "Moorish Camp" until it reaches Vega Hill, where one of the city's five gates opens. To the southeast is the Almudena Gate, known as St. Mary's Gate to Christians, and these two entrances see most of the city's traffic.

To the north of Vega Hill, an arm of the city wall extends outward to the Narigues Tower, an important sentry point. The wall itself continues, making a sharp turn north past St. Mary's Gate to rejoin the citadel by the Orient Square. Near here lies the Sagra Gate.

The southwest corner of the city is known as the Moreria, and predictably, serves as the Moorish quar-

ter. This area is particularly cramped, even for claustrophobic Madrid. Residents, wary of another invasion, prefer to build up rather than out, and keep their domiciles safely within the city walls.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Madrid was first a Muslim town, and a Moorish influence still hangs over the city. Place names, language, architectural style — all harken back to the Islamic origins of the city. In the century or so since the city was taken, a concerted effort has been made to stamp out this influence. Thus far it has not succeeded, but the program of reconsecrating mosques as churches is progressing steadily.

The Jewish community of Madrid is small and fearful, though it has begun to expand. The city's *juderia* is located near the Puerta de Vallmandu and is centered on a single synagogue. The community's influence is very small, and its presence is essentially ignored by outsiders.

The political scene in Madrid can best be described as "ambitious." While Toledo remains the capital, Madrid is rapidly increasing in size and population, and there are rumblings among the populace that it should be the center

QUEEN BLANCHE

*Love, with whom too late I am allied,
Has instructed me through its lordship...*

— Blanche of Castile

A daughter of Castile and the mother of (and regent for) Louis IX of France, Blanche (or Blanca) is a woman of many talents. Not the least of them is her remarkable compositional ability, which enables her to produce some remarkable songs in the troubadour tradition. While not quite as prolific as the Flemish *jongleress* Hadewijch, Blanche does have the advantage of wealth and position, which means that her songs are widely circulated and applauded, even by those not seeking royal favor.

Blanche's popularity and talent are such that Toreador from all over Europe are slowly sojourning toward Castile in hopes of discovering more prodigies like her. The notion of a *jongleress* of such skill is shocking enough to some of the more conservative members of the clan; the fact that she is of royal blood is even more remarkable. As a result, Toreador are now circling very carefully around anywhere Blanche makes her court, to see if perhaps a hidden member of the clan is standing in the shadows, pulling Blanche's strings and providing her songs. While her songs are lovely enough that no one cares who's actually writing them, the notion of an unknown Cainite with that much influence over a queen is extremely worrisome....

IBERIA BY NIGHT

of Castile. Within the city, politics is a game for the Christian wealthy, as there is no room at the top for the city's Jews and Muslims.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Madrid's Cainites are also very heavily Christian. Power in the city is increasingly centered around the church where Archbishop Monçada makes his haven. The Lasombra dominate the city, and every night Monçada dominates the Lasombra more and more. While he has not established himself as prince — he has no interest in such temporal honors, after all — he might as well be, and he is the real power in the city despite his relative youth. Of course, there are other potent Cainites in the city, including Monçada's sire Silvester de Ruiz (the current master of the Lasombra affairs across Christian Iberia) and the Ventrue Natasio, who serves as a field general of the Shadow Reconquista.

Oddly enough, the Cainites of Madrid are perhaps more tolerant than their human neighbors. While the ruling Christian Cainites are under Monçada's thumb, he allows the city's remaining Ashirra (most fled or were destroyed when the city was taken 1083) to stay so long as they feed only on their coreligionists and the city's Jews. Christians, it seems, are strictly for the Christian Cainites. Some Ashirra are thankful for the respite from conflict, while most resent the policy fiercely.

TOLEDO

Originally described by the Roman historian Titus Livius as "a small fortified town," Toledo has grown over the centuries to magnificent stature. Built on hills and bounded by the Tajo River, the city is dotted with fortress walls. Toledo is almost impregnable against direct assault, though it is somewhat more vulnerable to sieges.

The city is the capital of Castile and remains the kingdom's most worldly and cosmopolitan city. Its gates are open to travelers and merchants from all lands, and the satellite town of Talavera has a thriving pottery industry. The area around the city is settled and free from conflict, and its reputation as the place where the finest of everything can be found draws sages, physicians, philosophers — and Cainites.

DESCRIPTION

The main entry to the city is the north gate, alternately known as the Puerta de la Bisagra or the Puerta de Alfonso VI. The latter name derives from the fact that this is the gate through which Alfonso and



THE CHRISTIAN KINGDOMS

El Cid entered when they conquered the city in 1083. The city's market square, the Plaza de Zocodover, sits above the gate and sees much traffic. It is the main marketplace for Toledo, where goods as mundane as meats and fruits and as exotic as *azafrán* (saffron) and Damascene steel change hands. Merchants from the three faiths congregate here, as do farmers, fishermen who work the Tajo, puppeteers, the traveling players of *cómicos de la lengua* and more. Even on days when there is no market, there is often excitement as men play at *juegos de cañas* (javelin contests). The Zocodover is truly the heart of the city, though at night it is almost deserted by the living.

THE MIRACLE OF WATERS

During the Almohad invasion, Madrid was besieged by armies under the command of Ali ibn Yusuf. Ibn Yusuf laid siege to the city for several months (giving the so-called Moorish Camp its name). The siege was unsuccessful due in large part to the defenders' seemingly miraculous ability to come up with endless supplies of fresh water. Discouraged, ibn Yusuf moved on, and the Christian world ascribed the resupply of the city to the intervention of the Virgin Mary.

The truth is somewhat more prosaic.

The original architects of the city constructed an elaborate network of aqueducts, cisterns and waterworks underneath the city to provide fresh water in case of siege. Madrid was originally constructed as a military installation, after all, and as such was prepared for the eventuality of siege.

The aqueducts beneath the city are a marvel of engineering, which provides an unexpected side benefit to the local Cainite population. The entrances and exits to this system make an excellent means by which Cainites can enter and leave the city. Though these gates are well guarded and hard to find, guides can be had — for a price. Those seeking to force their way in through the tunnels, however, are in for a rude surprise. The original traps laid by the architects of the system are still in place. Furthermore, they have been improved by vampiric tenants — a trio of Nosferatu driven west from Constantinople by the depredations of the Fourth Crusade. The three previously fled Outremer, and have determined that they will do no further running. The cisterns beneath Madrid is where they will make their haven, and God help anyone who thinks otherwise. As a result, they are very wary about whom they guide beneath the city. They do not hesitate to turn on their "clients" if the barest evidence of treachery presents itself.

In the center of the city is the Alcázar, a square fortress with four towers. Originally built in the ninth century by the Muslim forces intent on securing the region, it occupies the highest point in Toledo. It is also extremely defensible, with overlapping fields of fire, and it serves as the city's last bastion of defense. After taking the city, Alfonso VI restored and expanded the original Muslim fortress and granted it to the Cid. El Cid was also granted the San Servando castle, which stands on the shore of the Tajo opposite the city.

Toledo is also a city of churches, including the Church of Santiago del Arrabal, which still sports its muezzin's perch. There are also churches that survived the Muslim occupation intact, including the churches of San Sebastian, Santa Eulalia, Cristo de la Vega, San Vicente, San Miguel and Santo Tomé. These churches are decorated in a constantly evolving hodgepodge of Muslim geometric and botanical styles and more traditional Christian art, and there is always a church being constructed somewhere in the city. Also worth noting are the Iglesia de Santo Cristo de la Luz, and the massive cathedral project planned for the ruins of the main mosque of Toledo. The mosque itself had been built on the site of a razed Visigothic church, and it is over this locale that Alfonso VII's queen and Alfaquí Abu-Walid had their famous quarrel (see sidebar).

To the southwest of the city stretches the Puente de Alcántara ("the arch bridge") that leads to the roads south. The western bridge, the Puente de San Martín, collapsed during flooding in the twelfth century, and its one surviving tower has become an object of local folklore. Young girls have taken to calling it "*el baño de la Cava*," tying it to the legend of Florinda La Cava, with whom the Visigoth king Rodrigo fell in love. In actuality the site is also a favorite Cainite haunt, which explains many of the tall tales.

Further down the river, not technically part of Toledo, are the gardens and palace of the Muslim governor Galafre. Of no strategic or military importance, they are still quite beautiful and a favorite place for local Cainites to take honored — or feared — visitors.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Toledo is a cosmopolitan city. It hosts Muslim and Jewish districts, and there are mosques and synagogues here as well as churches. While the population is growing ever more Christian, there are still sizeable minority populations, and the city is open to merchants of all faiths. Both Jews and Muslims regard the Christian majority as somewhat unsanitary, primarily for the custom of dumping chamber pots into the city streets with an accompanying cry of "*Agua va!*" Still, Muslim, Jewish and Christian scholars and men of power still confer and socialize, and the city is open to all.

As in most of Iberia, the Jews live in their own quarter, or *kahal*, which is walled off from the rest of the city. The centerpiece of the *judería* is the main syna-

gogue, which has 32 pillars, 29 arches and a ceiling of larch wood. The *kahal*, like other Jewish quarters throughout the region, has its own set of *takkanot*, or neighborhood laws. These are as binding as the king's own laws within the quarter, and the punishments for transgressions against the community can range all the way up to *Herem* — permanent excommunication. This, however, is generally reserved for informers.

Muslims are scattered throughout the city, though a great many mosques have been turned into churches. The Grand Mosque has been torn down, and a church rises in its place. There are several mosques still intact and open for prayer, however, including the Mezquita — which has nine cupolas over four Gothic columns — and another mosque next to the Puerta del Sol.

The Muslim presence in Toledo is almost bitter-sweet. While the city still welcomes Muslim trade, Toledo is becoming inexorably Christian. In the meantime, however, the city remains open, and the pace of trade grows ever more feverish as fanaticism and war limit the number of markets that might otherwise be available. Sooner or later, it is said, everyone interesting in Iberia comes through Toledo. After all, it's the place where all of the other interesting people are most likely to be.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Toledo's Cainites, like their mortal counterparts, are cosmopolitan creatures. The city is loosely under Lasombra authority, but only loosely — there are simply too many Cainites of all stripes moving in and out for anyone to keep a thumb on the whole city. As a result, Toledo is the closest thing to a free city on the entire peninsula, with favors, allegiances and occasionally lives bought and sold at the Plaza de Zocodover's night market. Jorge Crespo, the ancient Nosferatu who oversees the market and indeed, much of Cainite business in Toledo, takes it as his duty to wrap the night's affairs in a cloak of invisibility, to hide them from prying mortal eyes. Crespo also maintains the last tower of the Puente de San Martin as a site for particularly sensitive transactions, and is doing his best to emphasize the legend of the place, so as to keep humans a respectful distance away.

While the principedom of Toledo is something of a political football, Elieser de Polanco is the closest thing to a real power the city holds. It was he who engineered Tercio Bravo's removal from the principedom. While his supporters are the majority in the city, Bravo still has a few friends who are waiting for their moment. During de Polanco's increasingly frequent absences, they do their best to foment discontent and lobby for Bravo's return. But Toledo's Cainite population is so transient — many more pass through than actually dwell there — that no one cares enough about the principedom to start a fight, so long as trade remains open.

JANUARY 24

The 24th of January is celebrated in Toledo as a day of unity. It was on this day that Alfonso VI ended the breach between his queen, Constanca (and her advisor, Archbishop Bernardo of Sahagun) and the head of the city's Muslim community, Alfaqui Abu-Walid. The queen had, against the king's dictates, expelled the city's Muslims from a mosque built on the site of an earlier church. Abu-Walid met the king outside the city to appeal for an end to the feud. Ever since, January 24th has been a holiday of peace.

It is also a night of safe passage for any Cainites moving through the area, the one night of the year when they are safe regardless of clan or affiliation. However, the courtesy does not extend to the night of January 25th, so those fugitives and outcasts who take advantage of the day of peace must be gone before dawn or face dire consequences.

LEON

León is situated in what was the southern part of the ancient kingdom of Asturias. Its primary natural boundaries are the Cantabrian Mountains. The range of the Peña Negra forms most of its southern border. Much of the kingdom is within the great Castilian plateau, at an elevation of more than 1,600 feet above sea level, rising toward the Cantabrian Mountains on the north. From north to west, it is drained by the river Sil and its tributaries. The Sil receive its waters from the southern slope of the Cantabrian Mountains, known as the Peña Rubia. Very mountainous in the north and northwest, León becomes more level towards the southeast, especially in the so-called Gothic Plains. From north to southwest it is traversed by the Mountains of León, which join the Cantabrian chain. The countryside is thus a mixture of the rough and the smooth — much like the Leonese people themselves.

The kingdom of León abounds in mineral resources. The hollows on both banks of the Bernesga River contain deposits of coal as well as great quantities of limestone. There are also iron and copper mines as well as mineral waters, some of which are renowned throughout the peninsula for their healing properties. Indeed, a small industry has grown up around these medicinal waters. Cainites of several clans have taken an interest in the waters, believing they possess qualities useful to them in their alchemical experimentation. Others, like Alfonso Palacios of Zaragoza, seek them out as an aid to their medical practices.

The climate of León varies considerably from region to region. It is cold in the mountains of the north and warm in the lowlands of the southeast. The El Bierzo region, sheltered by the mountains from the north winds, is one of the mildest and most humid in the country. In it, grapes, olives and many other fruits are

grown. In the south, great quantities of wheat and other cereals are cultivated, as well as beans and flax. The forests are rich in beech, ilex and oak. Livestock forms another important part of the local economy, consisting mostly of cattle, sheep and pigs. The mountainous character of the region makes communications difficult in many areas, which has helped León to retain its distinctive character, even in the face of increased contacts with the rest of Europe. This fact has also sheltered many Cainites, particularly the Apostles of the Third Caine, who maintain several remote havens throughout the country.

COMPOSTELA

Compostela is one of the most famous cities in Iberia. The city is situated on a hill between the Sar and Sarela Rivers. In very ancient times, a Celtic fortress, known as *Liberum Donum*, crowned this hill. Compostela itself overlooks two Roman roads, both still in good condition and used by travelers to the city. The Sar, swollen by the Sarela River, flows onward from Compostela some fifteen miles until it joins the Ulla River and empties into the sea at Padron. Padron is a small town that gained its fame because it is the home of the miraculous boat that legend says bore the body of the St. James from the Holy Land to Iberia. The presence of the Apostle's body makes Compostela the third greatest pilgrimage site in Dark Medieval Europe, after Jerusalem and Rome.

Over the centuries, both mortals and Cainites have been drawn to Compostela, as it offers a more convenient form of pilgrimage than the Holy Land, whose distance and danger makes it less attractive to Western Christians. Moreover, the pilgrimage route is guarded by the Order of St. James of Compostela, a group of knights from León and Castile. The Order maintains castles throughout the region and receives support from both kingdoms, ensuring that it has the resources necessary to undertake its important mission.

DESCRIPTION

To outsiders, the city of Compostela seems constructed solely to support the pilgrims who come there in increasing numbers each year. The magnificent cathedral, for example, houses many of these pilgrims, as do the many different hostels and inns that surround it. This gives the city a crowded appearance in places, which the presence of so many people only increases. Indeed, newcomers from other parts of Europe are both amazed and horrified at the huge throngs of humanity that fill Compostela's streets during the high points of the pilgrimage season.

The cathedral itself was built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries after the Muslim general al-Mansur sacked the city and destroyed its original church in 997. That attack was devastating to Compostela's morale.

Though al-Mansur was unable to find the body of St. James as he had hoped, he did force many of its citizens to carry the old church's main bell on their shoulders all the way to Córdoba, where it was added to that city's central mosque. The citizens of Compostela still remember this indignity and have pressed their leaders to reclaim the bell once the *Reconquista* reaches the capital of the Almohad Empire. In this wish, they are joined by the city's Cainite prince, the Lasombra Reinaldo de Rubio, a former knight who would have died during al-Mansur's attack had his sire not Embraced him.

The new cathedral was completed in 1188 and combines older styles with newer ones imported from France. For example, the statues and images that grace its interior and exterior are remarkably realistic, differing greatly from the stylized forms more common in past eras. The main door of the cathedral shows Christ in glory, surrounded by the four Evangelists, while the side doors depict Purgatory and the Last Judgment. An image of St. James rests upon a central pillar beneath one of Christ, symbolizing the saint's role as intercessor.

PILGRIM BADGES

Throughout the Middle Ages, an extensive network of pilgrim shrines grows up all over Europe. These shrines are dedicated to one or more saints whose relics or deeds are associated with that locale. Beginning in the thirteenth century, pewter pilgrim badges and ampoules of holy water are sold to pilgrims as souvenirs of their pilgrimage. In fact, the sale of these souvenirs becomes a significant industry at many shrines, eventually leading to ecclesiastical investigation and regulation.

The badges themselves are sewn to hats or clothing as proof of one's difficult physical and spiritual journey. Each shrine has a distinctive badge: a cross for Jerusalem, keys for Rome and so on. The shrine of Compostela uses the cockleshell of Galicia. These shells come in many varieties, from the inexpensive to the extravagant, depending on the wealth of the pilgrim. The cockleshell of Compostela has become a widespread image in pilgrimage art — a testament to the power and prestige of the shrine of St. James.

Although many pilgrims keep their badges as mementos of their journeys, others do not. It is a common practice in England and France, for example, to toss one's badge over a bridge and into a river as a token of thanks to God for a safe return home. In other countries, it is considered good luck to give away one's badge to a friend or relative. In any event, pilgrim badges are an integral part of Christian piety.

between mortals and the Son of God. The walls of the interior are lined with images of saints and prophets, all of them entwined in the roots of a vast Jesse tree. Pilgrims frequently pray while touching these images. Already, the constant flow of these worshipers has begun to wear away the stone, creating small holes that can only become bigger as time goes on.

The high altar is the centerpiece of the cathedral and the climax of any pilgrimage to the city. Pilgrims climb the steps leading to the altar and embrace the Most Sacred Image of Santiago, a representation of St. James. They then kiss his jeweled cape after which a churchman hands them a Latin document called a *Compostela*. This document certifies that the pilgrim has entered the cathedral and performed the proper rites of veneration of the saint. After this, most pilgrims seek confession and attend Mass.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Compostela is a city devoted both to pilgrimage and the *Reconquista*. The Holy See has recognized the site as one worthy for pilgrimage and grants the same temporal indulgences to any who do so, just as if one had visited Jerusalem or Rome. The city is thus the third holiest city in Western Christendom, a fact in which the local inhabitants take great pride. Like both Rome and Jerusalem, Compostela is home to both the

pious and the skeptical. The latter often operate hostels and inns, taking advantage of the many pilgrims that throng the city's streets, especially during the month of July, when the saint's feast is celebrated.

However, St. James serves political purposes as well. He is known as the *Matamoros* among some of his adherents, meaning "the Moor Killer." This name derives from the legend that St. James himself aided King Ramiro I at the battle of Clavijo in 844, personally killing over 60,000 Muslims. Since then, stories of the saint's apparitions have spread throughout Iberia, especially when Christian forces achieve a spectacular victory over their enemies.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Many Lasombra and Brujah partake in the cult of St. James, though their emphasis differs somewhat. The Lasombra see the cult as a unifying force that impels Iberians to continue their war against the Moors. The Brujah, however, view St. James as a warrior and leader of men. They take his title of *Matamoros* very seriously and seek to emulate his legendary actions. Of course, Compostela's prince is himself a man of action. Reinaldo is not content to sit back and wait for the unity to be achieved in the fight against the Saracens. He regularly implores his underlings to take decisive action against

EL CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

The "Way of St. James" draws pilgrims from all over western Europe. These pious travelers come to Compostela by one of several routes, each of which has its own unique features and hazards. In the first quarter of the thirteenth century, these routes are:

- **The Northern Way:** This route is the original means by which pilgrims traveled to the shrine of St. James. The Northern Way was most popular in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, before the various Iberian monarchs promoted the French Way as a means to draw more pilgrims to Compostela. In general, pilgrims using this route came overland from France or by sea from the north. Afterward, they walked to meet up at San Salvador in Oviedo. From there, they would begin the journey to the Apostle's tomb in Compostela.

- **The French Way:** The French Way replaced the Northern Way as the preferred route beginning in the twelfth century. Sancho III of Navarre, Alfonso VI of Castile and Sancho Ramírez of Aragon all promoted it as the itinerary of choice. The French Way is, in fact, four different routes that eventually intersect on the way to Compostela. Three of them cross over the Pyrenees at Roncesvalles, while the fourth does the same at Somport and continues on to Jaca. Because these routes also connect important

highways in France, they are more convenient — and thus more popular.

- **The Silver Road:** This route covers the most ground, as it passes through lands with tremendous variety in the local geography and ecology. This route derives its name from a Roman road known as the Silver Road, which joined the cities of Mérida and Astorga, traversing the western peninsula from south to north and crossing the Tajo and Duero Rivers. This route was partly used by al-Mansur when he attacked Compostela in 997. The Silver Road is especially popular for pilgrims within the peninsula who must travel from the south to reach the saint's shrine.

- **The Portuguese Way:** This shortest route traverses the distance from Tui in northern Portugal to Compostela. As its name suggests, it exists to accommodate Portuguese pilgrims, many of whom hold St. James in high esteem as a result of their own battles against the Moors.

Other routes exist, but they are generally short and inconsequential. There is also talk of establishing formal routes from coastal ports in order to facilitate the travels of pilgrims from northern Europe, especially England. As the fame of Compostela spreads, so too does the diversity of its supplicants.

Muslim mortals and Ashirra — which has earned him a reputation for bloodthirstiness among his clanmates. He has significant influence over cabals of knights with the Order of Santiago (Iberia's primary military order), so he cannot be ignored.

Likewise, a small band of Cainites, led by a Brujah knight named Demesio, has taken to guarding the pilgrim road from bandits and other mortal predators. Demesio has served with the Lions of Rodrigo, a bloodthirsty band of vampiric Moor-slayers, and his zeal often gets the better of him. In 1207, for example, he and his followers killed several robbers who sought to harass pilgrims heading for Compostela. The discovery of their mangled bodies drew the attention of the local authorities and churchmen, including a representative of the Sword of St. James. Since then, Demesio's band has acted more circumspectly but no less passionately. He has taken to using a few mortal knights of the Order of Santiago as cover, which has involved him far more than he would like in the machinations of Prince Reinaldo and others.

For more on the Order of Santiago and the Lions of Rodrigo, see **Chapter Four: Powers That Be**.

OVIEDO

The city of Oviedo was founded by King Fruela I in the middle of the eighth century. The city was thus part of the Kingdom of Asturias and the northern Visigothic culture that initiated the *Reconquista*. In 760, Abbot Fromistanus and his nephew Maximus built a monastery at Oviedo and dedicated a church to St. Vincent the Martyr, a saint with an important local cult. Fruela likewise encouraged emigration to the area and built the basilica of San Salvador. His son, Alfonso II, made Oviedo his capital and expanded the Church of San Salvador. Archbishop Pelayo further expanded what was by then the Cathedral of San Salvador in the twelfth century.

Oviedo is noteworthy for being one of the few Iberian towns never conquered by the Muslims, and its inhabitants are some of the haughtiest in the peninsula because of this. They are strong supporters of the *Reconquista* and often argue that their good fortune (or divine blessing, depending on one's point of view) charges them with a responsibility to free other settlements from the domination of the Muslims. Unsurprisingly, Oviedo's history has inspired more than its share of young men — and even Cainites — to take up arms against the Saracens. Many take particular pride in joining the Order of St. James of Compostela, seeing their service as a way to "repay" the debt they feel Oviedo owes to God.

DESCRIPTION

The most famous sanctuary of the city is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, by whose help the Asturians

defeated the Muslims in 718. Also noteworthy are the two monasteries of Saint Vincent and Saint Pelagius. In the lower part of town is the church of Santullano, Alfonso II's most ambitious construction. He ordered it constructed between 812 and 842 in a balanced, majestic and classically horizontal style. The church has a very unusual design, formed from the union of late Roman and Visigothic construction traditions. The walls are covered with the remains of frescoes that preserve the most complete range of Roman palace painting. That neither Samson nor Epiphania has shown the slightest interest in Santullano is further evidence that the Nosferatu and his companion came to Oviedo for reasons other than aesthetics.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Oviedo sets itself apart from the rest of León. Its status as the capital of the kingdom makes its inhabitants somewhat haughty compared to their countrymen. In turn, the rest of León looks upon Oviedo with some disdain. Although the king is well regarded for his battles against the Muslims, the court with which he surrounds himself is thought of less highly. Indeed, Oviedo has a reputation as a city of sycophants and hangers-on, as more and more dissolute nobles from the country find their way to the king's side.

As a religious center, Oviedo boasts a famous chapel known as the Cámara Santa or "Holy Chamber." Built in the ninth century, this chapel has become the interior of the larger cathedral, built in the last century. The chapel is renowned for the relics contained within, which King Alfonso II rescued from the city of Toledo before it fell to the Muslim invaders. These treasures were enhanced in the twelfth century by two beautiful Romanesque sculptures: The Calvary and the Apostolate. The Calvary is a mixed composition of painting and sculpture. The Apostolate crowns the shafts of six pairs of columns. In the presbytery are the so-called Cross of Victory and the Cross of the Angels, used as standards by Alfonso II and Alfonso III respectively. The Holy Chamber also contains the Chest of the Relics, which contains numerous religious artifacts.

The city's archives are extraordinarily important as well. Among its most significant contents is the "Gothic Book" or *Book of Testaments*, which Bishop Pelayo wrote between 1126 and 1129. The book records the entire diplomatic history of the Asturian kingdom, making it invaluable to scholars.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Oviedo is the site of much politicking between Cainite factions. Originally a Ventrue stronghold in the days before the Moorish invasion, the city has since come largely under the sway of the Lasombra. However, Oviedo's prince, Marbuena, is a crafty Ventrue, whose talent at manipulation and subterfuge have allowed her to retain her domain — and gained her the grudging

respect of the Lasombra. Nevertheless, she faces a serious challenge in the enmity of Archbishop Monçada of Madrid and his sire Silvester de Ruiz. Monçada has called Marbuena a weakling on several occasions, and some whisper that he has offered to support any worthy contender of the principedom.

NAVARRRE

The Pyrenees extend southward from France and dominate the northern half of Navarre (or "Navarra"). This portion of the country consists of a tangled relief of forested mountains and well-watered valleys. Shepherding and timber are the primary livelihoods in this region. Precipitation is high in the Pyrenees and tapers off sharply toward the south. Southcentral Navarre consists of basins and hills that focus trade and travel toward the capital, Pamplona. In this area, most people make their living through the raising of livestock or the growing of grains. A Mediterranean climate prevails in the foothills and steppes of southern Navarre, drained by the Ebro River. The landscape here is more arid and monotonous, with the cultivation of grains a common occupation.

Navarre's population is concentrated along the Ebro River and in Pamplona, which has grown at the expense of towns in the lower Pyrenees. Large, compact towns predominate in the south, while small villages predominate in the mountains.

If a country can be said to have a mood, Navarre's is one of quiet resignation. Navarre's people are very much aware of their realm's glorious past — as well as its less-than-stellar present. This isn't to say they're dour or gloomy, but they lack the optimism and dynamic nature that characterizes other Christian Iberians. Perhaps it is the fact that the *Reconquista* has long since left Navarre behind that creates this feeling. Perhaps the strong ties to France keep their gaze elsewhere. Whatever it is, Navarre is clearly cut from a different cloth than the other states with which it shares the peninsula.

This difference is visible in the local Cainite population as well. Instead of the Lasombra, Ventrue and Toreador who dominate the more southerly states of Iberia, Navarre is home to notable Malkavian and Nosferatu bands. The Malkavians are strongest in Pamplona, where Roque, its prince, has established a large and active brood in the city. These Cainites form a tightly knit community that views the prince as a father figure and holds him in awe and reverence. The Nosferatu, on the other hand, are less well organized, possessing several distinct bands in the cities and rugged countryside. The most important of these bands is headed by Ezkerra, an ancient Nosferatu with an unusual attachment to his homeland. He views the presence of so many foreigners — both mortal and Cainite — in Navarre as an "infestation" that needs to

be eliminated. Consequently, he and his childer wage a guerrilla war against Castilian and French "invaders," an act that has not escaped the notice of the prince, although he has yet to act against Ezkerra.

PAMPLONA

Pamplona is a city in the northeastern portion of the Iberian Peninsula. It lies on the western bank of the Arga River in the fertile La Cuenca region. According to tradition, Julius Caesar's rival Pompey founded it as military camp in 75 BC during his campaign against Quintus Sertorius, leader of a revolt against Rome. The city's first name was thus Pompeiopolis. The city fell into disrepair after the Muslims captured it in 711. The situation was made even worse when the Franks occupied and subsequently abandoned it in 778, taking with them most of its defenses. Iñigo Arista recovered Pamplona in 848 and restored both its cathedral and monastery, converting the latter into a stronghold. Pamplona was made capital of the kingdom of Navarre by Sancho III, his new foundation being known as the *Ciudad de la Navarrería*. From that time until the beginning of the twelfth century, Pamplona was a vibrant and bustling capital, and a center of the *Reconquista*.

DESCRIPTION

The core of the town, known as La Navarrería, is dominated by its cathedral. The city celebrates the *Fiesta de San Fermín* (honoring St. Fermine, its first bishop) in October with a fair and various religious observances. The fair specializes in livestock and visitors are also entertained by a variety of performers.

Pamplona is situated in an irrigated cereal-producing area. Thus, it's an important center of agriculture whose farmer's markets and produce bring visitors from the surrounding countryside, even at other times. The city's ancient crafts of wineskin, sandal, rope and pottery making are as important to the local economy as the milling of flour. Pamplona also serves as a conduit between France and the Iberian states. This gives the city an unusual flavor, being simultaneously rustic and Iberian, sophisticated and northern European. Needless to say, this makes the city very attractive to Cainites of all stripes, many of whom call the city home.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Home to the court of King Sancho VII, Pamplona is rife with intrigue and deception. Part of this stems from the king's personality, which is by turns brilliant and erratic. Sancho has long offended many of his fellow Christians by maintaining friendships with learned Muslims. In addition, he has kept up a correspondence with the Almohads, seeing much to respect in these Muslim warriors. Indeed, the king's respect for them — and theirs for him — was so great that he served them militarily in North Africa for a time, a move that cost him portions of Navarre's territory to Castile.

Despite his feelings for the Almohads, Sancho participated in the great Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, a move that has probably secured Navarre's future for at least a few more years.

Sancho has no heir, which has led to entreaties from his fellow Iberian rulers — as well as outsiders — regarding the ultimate disposition of the kingdom. At the moment, French noblemen and ambassadors have the king's ear, much to the dismay of both the Castilians and Aragonese, both of whom covet Navarre's territory. Agents of both kingdoms, including Cainites supportive of their cause, are thus commonplace in Pamplona, adding further layers to an already complicated skein.

In addition to courtly intrigue, Pamplona possesses numerous religious traditions. One such tradition holds that Pamplona, Toledo and Toulouse received the Gospel due to the preaching of St. Saturninus, a disciple of the Apostle Peter. Thus, the city boasts an ancient association with both the Church and with Saint Peter, whom its inhabitants hold in high regard. Iñigo Arista made a point of transferring the bodies of the virgin martyrs Nunilona and Alodia to Pamplona. These women were killed during the reign of the Muslim ruler Abd ar-Rahman II. In the Cathedral of Pamplona is venerated the ancient statue of St. Mary, the White Virgin (*Santa María la Blanca*), which was preserved from very ancient times. The church also holds the relics of St. Fermin. Since 1186, his feast day has been celebrated with the same solemnity as that of the Apostles themselves.

Finally, Pamplona is the base of operations for the Sword of St. James, a dangerous group of witch-hunters. Its leader, Rodrigue de Navarre, maintains a home here and in Toulouse. He frequently travels between the two cities, leaving his trusted lieutenants Aignen le Libraire and Jean de Chanavière in charge of his estates. These Frenchmen know nearly as much about the battle against darkness as Rodrigue. However, their nationality makes it difficult for them to act within Navarre. They keep a low profile unless events draw them out.

LIFE IN THE CITY

Whatever its other faults, Pamplona is never a dull place. The city is remarkably cosmopolitan, especially when compared to the rest of Navarre. Foreigners are a common sight in the city, including Muslims of various sorts, most often guests of King Sancho VII. Along with these Saracens come both Muslim Lasombra and Assamites on missions for their elders. The Lasombra hope to sway the open-minded king to become an agent of change among his Christian contemporaries, while the Assamites seek to take advantage of the presence of so many outsiders to achieve very different goals.

For mortals, however, Pamplona offers an island of sophistication amid the pastoral sea of Navarre. The city's

merchants, many of them Jews, are exceedingly well traveled, providing goods from outside the peninsula to those interested in such luxuries. The city also functions as a convenient conduit between the peninsula and the rest of Europe. Consequently, Pamplona sees many more travelers than one might expect, and many exotic things are available there, for the right price.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Cainite Pamplonese complement their mortal counterparts. The court of Roque is an unusual place. Like King Sancho, the Malkavian prince is an erratic — though manipulative — personality. He possesses a keen understanding of both mortals and Cainites, a trait he has used to protect his position from would-be usurpers. Although the bulk of the city's vampires are also Malkavians, there has been an influx of Toreador in recent years. Chief among them is Baldomar, a scheming knight with clear designs on Roque's domain. Thus far, the prince has played the gracious host to his French rival, but that is only part of his plan. He intends to lull Baldomar into a false sense of security to determine if the Toreador has allies in the city. Once he has that information, the prince plans to eliminate him and his supporters.

TUDELA

The city of Tudela was taken from the Muslims by Alfonso the Fighter in 1115. In 1121, the king gave the city's mosque and the tithes of several towns to the prior and ecclesiastical chapter of Tudela, built the Church of Santa Maria and established a community of Canons Regular of St. Augustine. In this way, the church's abbot and prior gained the ecclesiastical authority of Tudela. Since that time, the city has played relatively little role in the events of the *Reconquista* proper — which makes it a perfect haven for the Apostles of the Third Caine, an offshoot of the Cainite Heresy.

DESCRIPTION

Tudela is a small and somewhat dirty town on the banks of the Ebro River. Its appearance is deceiving, for it nicely preserves many of the Moorish elements that existed in the city before its capture by Christian forces. The city's central area is known as the Plaza de los Fueros and is surrounded by many small and twisting streets. A bridge crosses the Ebro, which leads to the main road toward Zaragoza. The bridge has an unusual construction, making it appear rickety and incapable of supporting much weight. Like the town itself, this appearance is deceiving.

The city's main church is the Colegiata de Santa Ana, built in the twelfth century. The building is well known for its rose window, which stands above an intricately carved alabaster doorway on the western side. This doorway displays a frightful vision of the Last Judgment that both inspires and terrifies. Inside the church is a retablo and

beautiful old tombs. There is also a cloister whose own wall carvings possess a primitive charm.

The city also features numerous buildings that were destroyed during the Muslim conquest and never rebuilt. They stand deserted, avoided by most mortals. The local leader of the Apostles, Aimersent, uses these ruins to hold informal meetings with other members of her flock. Aimersent is a powerfully charismatic Cainite with a remarkable ability to command her fellow Apostles. Her charisma is only exceeded by her ambition. Unlike many Apostles, she does not wish simply to escape the Cainite Heresy but to destroy it. Thus, she and her flock spend much of their time plotting against Heretics in Navarre and elsewhere.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Tudela is a predominantly Christian city, but is also noteworthy for its sizable Jewish community, many of whom — like their brethren in Pamplona — are well traveled merchants. One of their number, a certain Benjamin, traveled throughout Italy, Greece, Persia, Palestine and the borders of China during the period between 1159 and 1173. Benjamin collected the notes of his travels in a book, called *Massa'ot*, and published it for the benefit of Christian and Jew alike. The book is a valuable compendium of information on the peoples and cultures of faraway lands, making it much sought after by scholars and travelers alike.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

As noted above, the Apostles of the Third Caine have a sizable presence in Tudela. Aimersent's plans have attracted the attention of the city's prince, a Lasombra named Fulgencio d'Idalia. Fulgencio has no love for the Cainite Heresy (being a childe of Ambrosio Monçada), but he does not tolerate attempts to turn his domain into a war zone. Thus, he has instructed his minions to root out the Apostles by any means necessary. The last thing Fulgencio wants is for a powerful Heretic to be killed in Tudela, thereby precipitating a blood hunt within the city. For their part, the Apostles seem unconcerned, believing Fulgencio's efforts will be no more successful than his predecessor's.

PORTUGAL

Portugal is situated on the western coast of the Iberian Peninsula, being bounded on the north and east by various states, on the west by the Atlantic Ocean and on the south by the *taifas*. Portugal and the other states with which it shares the peninsula are not separated by a strongly marked natural boundary such as divides some countries. Indeed they are geographically indistinct — a fact that has haunted Portuguese foreign policy for decades.

The northern portion of Portugal is mountainous and rises from 1,800 to 5,000 feet, including the Serra

do Gerez, notable for its vegetation and thermal springs. The central portion of the country is a zone of extensive plains divided by mountain ranges, among the latter being the Serra da Estrella, which rises to 6,540 feet and is the highest and largest in the country. The southern frontier is almost entirely composed of low-lying plains and plateaus. In all these regions, the mountains are usually part of other Iberian ranges. The only independent range of importance is the Serra de Monchique.

In the north, Portugal is home to many chains of mountains, plateaus of considerable height and deep narrow valleys. In the center, together with high and extensive mountains, are broad valleys and large plains. South of the Tejo River (the Tajo, in Spanish), the country is one of plains punctuated with hills. Its chief rivers are the Minho, the Douro (the Duero, in Spanish), the Mondego, the Tejo, the Sado and the Guadiana. The Tejo is navigable for small vessels as far as Santarem. There are no lakes worthy of mention, contributing to the generally arid quality of much of the country.

Portugal has few good natural harbors. The primary exception to this is Lisbon, which boasts one of the best in Europe. Already, the Portuguese have begun to realize the importance of this harbor, using it for the benefit of their mercantile ventures. The country's other ports are less accessible, usually blocked by sand bars and other obstacles. Thus, Lisbon continues to grow in importance, being Portugal's primary gateway to the world beyond Iberia.

Portugal is rich in mineral deposits, including antimony, copper, lead, tin and iron. Coal, however, is scarce and of poor quality. The country also has more than a hundred mineral springs and, like elsewhere on the peninsula, local legends hold that some of these springs have medicinal properties, attracting the attention of both mortals and Cainites. Indeed, the Brujah hold that the Spring of Yzebel north of Braga grants ecstatic visions to those who drink deeply of its waters (a grueling challenge for a scion of Caine). Yzebel was a Carthaginian Brujah renowned for her keen insights into the future. She was among the first of her clan to come to the Iberian Peninsula but met her Final Death in the conflicts with the Roman Ventrue during the Visigothic era.

Portugal's climate is temperate, but it differs from place to place according to soil, distance from the sea and other factors. The plateaus of Traz-os-Montes and Beira are cold and harsh, while the southern frontier is hot. Even where the temperature is most extreme, the temperature rarely exceeds tolerable levels. Snow falls only in winter, in the high mountains and in the north. The omnipresent humidity produces fogs that render the coasts dangerous to sailing vessels. Most of the year, winds from the northwest, north and northeast prevail, but in winter southwesterly winds dominate, usually accompanied by storms. Generally speaking, the weather

is pleasant, and some physics believe that Lisbon has a particularly healthful climate.

Portugal's vegetation is rich, including nearly all the vegetable species of temperate climates and a large number of those found in hot countries. Among trees, the pine is the most characteristic, but it does not grow south of the Sado River. Fruit trees abound, especially on the Upper Douro and in Beira. Olives and oranges are everywhere, and Traz-os-Montes produces almonds. Grapes grow throughout the country. The cereals most commonly grown are wheat and rye, but Portugal must still depend on foreign countries for a portion of its bread supply. Wine, oil, fruit, vegetables, cattle and cork are exported in large quantities. The chief manufactured items are wool, gold and silver work, and pottery. Fishing is one of the primary occupations of the coastal cities; the catches nourish the inhabitants of those inland as well.

LISBON

Lisbon is said to owe its origin to Ulysses, and hence its oldest name was Ulisaypo or Olissipo. The Phoenecians called it Alisubbo, meaning "friendly bay," and the Romans also thought highly of it, naming it Felicitas Julia. The city lies on the north bank of the Tejo River, 12 miles from the open sea, clustered around seven hills that rise above one another. The town was captured by the Muslims in 716 and remained in their possession until 1145. At that time, Alfonso Henriques drove out the invaders with the assistance of an army of Crusaders, including Englishmen, Normans and Flemings bound for the Holy Land. Shortly thereafter, he moved his capital from Coimbra to Lisbon. Portuguese kings have followed the precedent set by that battle ever since, namely the employment of foreign crusaders in the battle against the Moors.

St. Vincent (or São Vicente in Portuguese), the patron saint of Lisbon, was martyred for defending his faith under the persecution of the emperor Diocletian. According to local legend, his body was attached to a millstone and flung into the sea in 336, but it was miraculously discovered on the sands at Valencia by Christians of that city.

In the eighth century, the Muslims captured Valencia, and its inhabitants fled by sea, taking the relics of St. Vincent with them. They were driven ashore on the coast of the Algarve at the cape now known as Cape St. Vincent. There they remained until Alfonso Henriques expelled the Muslims from Lisbon. The saint's relics were then brought there and deposited in the cathedral Alfonso had just built. Alfonso also began the building of a Cistercian monastery of Alcobaca, in fulfillment of a vow he had made to build a monastery for St. Bernard's monks, if he were successful in his war against the Muslims.

DESCRIPTION

The oldest portion of Lisbon is along the steep slopes of the Castelo de São Jorge, which had been the stronghold of the Muslims. In the neighborhood of the cathedral (or Sé, as it is known), there are Roman ruins, including the remains of a theater. Although unused by mortals, the theater is a monthly meeting place for the city's Apostles of the Third Caine. They gather on the night of the new moon before retiring to a warehouse on the docks to partake in a communal blood feast. The Apostles operate with the utmost secrecy, lest they be discovered either by Cainite Heretics or agents of the ambitious Lasombra Vicente de Cardona, either of which would destroy them. The city's Brujah prince, Macario, bears no ill will toward the Apostles, but he is unwilling to defend them against any of their enemies.

The Cathedral of Santa Maria is the oldest church in Lisbon, dating back to the year 306. It served as a mosque for the Muslims during their occupation of the city. The facade with its towers and massive portico has yet to be rebuilt, despite promises from both civil and ecclesiastical officials. Outside what were the old walls of Lisbon stands the church of São Vicente da Fora. The church contains the mortuary chapel of the kings of Portugal as well as a monastery. This chapel likewise attracts the Apostles, who have taken a keen interest in the lineage of King Sancho as part of their investigation into his possible messianic status. A lone Cappadocian named Nyssa assists them in this endeavor, because of the unlikely possibility that the king faked his own death in 1211.

Another significant landmark of Lisbon is the Castelo de São Jorge. The Castelo was built in the time of Julius Caesar and reinforced by the Muslims, who used it in their defense of the city against Alfonso Henriques. It has three towers, known as Ulysses, Albarram and Managem. The Castelo now serves as the residence of the kings of Portugal. Its imposing appearance and strength are a reminder that Portugal remains a nation under arms. The *Reconquista* is very much alive in this newest of Iberian realms — as is the worry that the Muslims could retake it at any time. Thus, Lisbon remains heavily fortified and populated by soldiers and mercenaries of all sorts.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Lisbon is a city under arms. The streets of Lisbon resound with the clamor of armored feet, as both native Portuguese knights and foreigners fill the city. This is exactly how King Alfonso II prefers it. His grandfather, Alfonso Henriques, won the independence of Portugal partially through martial prowess, and Alfonso has no intention of losing it due to inattention to that same field of endeavor. Consequently, Lisbon often appears to be the most heavily fortified of all the Christian cities of Iberia.

An important faction among the soldiers are the foreign crusaders, many of them Hospitalers and Templars, who have taken up the battle against the infidel in Portugal. Like his father, Alfonso rewards these crusaders generously, treating them as national heroes of Portugal. Many have gained great wealth and influence because of their aid to the king. Naturally, their presence has raised the eyebrows of many Portuguese soldiers and noblemen, who consider them to have ulterior motives for their assistance in the *Reconquista*. If these patriotic men only realized that among the foreigners were many Cainites, their level of concern would be greater still.

LIFE IN THE CITY

Lisbon blows with the trade winds. The city's large harbor sees ships from many ports come and go on a regular basis. They bring not only more soldiers for the *Reconquista* but also supplies and news of the wider world. While the inhabitants of the city are still somewhat sheltered and ignorant, that is changing. In the last few years, contact with the rest of Europe has increased dramatically, leading to a greater understanding of Portugal's place in the greater scheme of things. King Alfonso encourages this, as does the Brujah prince, believing it can only serve Lisbon for the better.

In addition, Lisbon is quickly acquiring the reputation as home to some of Europe's best sailors. Although not all of these sailors are Portuguese, many call Lisbon their homeport, as it offers more opportunities than ports elsewhere. From Lisbon, the Atlantic coasts of France and the Low Countries — as well as England and Scandinavia — are open. Likewise, North Africa and regions further south beckon. These opportunities are

too much for true mariners to pass up, which is why so many have come here. Alfonso has not yet taken advantage of this situation, but the king intends to build a stronger navy once he feels more secure in his position on the peninsula. For their part, the Brujah have little interest in sea travel, except to the extent that it advances their dreams.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Vampires of Clan Brujah have already infiltrated the king's inner circle. One of their number, a female Cainite named Ayzebel, served as the late king Sancho's personal astrologer and soothsayer. She was genuinely helpful to him as he waged war against the Muslims. The Brujah hoped that Ayzebel could influence the king to act in a fashion conducive to their goals, particularly by weakening the influence of the Church and the local nobility.

These hopes may have died with Sancho in 1211. Ayzebel has disappeared without a trace, as if she had simply vanished from the face of the earth. Neither her clanmates nor her enemies have any idea what became of her. Meanwhile, the Apostles of the Third Caine led by Balesquida are unsure what to make of this turn of events. They had believed King Sancho to be a possible Third Caine, but his death has called that attribution into question. That his Cainite advisor has disappeared along with him has emboldened some of the Apostles, who believe his "death" merely presages his reappearance as the vampiric messiah they hoped him to be.

Beyond the machinations of the Apostles and the Brujah are the ambitions of Vicente de Cardona. After many years of lobbying, he has been sent to Lisbon to claim Portugal for Clan Lasombra. He seems like a somewhat boorish man, and has made several blunders, but he has a dangerous list of contacts and a willingness to spill blood — living and unliving — that gives the locals pause.





Chapter Three: 211=21ndolus

To thee and to thy vassals belongeth
all the prey

And as for thy two sons-in-law they
have been proved aright.

Who got their fill of Moorish war
upon the field of fight.

- The Song of the Cid

OVERVIEW

Al-Andalus is the Muslim-dominated area in the south of Iberia. Muslim invaders conquered almost the entire peninsula in their campaigns beginning in 711; however, by the thirteenth century, al-Andalus occupies only about the southern third of the peninsula.

The Muslim grip on Iberia reached its zenith in the tenth century with the political ascendancy of the Caliphate of Córdoba. The Caliphate came to an end in 1031, and the struggles that followed destroyed Muslim unity while the Christian kingdoms to the north grew restless and eager to expel their southern neighbors.

Two waves of fundamentalist invaders from North Africa have since come to the peninsula. The first were the Almoravids, who were dominant in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Eventually, the comforts of civilization dulled their fervor and they were in turn displaced by the Almohads, who have struggled to unify al-Andalus. Their success has been limited, securing much of the central plain but not being able to exert control over the further reaches of the realm. Time is rapidly running out. As the Muslim authorities prepare for war, or to abandon their holdings, their Christian counterparts study their maps and gather their armies. With the disastrous defeat of the Muslims in 1212 at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (see p. 27), panic and defeatism have set in.

CAINITE POLITICS

The Lasombra (or "Qabilat al-Khayal" in Arabic) and Assamites (or "Banu Haqim") are the dominant vampiric clans in al-Andalus. Most of the other clans are present, but these two clans have invested by far the most time and energy in the territory. They fight the hardest to keep what they have gained.

Politically, the Cainites of the region are as fractured and fractious as their mortal counterparts. The Almohads, with strong support from the Assamites and more pragmatic Cainites, have a strong hold on the central regions of al-Andalus. Religious orthodoxy is strictly enforced, and non-Muslims face growing suspicion.

The north and east are relatively chaotic, ruled by ever-shifting coalitions of Cainites striving to protect their *taifa* kingdoms. The Assamite sultans are primarily concerned with protecting a greater Muslim state against the Christians of Europe. Those rulers belonging to Clan Lasombra are more often fired by their religious beliefs. The sultans and viziers of other clans are, by and large, interested in preserving their individual power and security. More than a few have found themselves willing to come to some accommodation with their Christian rivals.

In the south and east, the control of the ruling dynasties has always been weaker (especially in the geographically isolated eastern states). While the conflict between Christian and Muslim has been just as fierce, it has been marked more by the rise and fall of individual leaders than by dynastic conflicts. The eastern highlands are only loosely controlled by the Almohads. Granada, the central city of the region, is held by the vampiric Sultan Badr, who is both strictly orthodox (some say fanatical) and fiercely independent.

The east coast and the Balearic Isles lie beyond effective Almohad control. Valencia is ruled by an orthodox Lasombra, but the former sultan has secretly returned and the city is experiencing major political upheavals. The isles are nominally part of the Sultan of Valencia's domain, but in reality they are something of a Cainite no-man's land. The Assamites are present, as are a number of Toreador and some others whose presence predates both the Muslims and the Christians.

MOSQUES

All cities under Islamic rule contain mosques, Muslim places of worship; large cities, such as Córdoba, Sevilla and Granada have scores. Each city has an *alijama*, or grand mosque, in the center of the urban area, surrounded by a commercial district (the *medina*). Also located nearby is the *madrasa* (college), surrounded by a maze of alleyways containing numerous small shops.

A mosque has three elements: the minaret, the courtyard and the prayer hall. The minaret, from which the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer, is a square tower that tapers as it rises. Generally made of brick or stone, it is decorated with tiles, arches and brickwork patterns and is capped by three golden spheres, or *yamur*.

The *shan*, or courtyard, often shaded with trees and cooled by fountains, is a space for ablutions and often has a covered gallery running around its perimeter. The

liwan, or prayer hall, is little more than an empty space held up by arches and pillars forming parallel naves, with prayer mats on the floor. Of course, the arches and pillars are far from humble in design, especially in the larger and better-endowed mosques. The *mihrab*, or pulpit, is in the center of the east wall (toward Mecca). In a small mosque, it may be no more than a simple hollow niche, but in an *alijama* it is lavishly decorated and designed to amplify a speaker's voice.

A mosque is generally ringed by high stone walls with minimal decoration, no windows and few doors. Mosques act as community centers or town halls and are commonly used as focal points for community activities, including teaching, administration of the law and other gatherings. The exterior walls often have messages pasted to them, functioning as a kind of community notice board.

Overall, al-Andalus is sparsely populated, with most of the inhabitants concentrated in the major cities and hardy prospectors, farmers and the occasional madman scattered throughout the countryside. Architecturally, waves of invaders have left their mark. The Muslim influence is strong, with mosques in all major settlements, and the distinctive Arabic brick construction and elaborate roofs and decorations are common. Roman and Visigothic ruins abound, as do Roman bridges, roads and aqueducts.

CULTURE

The Muslim tradition of tolerance for Christians and Jews (as fellow *ahl al-kitab*, or "people of the book") has had a strong influence on the local cultures. Muslims are a sensual as well as a spiritual people. Private gardens, elaborate architecture and delight in food, dress and manners have combined to produce a cultural hybrid unique in the medieval world. Many Christians (and some Jews) have converted to Islam, some out of genuine religious conviction, others to avoid the extra taxes payable by non-Muslims and yet others as a means of entering the civil bureaucracy and entering the corridors of power.

In recent years, as the *Reconquista* has renewed itself and al-Andalus has struggled for unity, this tolerance has begun to unravel. The Almohads have expelled

non-Muslims from their cities, and opportunists consider whether they should abandon Islam and convert (or convert back) to Christianity. Pragmatists eye opportunities in other lands. The religious strive to bring unity to the community of the faithful. In the shadows, the Ashirra are as divided as the mortals they prey upon.

THE TAIFA KINGDOMS

Following the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate, al-Andalus never regained the strength of unity and purpose Umayyad rule had provided. While the Almoravid emirate brought some degree of unity to al-Andalus, their influence was fleeting and the Almohads who displaced them only truly ruled their kingdom based around Sevilla. The other half of al-Andalus continued to be broken up into the little states that formed following the fall of the caliphate and the resulting unrest. Ruled by particular factions (or *taifas*), these mini-states persist until the very end of the major Islamic presence in Iberia. Chaotic and ultra-competitive, the *taifa* kingdoms stimulate trade, art and learning



AL-ANDALUS

but have been unwilling to unite in the face Christian pressure. Their disunity and infighting is proving to be their downfall.

Such divisions among the kine match the bitter and twisted disputes among al-Andalus's Cainites. After straining under the Cordoban Sultan for so long, few Cainites outside the big cities have any desire to lose the freedom they gained during the political chaos of the last centuries. Ambitious coterie and powerful individual vampires have been able to stake out *taifa* kingdoms as their own personal domains, free of any outside control. As a result, politicking, fighting and disunity among the Cainites of al-Andalus has reached new heights, with jealous sultans working endlessly to protect and expand their own influence, paying little heed to outside affairs. Of course, just as not all kine are blind to the coming storm from the north, not all Cainites are ignorant either, especially as the decades wear on and Christian pressure becomes ever more apparent. However, the majority of forward-thinking Cainites are preparing to either change sides or flee to North Africa, leaving the last vampiric sultans of the *taifas* to a doomed resistance.

Despite their stubborn independence and the rugged and varying terrain of al-Andalus, the *taifa* kingdoms share many features. The key to these similarities is the dominance of Islamic culture, religion and politics. The rulers of these little fiefdoms are much closer to the ebb and flow of the wider Islamic world than to the geographically closer Christian kingdoms of the north. While this contributes greatly to the inevitability of the statelets' fall, it does allow some strong generalizations to be drawn in regards to their internal structures and relations with one another. As little precise information is available about these micro-kingdoms, except when they were based in a large city like Valencia or Granada, the purpose of this section is to give a Storyteller all the building blocks necessary to create her own *taifa* kingdoms and populate them with both Cainites and kine, as well as provide a few examples.

ORGANIZATION

The *taifa* kingdoms place the internal contradictions of medieval Islamic politics in stark relief, falling into broad categories depending on whether the bureaucracy, the military or the nobility rules them. Governments come and go with the rise or deaths of strong rulers. Stability is something that rarely lasts more than a decade or two. The interference of outside forces is also a major factor given the small size of the kingdoms and internecine conflicts within them. These conflicts usually follow the same three lines of power mentioned above; only rarely do issues such as religion, race or economics play much of a role.

BUREAUCRATIC

The ministers, secretaries and clerks who make up the governing bureaucracy of Islamic states form a powerful and influential clique. In many ways, they are

the glue that holds the disparate power groups of the Islamic world together, keeping communications going between the nobles, the military, the merchants, the *ulama* scholars and the common citizens. The bureaucrats left behind by the Umayyads, Almoravids and Almohads were often the day-to-day power in their respective regions. Many found it quite easy to assume power for themselves once control from the capital fell away. Bureaucratic rule also came about when either a military or noble regime failed or a particularly powerful and influential minister managed to oust his erstwhile masters, such as occurred during the fall of the Cordoban Caliphate itself.

Without strong local ties, bureaucratic regimes in the *taifa* kingdoms are usually short-lived affairs. Even if another group does not overthrow the bureaucrats, they tend to be absorbed into the local nobility and their states become indistinguishable from any other regime dominated by local magnates. The one major exception to this is those states in which the leading bureaucrats come from a non-Islamic minority, most commonly Jews but occasionally Mozarabs. In these cases, bureaucratic rule is a precarious affair maintained only by the cunning, brilliance and ongoing success of the leading bureaucrat. Once such a leading *dhimmi* dies or suffers a notable defeat, the Islamic citizens tend to overthrow the regime. Such uprisings tend to be violent affairs, featuring pogroms against the previously powerful minority.

While bureaucratic *taifa* regimes may be short-lived, they also tend to be the most economically, culturally and (very often) militarily successful states in al-Andalus. This is hardly surprising, since trained bureaucrats are experienced diplomats and administrators. Most bureaucratic rulers also possess military training, part of any well-educated man's upbringing, and are thus at least as well prepared to be generals and captains as local nobles. Beyond the obvious skills they bring to running their small states, they also tend to have a wider perspective than nobles or generals. By education and experience, bureaucrats are part of the wider Islamic world. Thus they prove far more adept at managing local power groups for the betterment of all, and they are far canner in their dealings with other *taifa* kingdoms and the Christians.

MILITARY

The reliance by Islamic regimes on mercenaries, especially those from particular Islamicized ethnic minorities, led to numerous instances of those hired forces overthrowing their employers and taking power for themselves. In Iberia, the most common occurrence was a coup by Berber mercenaries, though Arab commanders recruited from the east, and even Christian mercenaries such as El Cid also succeeded in establishing their own states. Such coups, especially those that

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happened during the chaos after the fall of the caliphate and the collapse of Almoravid power, were prone to be violent and destructive. Many Berber mercenary bands became little more than bandits, looting and burning entire regions before settling down to rule over the dispirited survivors. Peaceful coups were almost always those carried out by Arab commanders who simply assumed power over frontier towns and fortresses when central power collapsed or their ambition got the better of their loyalty. The distinction between Berber and Arab/Mozarab military states is therefore quite marked.

The reason for the presence of Arab and Mozarab mercenary commanders along the frontier is obvious: They were there to defend the frontiers of al-Andalus from the Christians. The states they form are heavily militarized and continually struggle against the unstoppable progress of the *Reconquista*. As a result, these *taifa* kingdoms are among the least influential and important. They simply do not last long enough or possess the spare resources to have much of an impact beyond their own borders. That said, the staunch resistance of Arab and Mozarab military *taifas* stands in stark contrast to the self-interested dealings with the Christians that characterizes other states in al-Andalus. Nor do all these military commanders lose their power after surrender; many become vassals of the Christian rulers.

Berber mercenaries on the other hand ran amuck all over al-Andalus during the unrest between major dynasties. Those groups based on the frontier moved south to find better pickings and depopulated entire districts in the course of their pillaging, doing such serious damage that they fatally weakened resistance to the Christian advance for decades afterward. Few of these marauders returned to North Africa, for the rich fields and valleys of al-Andalus were far more attractive than the barren deserts of home, and eventually those bands that were not exterminated and avoided degenerating into bandit gangs set themselves up as foreign overlords. That they shared a common religion with most of those they ruled did not prevent Berber military rulers from being brutal, and they undid many of the cultural achievements of previous generations. In those Berber *taifas* that last longer than a single generation, however, the military rulers are absorbed into the local nobility and become indistinguishable from the educated and cultured rulers that preceded them. So, despite their initial barbarity, Berber dominated military states last far longer than those dominated by Arabs or Mozarabs further north. Yet they were mainly noncontributors to the wider society of al-Andalus, so alienated were they from those they ruled. Worse still, their internecine fighting provided the perfect opening for the Christians monarchs of the north to interfere in the internal politics of al-Andalus. It is not surprising therefore that the *taifa* state of Granada, which lasts until 1492 as a vassal of the Kings of Aragon, is ruled by the Nasrids, a dynasty of Berber ex-mercenaries.

NOBILITY

As in all medieval societies, the dominant elite outside the Umayyad, Almoravid or Almohad capital were the landed magnates who dominated the economy and provided the military levies the national armies relied on in time of war. During both the rule and fall of these three dynasties, these local magnates maintained their influence and power. *Taifa* kingdoms founded by particularly powerful local magnates, or alliances of such magnates, are the most common form of governance found in al-Andalus in the thirteenth century. These magnates are not solely nobles in the western sense of the term, since in the Islamic world their number included both the noble-born and merchants of varying religious and ethnic backgrounds, so referring to these *taifas* as "noble" is just a convenient shorthand reference rather than a concrete definition. In general, the more urban the state, the more mercantile and trade orientated the dominating local magnates are likely to be. Conversely, the more rural and agricultural the *taifa*, the more power is in the hands of landowning nobility.

In practice however, there is little difference in the nature of these *taifas*. They tend to be small and introverted. The conflicts between noble families take precedence over the threat from the north and provide an easy opportunity for Christian kings inclined to use diplomacy to bring the *taifas* under their sway. In their desire to outdo one another in displays of wealth and refinement, the noble *taifas* are great patrons of the arts and scholarship, as well as strong economic centers. It is in the creations and lifestyle of the rulers of these states that much of what is now commonly regarded as "Moorish" came into being, not the least of which is the use of the word to denote sybarite pleasures and luxury. The states run by a bureaucratic elite may have been better run, but in their ego-driven competition, the *taifa* nobles produced an intellectual ferment beyond anything else experienced in al-Andalus following the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate.

Yet this competitive drive, responsible for so many achievements, is also a fatal flaw. The local magnates resist any drive for greater unity despite the fact that they benefited from strong ties to the kingdoms they ruled, giving them an edge over competitors for power. In this respect, the terrain of al-Andalus played a role because it was difficult for any of the *taifas* to develop the resources to overwhelm their neighbors. Those states whose economies are based on trade have the money to build up mercenary forces recruited from North Africa to fight wars of conquest, but given the regular problems with Berber mercenaries, they resist doing so, hiring only those mercenaries necessary to supplement local forces. And because of the infighting and intense competition previously mentioned, alliances are also uncommon. Thus the noble *taifa* kingdoms

can no better resist invasion from the north than any other kind, and much of their intellectual and artistic productivity can be put down to a carefree fatalism in which they ignore their coming doom in preference to pursuing local rivalries and their own pleasure.

RELATIONS

Dealings between the *taifa* kingdoms are in a perpetual state of turmoil, which in turn reflects their relations with the Almohad Amir in Sevilla and the Christian Kingdoms of the north. Despite the almost purely local interests of the *taifas*, these fractious relations define al-Andalus in the early thirteenth century. Indeed, they explain the weakness that led to the disaster at Las Navas and continue to diminish and demoralize what's left of Muslim Iberia. This last point, the failure of hope as the chances of resistance to the Christian advance dim, is the key element to the mood of life in the *taifa* kingdoms. The fierce and pointless fighting and intriguing between the *taifas* and the openness to external manipulation are all reactions to the obvious doom approaching from the north.

BETWEEN TAIFAS

The *taifas* are remarkably belligerent. Scarcity of resources plays only a limited role, even given the damage done to al-Andalus's economy after the fall of the Almoravids and the tribute demanded by the ever more assertive Christian kingdoms. Nor does territorial aggrandizement play a major role, as most *taifa* kingdoms lack the ability to control conquered lands given the difficulties of internal communication across al-Andalus's many mountain ranges. No, the explanation for the constant raiding and minor wars between the *taifa* kingdoms lies in the feuds and petty rivalries of their rulers — and their associated families and allies. The word *taifa* (faction) was not lightly chosen to define these states; until their conquest by the Christian Kingdoms, they continue to fight factional battles over minor prizes.

The major limitation here is that this feuding is localized. *Taifa* kingdoms are only concerned with those states that border them; those any further away exist beyond the narrow views of the *taifas'* elite. Despite all this fighting, the petty kingdoms continue to trade with one another. As well, the various rulers and powerful local families are inevitably related by intermarriage and adoption. This continuing social and economic interaction persists through the feuds via intermediaries from other communities or from ethnic minorities within each state, especially Jews, who carry on the necessary commerce for each *taifa* to survive.

In this chaotic environment, banditry and slavery thrive, and travel away from major caravan routes in al-Andalus is dangerous. This means that *taifas* connected by rivers or the sea have far more contact with each

other than those that might be geographically closer but are separated by rough terrain. Banditry is also a favored option for those rulers driven from their petty kingdoms, by internal coup or Christian advance. Overland trade between the *taifas* has become progressively more difficult and less profitable.

WITH THE ALMOHADS

Despite ruling nearly half of al-Andalus, the Almohad state based around Sevilla plays a role little different to that of a *taifa* kingdom. With the Almohads more interested in keeping their lands in North Africa than expanding their rule in al-Andalus, the amirs in Sevilla have little interest in the neighboring petty kingdoms beyond extorting tribute from those that lay close enough to be cowed by shows of military force. Even this level of interest wanes as the century progresses and Almohad rule in North Africa comes under threat. Leaders in al-Andalus give themselves over more and more to indolence, debauchery and disinterest in the world beyond the glittering confines of Sevilla.

The threat that the Almohads might pose to the independence of the *taifas*, however much they might lack the will to do anything with their power, plays a significant role in inducing the petty Muslim states into alliances and tribute relationships with the Christian kingdoms. Almohad inertia is only another motivation for looking northward for help. Despite this, the Almohad cities, especially Sevilla, are the richest and most refined in al-Andalus and are the centers of trade and culture. While they may be a spent force politically, the Almohads remain culturally dominant, a strange juxtaposition that may account for the poor foresight exhibited by so many *taifa* rulers as to the changing dynamics in the Christian kingdoms of the north.

WITH THE CHRISTIAN KINGDOMS

Many *taifa* rulers, connected as they are to the wider trends of the Islamic world, realized that their hold on their lands was becoming precarious only after the recent (and devastating) battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. Despite the threat, they still place their relations with the Christian kingdoms in the same category as their relations with the other *taifa* kingdoms and with the Almohads in Sevilla. That there is a war for religious and cultural supremacy going on has never occurred to most of them. Those who do realize their way of life is ending also know there's precious little they can do about it in any event. For most, religious differences did not stop intermarriage, trade and political alliances. That the zeal of the crusades was now affecting Iberia is something that too many *taifa* rulers do not realize until the Christians are at their doors. Even then, many initially become vassals of Aragon or Castile immediately after the *Reconquista* — the Kings of Aragon in particular have little interest in pursuing religious conversion. Thus the ambassadors, merchants and

mercenary captains of the north are found throughout the *taifa* kingdoms during the thirteenth century. Only in the border states — where the threat of conquest was imminent — were relations strained, a situation that eventually all the states of al-Andalus will find themselves in.

TAIFAS BY NIGHT

The multitude of *taifa* kingdoms offer a great opportunity for Cainites of all backgrounds to establish independent domains. Thus, no two *taifas* feature exactly the same type of night predators. Sometimes a single powerful Cainite holds the kingdom in his fangs, other times a powerful coterie does so. Secret plots span many a *taifa*, and roving bands of Cainite bandits prey on others. These diverse Cainite sultanates can, however, be roughly grouped by their reaction to the *Reconquista*.

TRADITIONALISM

Many of the powerful Cainites who claim sole domain over entire *taifas* are traditionalists. Lost in the world of the past, they pine for the nights of the Cordoban Sultanate or some other period. These dark lords lurk behind the facades of states ruled by families that they have influenced for generations, and they are thus most often found within noble and bureaucratic kingdoms. Traditionalists tend to be Cappadocians, Lasombra or Toreador. With the perspective lent to them by their age, most of the traditionally minded sultans are aware of what is coming, but they either hope to ride it out, as many rode out the initial Islamic invasion, or feel that the infantile conflicts among the kine are beneath their immortal concern. To many of these older vampires, Islamic faith is a superficial thing, though the few who are active members of the Ashirra sect support many religious organizations trying to rally the faithful against the Christians. Unfortunately, a few powerful Cainite believers is not enough to turn the tide of apathy and despair gripping al-Andalus. These old Ashirra are bound to either go down fighting against the Shadow *Reconquista* or flee to North Africa to fight another day.

RADICALISM

Many Cainites felt keenly the restrictive rule of the Cordoban Sultanate, especially those opposed to the conservative views of the Ashirra elders there. Following the fall of the sultanate, they seized the chance to found independent domains of their own where they could pursue their deviant political and philosophical views without restraint. These radicals included Brujah seeking a new Carthage, Gangrel seeking to undermine the dominance of the major clans and younger Ashirra seeking to create "pure" theocratic states. Coterie of these radicals managed to claim domain over several key *taifas*. The most likely states for the radicals to

conquer were those where Berber mercenaries had shattered the traditional power structures of the kine, and with them the Cainite status quo, but a few radicals managed to take power under bureaucratic regimes. Ashirra coterie were attracted to the Arab dominated military kingdoms on the Christian frontier. No other vampires in Iberia created so much ferment and turmoil as these radicals, since most weren't content to pursue their philosophies alone, insisting on trying to convert other Cainites to their cause. Few of the radicals saw the coming of the *Reconquista* before the shock of Las Navas, and it may now be too late to do anything but flee to North Africa.

OPPORTUNISM

It was not only Cainite radicals who felt restricted by the elders of the Cordoban Sultanate. Many Cainites merely resented the limited opportunities to pursue wealth and power for themselves, and such opportunists are the most common *taifa* Cainites. Young coterie who found themselves shut out by elders in Córdoba jumped at the chance to oust their betters from their domains or found new ones when the caliphate fell. From the low clans like the Ravnos, Nosferatu, Malkavian and Followers of Set, these new ruling cliques set about creating for themselves what they had been denied. Power and wealth are addictive commodities however, and too many of these new petty sultans could not help but expand their influence over nearby domains, encouraging the divisions and jealousies among the kine in order to undermine their rivals and expand their own influence. How much of an influence older Cainites in both the Christian kingdoms and North Africa have over these minor sultanates is unclear, but many have become willing vassals to some degree in the wider schemes and conflicts of their distant elders. Not surprisingly, few of these young vampires can hope to hold onto their power in the face of the *Reconquista*.

WEST

The western part of al-Andalus is neither rich nor crowded. The Portuguese Christians are pushing in from the north, and the major cities are Badajoz in Extremadura and Huelva on the Atlantic coast. Of the two, Huelva is the most prosperous and has the most to lose as the *Reconquista* advances.

EXTREMADURA

Extremadura is a sparsely populated tableland in al-Andalus's far northwest corner. Much of Extremadura is flat, but it is bounded to the north, east and south by wooded hills that rise into the Montes de Toledo (north) and the Sierra Morena (east and south). Two major rivers, the Tajo and the Guadiana, cross the region from east to west. Extremadura's climate is

extreme, with blistering summers and freezing winters. The *Extremeños* themselves are similarly divided between the rough-and-ready peasants and the sophisticated city dwellers. Extremadura is often also called by the same name as its main city, Badajoz.

The north is a patchwork of lush valleys and uplands, with villages that significantly pre-date the Muslim conquest. The very far north, *Las Hurdes*, has long suffered from disease, poverty, witchcraft, evil spirits and cannibalism. The *Hurdanos* are a tough, determined people, eking out a living from the rocky terrain, cultivating honeybees and living in slate-roofed stone huts with few comforts. Their daily struggle to survive has left them with little interest in politics or the doings of conquerors.

BADAJOS: THE CITY

The Romans first settled Badajoz, Extremadura's major city, as an agricultural village or country villa; it didn't become a fortified town until the ninth century. The lands around Badajoz are rich and fertile, benefiting from the waters of the Guadiana. There are many villages and a number of fortified towns and Roman ruins in the city's immediate vicinity, many of which see use by local communities as meeting places and festival grounds.

The city itself is unpretentious and has few attractive buildings; it is, however, heavily fortified, and the citizens generally remain calm in the face of a crisis. The fortifications center around the *alcazaba* on the southern side of the Guadiana, but the city walls extend around a good deal of the remainder of the city. To the south of the *alcazaba* lies the heart of the town, with plazas for trading and taverns, stores and workshops jostling each other for space on the narrow streets, some of which are not even wide enough to allow a cart to pass. To the west of the old town are inns and more spacious, expensive boutiques, trade and shipping companies, financiers and master craftsmen.

BADAJOS: POLITICS AND RELIGION

The history of Badajoz is a story of sporadic conquest, resistance and independence. The city was part of the Cordoban Caliphate until the arrival of 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Marwan in the late ninth century. Ibn Marwan was a *muwallad* soldier who had been exiled to Badajoz for quarreling with a senior Arab officer. In 877, he fortified the city and asked Alfonso III, King of the Asturias, for aid. He defeated a Cordoban army but fled in the face of a second, larger force. Returning seven years later, he ruled Badajoz until his death in 890, whereupon his sons took up the reigns of power. Córdoba did not reimpose control until 930.

When Cordoban authority collapsed in the eleventh century and a long period of unrest began, Badajoz again asserted its independence, this time under the rule of Sabur al-Saqlabi (Sabur the Slave). The civil

governor of Badajoz took direct control upon the collapse of the Cordoban Caliphate and passed it down to his sons. Gerald the Fearless, a Portuguese adventurer, briefly held the city but was expelled by the Almohads in 1169. They have held it ever since.

In the wake of the Muslim defeat at Las Navas, tribute and the occasional display of will no longer keep the city safe. Despite the citizens' hardiness, there is an air of inevitability about the conquest of the city. The locals want to get as much pleasure from their lives as they can before Christian rule is imposed.

BADAJOS: CAINITE AFFAIRS

Badajoz is one of Islam's northernmost outposts in al-Andalus. As such, the militant warrior caste of Clan Assamite has descended upon it in force. Quickly marshalling the city's Cainites, they set about preparing to fight the Christians. The new sultan, Tabitha al-Masri, is not a fanatic, and she demands loyalty, not piety, from her subjects. The previous sultan, the Brujah warlord Bassam, agreed to step down and serve as al-Masri's vizier after an appropriate display of her determination—a dagger was placed on Bassam's chest as he slept.

The defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa has come as a heavy blow, dividing the Cainite population. Many have fled the city for the presumed safety of Muslim centers like Sevilla and Granada. Most of those who remain are determined to fight, but there are a few who are prepared to make accommodations with the Christians. Tabitha is laying in plans for the city to hold out as long as possible. With the help of the powerful vizier Umar al-Rashid, she is attempting to secure an escape route for their fellow Assamites, setting up safe havens in a path leading back to Sevilla. Before she goes, she is determined to sell the city as dearly as possible. She has not persecuted those who have no inclination to join the fight, but they are being carefully watched. She has made it clear that any Cainites who attempt to contact the Christians for any reason at all will be destroyed. Already two such executions have been carried out.

ELSEWHERE IN EXTREMADURA

Central Extremadura's major settlement is Cáceres, a pleasant and lively city with a vibrant intellectual community and a number of Toreador. Strategically located south of the Alberche River and straddling an old Roman road, Cáceres was captured by the Christian kingdom of León several times since 1142, but was retaken each time.

The other major settlement in the south of Extremadura is Merida. Founded by the Romans in 25 BC, it became the capital of the province of Lusitania. Under the Visigoths, it remained an important center and was not conquered by the Muslims until 713. It has declined under Muslim rule and is now little more than

a regional backwater, overshadowed by Badajoz to the southwest. The city abounds with Roman ruins, including a theater, arena, temple to Diana, several mansions, a hippodrome and an aqueduct inhabited by storks. Several Cappadocians and Nosferatu make their home in the ruins; they have no intention of fighting the Christians.

HUELVA AND SILVES

Huelva lies almost directly to the south of Extremadura. The Atlantic coast consists largely of lagoons and pine-covered dunes, with a string of fishing villages. In the middle of the shoreline is Huelva, a port and industrial city. The Guadalquivir forms the border with Cadiz and Sevilla to the east, while to the west the Guadiana forms the border with Portugal. To the north, the Sierra Morena form the border with Extremadura. Huelva's interior is an undulating region of flatlands, growing cereals, fruit and sunflowers. In the southeast of the Sierra Morena are the Rio Tinto tin mines. Silves lies slightly further west, just south of the Portuguese frontier, with good trade winds to the North African coasts.

THE CITY OF HUELVA

Huelva is an attractive city located on a bluff between the Tinto and Odiel Rivers. Founded by Phoenician traders (as *Onuba* — citizens still call themselves *Onubenses*), it was used by the Romans, who opened tin mines in the mountains. The Moors continued the mining and strengthened the city's fortifications, and it has remained a prosperous *taifa* state. The vampiric sultan of the *taifa*, Laila of Clan Lasombra, has no intention of losing her position to the winds of history; She is negotiating a treaty with the Portuguese Lasombra Vicente de Cardona to maintain her position. She is well aware that Vicente is something of a buffoon, but she has more confidence in his childe and emissary, Rodrigo Toca.

THE CITY OF SILVES

An important port involved in commerce with Africa and the slave trade, Silves was also a major naval base and closely ruled by the Umayyads, Almoravids and finally the Almohads. To ensure the loyalty and reliability of the town and its important services, the central authorities traditionally appointed various powerful bureaucrats to oversee the town. When the Almohads lost their interest in the town at the start of the thirteenth century, the last vizier of slaves, a free-man of Mozarab descent named Dabir ibn Abundio Al-Noya, managed to seize control in 1202 by forming a loose alliance with the town's powerful merchants. For the next nine years, Dabir ruled over the prosperous port town, maintaining his position by keeping the trade flowing and by not upsetting the pirates who replaced the Almohad navy as the most dangerous military presence in the town.

By 1210 however, Silves was starting to feel the pressure of the inexorable advance of the Dukes of Portugal down the Atlantic coast. Dabir however, did not live past a naval raid by English Sea Dogs in 1211, killed not by the raiders, but by rioting Silvan citizens following the firing of the main docks. He was replaced by Nusair ibn Jamal Abu-Hamra, an Arab slaver of great wealth and influence, who was first among equals within the town's trading community.

For now, Nusair's rule is relatively stable, but the city is coming under economic rather than military pressure for Portugal. The Christian advance is killing the market for imported slaves and cutting off the sources of most of the town's exports. Those merchants and citizens wealthy enough are considering relocating to Marrakech or Fez in North Africa, while the poorer citizens look to Sevilla, hoping the Almohads can protect them. In 1234, Silves surrenders to the Portuguese without a fight, little more than a ghost town, never returning to the importance it had once held.

CAINITES OF SILVES

At the height of the power of Córdoba, Silves was an important and lucrative vampiric sultanate that owed its power to the capital. The sultan of Córdoba named the sultan of Silves and supervised his rule. Apart from its mortal trade, the town was a primary conduit for Cainites who wished to enter al-Andalus without difficulty. Its slave trade was important for the replenishment of many a vampire's herd. During the chaos after the fall of the Cordoban Caliphate, the Lasombra Sultan of Silves, one Farouk ibn Omar, was able to keep his control of the town intact and continued to proclaim loyalty to the Sultan of Córdoba while simultaneously dealing with anyone who would pay for his services. Farouk gave equal support to the Cainites who followed the Almoravids and Almohads to al-Andalus and was even known to have dealings with Christian Cainites under the cover of Silves's intermittent trade with the north. He used the communication among the Lasombra on both sides of the religious divide to his advantage.

In recent years, however, Farouk's careful planning and deals have not protected him from a coterie of Baali who followed the Almohad invasion of al-Andalus, looking to profit from the chaos and destruction. They saw Silves as a perfect place to spread the tentacles of their corruption throughout al-Andalus. In a sudden coup, the Baali massacred much of the local vampiric populace in a faked Christian raid. They then set up one of their own as sultan, in the guise of a Lasombra childe of Farouk's. This hidden Baali, Muhammad ibn Farouk, knows full well that the Christians are coming to take Silves away from him and has welcomed envoys from his supposed clanmate Vicente de Cardona, whom he hopes can serve as a tool to spread his own dark faith in

the Christian lands. That the Baali have managed to pull off this scheme under the Magisters' very noses speaks volumes as to the chaos gripping the *Amici Noctis* as a result of religious divides.

ELSEWHERE IN THE REGION

Some 20 miles east of Huelva is Niebla, a fortified town. Located at a crossing of the old road and the Rio Tinto, the pink sandstone walls surrounding the city are almost 50 feet wide in places and stretch for over a mile. The Moors call the town Medina Labla; it was capital of the caliphal district but is now an independent *taifa* kingdom controlling the silver mines. The town also has a sizable Jewish population and several synagogues. The Sultan, a Jewish Lasombra named Abraham, has entertained Portuguese emissaries but has not committed himself to their cause.

CENTRAL PLAIN

The largest of al-Andalus's regions is the broad and fertile alluvial plain of the Guadalquivir, the major waterway of southern Iberia. This area of rich farmland, thick with vineyards and olive groves, is home to both Córdoba and Sevilla. Politically, control of the plain is contentious, with many rebellious *taifa* kingdoms springing up under the control of local nobles, city bureaucrats or warlords. Summers are desperately hot and routinely claim the lives of the sick or unfit; winters, by contrast, are comparatively mild in the lowlands, typically severe in the mountains.

CADIZ

Cadiz is the most southerly province of al-Andalus. Reaching from the mouth of the Guadalquivir to the Straits of Gibraltar and inland to the Sierra de Grazalema, the western half of the province is dominated by rolling fields, while to the east, hills merge into the Serrania de Ronda on the Málaga border, and to the south, the Levante trade wind whips up the seas of the Straits of Gibraltar. Further north is the estuary of the Guadalquivir, rolling farmlands dominated by vineyards. The local sherry is renowned across Iberia. At the southernmost point of the province lie the towns of Gibraltar and Carteria, a pirate haven and a prosperous town respectively.

THE CITY

Cadiz is a seaport on an isthmus protruding into the Atlantic. Established by the Phoenicians as *Gadir*, the city served as a center for trading Baltic amber for Spanish silver and tin. The Romans were attracted to its strategic position and called it *Gades* (inhabitants still refer to themselves as *Gaditanos*); Julius Caesar was given his first public office here. The city has declined economically under Moorish rule, as the Muslims are not great seafarers. Other ports, such as Málaga and Al-Mariyat, are on the Mediterranean side of the Pillars of Hercules.



IBERIA BY NIGHT

The city itself is quite small, with the streets well laid out in a grid pattern broken up by numerous plazas. A series of watchtowers look out over the town and the ocean.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Long regarded as a backwater, Cadiz was ruled from Córdoba, became a *taifa* state, was held by the Almoravids and is now held by the Almohads. The people of Cadiz are a hardy, fatalistic lot, well suited in temperament to Islam's submission to the will of God. The Almohads have met with strong acceptance here, and the people are eagerly renewing their faith.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Cadiz has been a great success for the Cainites accompanying the Almohad conquest of Iberia. The native Cainites are hardy and independent and were happy to accommodate the Assamites, so much so that the local sultan, a devout Muslim Lasombra named Haroun, has been entrusted with advancing the Almohad cause.

The remainder of the city's Cainites either joined Haroun in embracing the cause or simply ignored it. There are a few Jewish Cainites, however, who are quietly concerned. They fear that while things are peaceful (and tolerant) for now, once the Christians are at the gate things will change. Thus, they have begun plotting against their sultan, under whom most have lived peacefully for centuries. This would not sit well with most Jewish Cainites in the region, who see Haroun as an honorable protector, but the conspirators have yet to be discovered.

ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE

The Rock of Gibraltar rises almost sheer from the sea, a 1,400 foot chunk of limestone with a number of spectacular caves. Inhabited primarily by birds and monkeys (Barbary apes), it is as forbidding as it is spectacular. Gibraltar was known to the Phoenicians as *Calpe* and the Greeks knew it as one of the Pillars of Hercules (the other being Mount Ablyra on the other side of the Straits).

In 711, Tariq ibn Ziyad landed his invasion force near the point and named it *Jabal Tariq* (Tariq's Rock), but it was not until 1159 that the Almohads founded the town of Gibraltar. It has become, to their dismay, a chaotic haven for pirates and smugglers, ruled by brute force and intimidation. The Caliph Abdul Mamen constructed a mosque, reservoir and some defensive works (walls and towers), but control of the town is tenuous.

The Phoenicians established a small town, *Carteria*, two miles from the point. It was from *Carteria* that Julius Casear departed to defeat the Carthaginians at Munda. Orderly and well governed, *Carteria* has a large Jewish population who keep a watchful eye on the town of Gibraltar, fearful of its inhabitants. There are a number of Assamite warriors and a single sorcerer in

Carteria, and they suspect that the Baali, the Followers of Set, or both, are using Gibraltar as a point of entry into Iberia.

SEVILLA

Sevilla is a landlocked province bordered by Huelva to the west, Cadiz to the south, Córdoba and Málaga to the east and Christian territory to the north. The city is magnificent and, as the seat of Almohad power, is a place of much learning and culture. The Guadalquivir runs through the center of the province, providing fertile land for the growing of cereals, grapes, sunflowers and olives. The Sierra Morena rises in the north. In the extreme southeast lie the Serrania de Ronda highlands.

THE CITY

The site of Sevilla was occupied by Iberians, Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Romans, all attracted by the silver and copper to be found in the mountains to the north. The Moors conquered the city in 712, changing the name to *Ishbiliyya*. In 1031, the city repudiated Cordoban authority and became a *taifa* kingdom. Conquered by both the Almoravids (1091) and the Almohads (1146), the latter established Sevilla as their power base and from there are trying to unite al-Andalus.

A densely packed city straddling the Guadalquivir and dominating the east bank, Sevilla features narrow and twisting streets with many small plazas in the inner city. This lack of large public spaces does little to curb the enthusiasm of the population, however, who are well known for their love of festivals and celebrations.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Sevilla has been a major power in al-Andalus since the middle of the eleventh century, when Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn Abbad and his descendants, the Abbadids, seized power. In short order, they conquered the surrounding provinces of Huelva, Córdoba and Murcia, and the city became an economic and cultural center, famed for its musical instruments, tiles and scholars.

The Almoravids took control of the city in 1091. The delights of civilization soon overcame their fervor to rebuild al-Andalus. Uprisings led by a *sufi* named Ibn Qasi against them began in 1144, and two years later, they were overthrown by the Almohads, who had been asked by Ibn Qasi for assistance. The Almohads and Ibn Qasi soon fell out; the mystic fled to Silves but was assassinated in 1151.

The Almohads have done a much better job of maintaining discipline but their efforts have come too late. The *Reconquista* has entered its final stage, and in the aftermath of the defeat at Las Navas, the Almohad Amir Muhammad fled the battlefield. The city has commenced construction of the Torre del Oro (the golden tower) to defend against a seaborne attack, but the mood in the city is sour. Defeat seems inevitable.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

The Sultan of Sevilla is Gerushah bint Yoav, a Jew who converted to Islam after her death. Gerushah now finds herself in a difficult position. Her conversion has alienated the city's Jewish Cainites. Despite her loyalty to the Ashirra, she is not fully trusted. The mortal amir's perceived cowardice has severely damaged his credibility as a ruler — a number of factions actively plot his downfall, even as he emphasizes the need for unity. There are more than enough mortal conspirators, but several Ashirra have also joined the fray.

Chief among these is a cabal of Cappadocians, normally uninterested in politics but now sorely concerned that their interests in Italica, to the north of Sevilla, will be impossible to maintain under Christian rule. Their leader, Aliyyah, is a sad-eyed but utterly ruthless Cainite with a taste for treachery. The other faction is the militant Ashirra, led by an ambitious Lasombra Reyham, but it is really a tool of Umar al-Rashid, a powerful Assamite vizier who has been in Sevilla since the Almoravids came. It was al-Rashid who elevated Gerushah to the sultan's post, and it is he — if he has anything to say about it — who will remove her. Reyham believes himself to be the master of the intrigue, of course, and converted to "his" cause Imam Rida, the local religious authority within the Ashirra sect. Unbeknownst to both these factions, Gerushah has infiltrated their inner circles and has plans in place to deal with them. An ancient Visigoth vampire lies staked beneath the city's new mosque and Gerushah will, if necessary, loose him upon her enemies.

ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE

Six miles north of the city of Sevilla lie the remains of the Roman village Italica. Founded by Publius Cornelius Scipius, it was the birthplace of Emperor Trajan. His successor, Hadrian, spent much of his youth here. The Moors abandoned the town after floods changed the course of the Guadalquivir. The remains include an amphitheater that once seated 25,000 and was the third largest in the Roman Empire, and a well-laid-out city of around 60 structures. The ruins are said to be haunted by the spirits of the gladiators who fought and died in the amphitheater. A number of Cappadocians have moved in and are said to be searching for the ghosts. The combination of vampires and ghosts has kept mortals out of the ruins; the few who venture there rarely return.

The major settlement in the east is Carmona, site of two alcazars and home to a large Jewish population. A strong *taifa* kingdom, there is a large Roman necropolis outside the walls, with over 1,000 tombs.

CÓRDOBA

The Córdoba province is completely landlocked. The center of the province is the broad valley of the

Guadalquivir, rich with olive trees and dominated by the city of Córdoba. Once it sat as the heart of Muslim Iberia, the seat of a caliphate that claimed succession from the Umayyads of Damascus. Now, although the city still teems with life, its glory days are past.

THE CITY OF CORDOBA

Located on the fertile plains of the Guadalquivir, Córdoba straddles the river and dates back to the Bronze Age. The Romans founded a city there in 152 BC. A major cultural center, the philosopher Seneca and the poet Lucan were born in Córdoba. Both the Vandals and the Visigoths overran the city. In late 711, Muguez al-Rumi conquered it for Islam.

Once the greatest city in western Europe, Córdoba had dazzling mosques, patios, gardens, public baths, libraries, observatories, aqueducts and a well-respected school. Economically, the city flourished, both from agricultural products and the works of its artisans (including leather and metal work, textiles and glazed tiles). The old Visigothic alcázar, now the seat of the civil government, was abandoned by the Umayyads when they moved to Medina Azahara (see p. 24). Located to the west of the mosque, the alcázar has been fortified and is linked to it by a bridge. Córdoba's mosque is the pride of the city, and successive caliphs have extended and improved the structure (see sidebar). The *judería*, between the mosque and the western walls of the city, is a labyrinth of narrow lanes and alleyways. Entered through the ancient Gateway of the Jews, a number of plazas break up the narrow streets and serve as meeting places.

In recent years, the city has fallen into disrepair, and the population has suffered civil war, foreign rule and economic hardship. The Almohads have begun a program of construction and renewal but they are not well liked by most of the populace, who find their ascetic lifestyle not to their taste.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

By 756, Córdoba was the capital of al-Andalus. It was for several centuries the center of Muslim culture and learning, producing poets, scientists and philosophers. In 758 'Abd al-Rahman I, an Umayyad fleeing Damascus, established an independent caliphate. The city grew under his successors, reaching its height in the early eleventh century under 'Abd al-Rahman III, his son al-Haken II and the vizier al-Mansur.

From 1008 until 1031, the city was wracked by civil war, with claimants to the caliphate regularly attacking. In 1031, Caliph Hisham II abdicated and Córdoba's power was broken. In 1069, Sevilla conquered the city. Its power as a cultural center remained strong, however. In the twelfth century, the city produced the Muslim scholar ibn Rushd, better known to the West as Averroes, and the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides.

IBERIA BY NIGHT

In 1094, the Almoravids took the city. They were supplanted by the Almohads in 1148 after a series of uprisings. The new rulers have poured many resources into the city in an attempt to restore its population's confidence in the future of Islam and strengthen it against the coming storm, but with news of the defeat at Las Navas fresh in everyone's minds, their task seems futile.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

The Sultan of Córdoba, the powerful Hilel al-Masaari, is an Assamite warrior who accompanied the first invasion of Iberia in 711. He has maintained his position ever since. Deeply religious, but neither dogmatic nor a fundamentalist, his flexibility and his faith enabled him to weather the storms of the fall of the caliphate and the

Almoravid and Almohad conquests with his power intact. The defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa has only confirmed his suspicion that Islam is doomed in Iberia.

Al-Masaari is not a hands-on ruler, however, so the young have long been able to gain influence in Córdoba. One of these is the Assamite vizier Enam al-Dimshaq. She arrived in the city two decades ago and has risen to her current position of influence through a combination of masterful intrigues and the genuine trust of the sultan. She is desperately trying to preserve the peace and wishes for the sultan to emerge to lead his subjects, rather than brood awaiting a final battle. She suspects that the Lasombra Miriam bint Aisha, one of the most feared Magisters of Córdoba, may be behind the sultan's melancholy, but has been unable to prove it. The city also has a large Toreador population, many of whom share al-Dimshaq's concerns and support her.

ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE

Four miles northwest of Córdoba lies the great fortified town of Madinat al-Zahra, or Medina. Begun in 936 by 'Abd al-Rahman III in honor of his favorite wife, Azahara, no expense was spared in its construction. A complete walled city, holding some 20,000 people, it is almost a mile long and 1,200 feet wide, sprawling over three terraces. Al-Rahman's successors also inhabited the fortress, but the city rapidly declined after the death of al-Mansur. In 1010 the citizenry revolted and the city was finally destroyed by Berber mercenaries. The vampiric sultan of Córdoba, Al-Masaari, now holds court in the ruins.

To the north is the Sierra Morena. Rolling farmland planted with cereals gives way to wooded uplands rich in oak, pine and deep ravines. A popular area for hunting deer and wild boar, vultures and eagles, the uplands are said to be home to a few Gangrel, but no mortals.

In the south is the region known as Los Pedreches, a landscape of rolling olive groves and vineyards. The fortress town of Lucena sits at the feet of the mountains to the east, guarding the approaches from Granada. It is the domain of a reclusive Lasombra named Rafiq ibn Haroun. Vampiric visitors enter it at their own risk and leave it only with his blessing. The only major settlement in the mountains proper is Priega de Córdoba, noted for its textiles (primarily silk). The steppes eventually give way, in the southernmost reaches of the province, to the limestone ranges of the Sistema Penibético, rife with narrow valleys and steep ridges.

EASTERN HIGHLANDS

The northern reaches of Sierra Morena highlands are poor and sparsely populated, but rich in mineral wealth. To the east lie the heights of the Sierra Morena. This territory is largely under the control of the kingdom of

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THE GREAT MOSQUE

The great mosque of Córdoba has four distinct sections, each representing a different stage in its evolution. 'Abd al-Rahman I began construction in 785, locating the building on the site of a Visigoth church and a Roman temple, fully intending to build Islam's greatest mosque. A west-facing wall was retained to save time and materials, but this also meant that the *mihrab* faced Damascus, 'Abd al-Rahman's home, not Mecca. Pillars from both the Visigoth and Roman structures were reused, as were others brought in from ruins in the region. These were of varying lengths and materials, including marble, jasper and porphyry. Longer pillars were buried to produce a uniform height, and a second row of pillars and arches was eventually built to support the roof. The design is reminiscent of a Roman aqueduct, with alternating bands of red brick and white stone lending the arches a unique appearance.

'Abd al-Rahman II extended the mosque between 833 and 848, adding nine arches to the south. A third enlargement was made by al-Haqim II, demolishing the south wall and adding another 14 rows of columns. He contracted Byzantine craftsmen to construct a new *mihrab* that indicated the direction of Mecca (not Damascus) and amplified the voice of the prayer leader. The ceiling of the *mihrab* was carved from a single slab of marble. The last expansion was made during the time of al-Mansur. Seven rows of pillars were added to the east side. This was a controversial construction as it destroyed the symmetry of the building — the *mihrab* was no longer in a central position.

To the north of the mosque is the *Patio de los Naranjos* (courtyard of oranges), a peaceful, enclosed area of orange trees and fountains where the faithful made their ablutions before prayer.

Granada. These regions suffer the same scorching heat during summer as the Guadalquivir basin, but their winters are considerably colder, with heavy snowfalls common.

MÁLAGA

The terrain of Málaga varies greatly. In the fertile inland, rivers have cut deep gorges through the mountain ranges and limestone formations, and the lakes are home to countless flamingos. The coastline is made up of gritty beaches and low cliffs. Málaga is the largest port and city while to the east is La Azarquia, unconquered bandit territory.

THE CITY OF MÁLAGA

Located at the mouth of the Guadalmedina on a broad bay, Málaga sprawls inland and enjoys a mild climate with little rain. Founded by the Phoenicians, who planted the area's first vineyards, Málaga became a busy port during Roman times, exporting minerals and agricultural goods from the interior. Under Muslim rule, it became the main port supplying Granada.

Málaga boasts two main fortifications. The older of the two is the Gibralfaro, built in the eighth century. It towers above the more recent structure, the alcazaba, and a curtain wall connects the two. The alcazaba has a double wall, many towers and a series of staggered passages forming the entry. It sits at the lower, westerly end of the hill dominating the center of the city, where the surrounding jacaranda trees give the fortress a blaze of purple color when in bloom.

The people of Málaga are known for their lively, liberal attitudes, and their fierce devotion to their city. While this has spared its inhabitants the kind of persecution and hardship brought by more strict rulers, it has also made its loyalty somewhat suspect to its neighbors, who keep a close eye on the city.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Berber generals took control of Málaga during the unrest of the eleventh century and ruled it as a *taifa* state. Their reign was neither particularly efficient nor enlightened, but commerce continued mostly unhindered, and Málaga figs ended up as far afield as Baghdad. With the coming of the Almoravids in 1090, things changed. The province's large rural Christian population suffered at the hands of the new rulers, who imprisoned the city's bishop. The Almoravids ruled for less than a century before being usurped by the Almohads, who imposed even stricter religious policies.

The increasing unpopularity of their rulers has made the citizens of the province receptive to the idea of Christian rule. Even the Jews and Muslims of the city are uneasy at the heavy-handed tactics of their new rulers, and they are all too aware of the damage being done.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

A number of old Gangrel, Brujah and Ventrué inhabit the rural areas of the province, content to

coexist with their Muslim and Jewish counterparts. In the city, the Jewish and Mozarab populations are under increasing pressure to convert or leave, and the result has been a weakening of the city's readiness to meet the Christian threat.

Sultan Badr of Granada has a strong hand in Málaga and has sent emissaries to the city to pressure its own sultan, the venerable Brujah *muwallad* Coman, whose sire survived Carthage. Badr's uncompromising stand on religious conformity threatens the security of his city, however, and Coman is unwilling to risk his domain simply to assist the fundamentalists. The local Ashirra are uncertain whether to support Badr or to attempt to maintain their independence.

ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE

Some 30 miles to the northwest of the city of Málaga, the Guadalhorce carves its way through the Garganta del Chorro, a massive gorge almost three miles long, 1,200 feet deep and as narrow as 30 feet. Nearby is Bobastro, the hilltop fortress of Omar ibn Hafsun, a notable bandit of the ninth century. The fortress is now shared by a brood of militant Ashirra, determined to hold out for as long as possible against the Christian invaders.

ELVIRA (GRANADA)

Elvira is al-Andalus' most mountainous province, with over half its area covered by Sierras. It has a panhandle stretching to the border with Murcia, and is home to towns such as Guadix, carved out of the soft rock, or Baza in the east, at the start of a region of semi-arid desert that stretches to Al-Mariyat.

The Sierra Nevada has the highest peaks on the Iberian Peninsula; oak and pine cover their lower slopes, but the upper reaches are Alpine pasture and scree. Wooded valleys drain the mountains into the main east-west river valleys.

THE CITY OF GRANADA

Granada sits at the eastern end of a fertile plain, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, which rise in the south and east. The first settlers on the site were Iberians, followed by the Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians. The Romans established a town known as Ilibris. The Visigoths expanded the settlement and built city walls; during this period the Jews established a suburb on the southern slopes of the Alhambra, called Garnatha Alyehud.

The Moors invaded the city in 711 and named it Karnattah. Controlled by the Caliphate of Córdoba until the eleventh century, the *taifa* ruler Zawi ibn Ziri established Granada as the provincial capital. The city has prospered under both the Almoravids and the Almohads. It remains a thriving trade center.

IBERIA BY NIGHT

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Córdoba ruled the province until the second decade of the eleventh century, when a Berber general, Zawi ibn Ziri, took the province and moved its capital from the city of Elvira, an exposed plains settlement, to the much more defensible Granada in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The Zirid dynasty rapidly developed Granada into a major regional power. Zawi's somewhat unusual policy of allowing capable administrators to advance, regardless of their creed, led to the rule of a Jewish man, Samuel ibn Naghrila. A senior civil servant, Samuel "handled" the succession crisis of 1038 (following the death of Zawi) and successfully placed his favored candidate, Badis, on the throne. Samuel was the de facto ruler until his death in 1056, whereupon his son, Joseph, took power. But in 1066 a *faqih*, Abu Ishaq, stirred up anti-Jewish feelings in the city and Joseph was killed; a pogrom followed.

The Almoravids took control of the city shortly thereafter. With them came rule from Sevilla. In 1099, they destroyed a church and began harassing the Christians; the days of tolerance were well and truly over. In 1154, the Almohads took the city, and religious intolerance reached a new height. Instead of unifying the city under Islam, the Almohads fragmented the city's tenuous unity.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Affairs in Granada have been a major setback to the Ashirra in al-Andalus. The mysterious Lasombra Sultan Badr so impressed the Assamites who arrived with the Almohads they made no move to challenge his rule. Badr expelled all Christian, Jewish and dissident Muslim Cainites in the city and began preparing for war with great fervor. But such fanaticism has not served the cause of Islam well. Granada is an important base of Almohad power, but the Cainites' mortal followers have actively antagonized rival factions, making it impossible for the Almohads to unify al-Andalus against the Christian threat. And where the herds are divided, so too are their predators.

In the aftermath of Las Navas de Tolosa, Cainite (and mortal) morale has plummeted. Badr seems unconcerned, but the local Assamites are divided on the issue. Opposed to Badr's strict fundamentalism is the vizier Farid, who calls for a more rational approach to support the interests of Alamut. But the sorceress Nazirah supports Badr, and her word carries much weight among the Children of Haqim.

ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE

Guadix, located almost 40 miles east of Granada, is situated on the Rio Guadix and is surrounded by fertile farmlands. The town is said to have been founded by Julius Caesar in 45 BC. Silver, iron and copper mines popped up soon thereafter. For their part, the Moors established a profitable silk industry, funding a wall and

an impressive gateway. An alcazaba, constructed in the tenth and eleventh centuries, sits over the town. Red sandstone walls and battlements surround an impressive central tower, giving views far over the surrounding terrain. The alcazaba is strong, but the locals are fearful of the Christians. Many locals have begun digging caves out of the soft tufa rock of the surrounding hills.

ALMERIA

Almeria is one of the driest, most remote and least populated regions of al-Andalus, often reminding visitors of North Africa more than the rest of Iberia. The interior has few settlements of any size, none of which are shown on maps. The only city is Almeria itself. Surrounded by mountains, the region has long, hot days with little humidity. The landscape shows some variation, with barren lands broken by mountains and a coastline featuring massive cliffs, remote coves, caves and occasional dunes. Agricultural plots dominate the extremely fertile coastal lowlands. Despite the climate and sparse population, Almeria manages to be a net exporter of agricultural goods, making the province valuable and providing the locals some degree of wealth.

THE CITY OF ALMERIA

A port of considerable value on the Mediterranean coast, Almeria had been controlled by the same close-knit alliance of rural nobles since the days of the initial Berber invasion in 711. Of the three families, the Al-Wadi and Al-Rimal were Arabs, while the Neves were Mozarabs descended from one of the original Visigoth families that had ruled the area following the collapse of Roman rule in the sixth century. Controlling all the arable lands around Almeria, the three families ensured that the succession of governors dispatched by the Umayyad Caliphate knew who really controlled the city. Following the fall of the caliphate, these governors took control of the city themselves and maintained it in the face of disputes between the three families, the Almoravids and the Almohads, though on occasion they had to swear spurious loyalty to the new invaders.

When unrest erupted following the collapse of Almohad rule, Almeria was unprepared for the chaos as the three families were in the middle of a violent inheritance dispute over some valuable olive groves. So, when in 1199 Berber mercenaries from the Abbes tribe descended on Almeria, the city was able to put up only the briefest of fights. Despite the quickness of this defeat, most of the surrounding countryside was devastated. Hundreds were killed and many more found themselves sold in the slave markets of North Africa. The Al-Wadi, Al-Rimal and Neves were exterminated or enslaved, along with all the other local families who could not ransom themselves into a position of free subservience to Almeria's new ruler, Bassam ibn Coman Al-Abbes.

Al-Abbes formed a new ruling dynasty, the Abbesids, and distributed the empty lands of the surrounding

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region among his followers. Over the next generation, the Abbasids became almost indistinguishable from the ruling class they overthrew, a conversion helped by the number of enslaved Al-Wadi, Al-Rimal and Neves women who found themselves married to the slayers of their families. Life returned to normal, though the farmlands never regained their previous productivity, and the murder or enslavement of Almeria's entire Jewish community during the conquest hurt trade. The recovery wasn't helped by a series of wars the Abbasids fought with various neighbors, especially their Berber neighbors, the Nasrids of Granada.

By the luck of geography, Almeria remained unthreatened by the Christian advance for a long time, but eventually their more-powerful neighbors in Granada were able to gain control of the city in 1234 through a mixture of bribery, intermarriage and offers of protection from the advancing armies of the King of Aragon. The survivors of the Abbasid dynasty fled to North Africa or integrated into the new regime, which survived until 1492.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

During the fall of Almeria to the Visigoths, the powerful Neves family who established themselves as

lords of the city and the surrounding countryside had a powerful ally. Theoderic Neves, the great grandfather of the first Neves lord of Almeria, had been following his family for many years. When they decided to setup permanently in the city, he joined them. A Ventruer, Theoderic was the child of a Roman Cainite seeking to gain influence over the new invaders. A true barbarian more suited to the field of battle than the confines of a court, Theoderic ignored the blandishments of his clan and continued his bloody ways. He was somewhat of a loss as to what to do upon settling in Almeria. Initially he enjoyed himself hunting down and destroying the few Cainites who remained in the city. Then he joined his relatives in subduing the lands nearby, reveling in the blood-soaked violence and destruction.

Eventually Theoderic settled down as the master of Almeria's shadows. Over the next two centuries, he spent his time building his mortal herd and mercilessly hunting down any Cainite who trespassed in his domain. Despite his territoriality, he became an accepted elder of the Ventruer and took some small part in the matters of his clan. Unfortunately, Theoderic's aloof ways left him without allies when zealous Ashirra followed the Islamic invasion of Iberia in 711. Outnumbered and facing final death, Theoderic threw



IBERIA BY NIGHT

himself on the mercy of the invaders. He converted to Islam and accepted the blood oath to the new vampiric imam of the Córdoba sultanate. Little more than a slave, Theoderic labored for his new masters for centuries until the chaos of the fall of the Cordoban caliphate allowed him to work a long-wrought plan and slay his master before he fled back to Almeria in the chaos.

Once returned to his old domain, Theoderic settled down secretly and took control of the few other Cainites in the city. With no other goal than a return to the untroubled lifestyle and independence he had previously known, Theoderic worked to keep Almeria out of the general disturbances afflicting the Cainites of Iberia. He ignored the mortal conflicts that swept the peninsula, caring little for religion, politics or even the fate of his mortal descendants. His own security was his only real concern, and he ensured it through strict oversight of the Cainites in his small sultanate and brutal violence against anything he perceived as a threat. He did nothing to resist the Berber conquest — indeed, it proved a useful screen for the removal of a few Cainites whose growing power had worried him. Nor does he resent the slow decline in the city's fortunes as the Christians slowly cut off trade and raids despoiled the hinterlands. He has happily cut deals with both the Ashirra of Granada and the Cainites from Aragon to ensure his continued power. He hopes to be there when the *Reconquista* ends and the Ashirra who once displaced him are gone for good.

EAST COAST AND ISLANDS

The Mediterranean coast of Iberia features major port cities like Valencia, which was once home to El Cid, and Cartagena. Both are on the front lines of the *Reconquista*. Out to sea, and basically constituting another region of the Muslim presence in Iberia, are the Balearic Islands. Sitting in the Mediterranean off the east coast of the peninsula and surrounded by warm waters, there are four main islands: Mallorca, with high, wide cliffs and quiet, hard-to-reach beaches; Menorca, with its beautiful beaches and hidden coves; Formentera, with flatlands, beaches and rocky cliffs; and Ibiza, with its sandy beaches and rocky shores. The mild climate is marred only by the baking heat of summer.

MURCIA

Murcia is without doubt the most isolated area of al-Andalus. Roughly diamond-shaped, the province is hot and dry, cut off from its western neighbors (Castile and Granada) by arid uplands and mountains, while to the northeast lies the dry southern end of Valencia. The province's only relief is its southeastern coast.

Extensive irrigation systems, including canals, waterwheels and aqueducts distribute the meager rain-

fall. Agriculture is concentrated in the fertile valley of the Guadalentin River, noted for its citrus crops and wine production.

The *Murcianos* tend to regard strangers with reserve or even outright suspicion. The province has long been subject to claims of sovereignty from distant states (such as Córdoba and Sevilla), but the realities of geography ensure that such control remains nominal at best. The *Murcianos* tend to remain dismissive of such claims; no matter which distant dynasty claims to rule, life goes on much as it always has.

THE CITY OF MURCIA

Founded by 'Abd al-Rahman II in 825 as a Cordoban dependency, Murcia is a small city straddling the Rio Segura. Noted for its *madrasa*, the city has produced a number of scholars and specializes in engineering and animal husbandry. A large mosque lies just to the north of the river, with the *madrasa* a few blocks further north. The city quietly bustles; the combination of students and merchants make for an atmosphere of sober efficiency.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

The Cordoban Caliphate nominally ruled Murcia until its collapse, and the city fell under the control of the Sevillian *taifa* state in 1078. Ibn 'Ammar, sent to rule Murcia, wasted little time in asserting his own independence but he was betrayed by a member of his court and forced to flee.

The next phase in the city's political life began in 1146, when Sayf al-Dawla, a Zaragoza noble, arrived with the backing of Alfonso, the King of León-Castile. Alfonso decided al-Dawla wasn't a reliable ally, however, so he double-crossed him and had his royal emissaries kill him. Alfonso then installed his preferred ally, Muhammad ibn Mardanish, as ruler. Styling himself *El Rey Lobo* (The King Wolf), ibn Mardanish dressed, spoke, fought and ate as a Westerner and held Murcia (and Valencia) against the Almohads until his death in 1172. Since that time, the Almohads have nominally ruled the province, but their grip is far from steady and Murcia remains essentially independent.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Ashirra arrived in Murcia during the ninth century, primarily Lasombra and a number of Nosferatu. When Cordoban authority collapsed, the vampiric sultan Yasar al-Nahyan, a Nosferatu scholar originally from Damascus, wisely decided to simply carry on as if nothing had happened. The Lasombra of Castile arrived when their mortal ally ibn Mardanish took control of the city in 1146. Al-Nahyan convinced the Lasombra emissaries that he should remain as sultan but offered to take an ambassador (the Lasombra priest Ermengol) into his inner circle. The domain thus remained nominally independent for another 26 years, until the Assamites convinced the Muslim Lasombra Omar al-Aziz, the

sultan's vizier, to act on their behalf. Al-Aziz had never been entirely comfortable with his sultan's maneuverings and was easily convinced that the city would better serve Islam under a more righteous ruler.

The Almohads took the city in 1172 and al-Aziz assassinated al-Nahyan, becoming sultan in his place. His first act was to execute Ermengol. This execution of a Lasombra ambassador by a Muslim clansmate, without so much as consulting the *Amici Noctis*, is one of the indignities that has led to that august body supporting the Christian cause in Iberia (see p. 85). A number of Assamites have come to the city, but they keep a low profile, protecting the sultan from the shadows. Their presence is a constant threat to the local Cainites and a reminder of al-Aziz' treachery. Al-Nahyan's surviving allies have approached the Castilian Lasombra, hoping to find a common cause. The Assamites are aware that these communications have taken place, but have so far been unable to find the culprits.

ELSEWHERE IN THE PROVINCE

The only other major town is Cartagena, an important port city founded by Iberians, conquered by Hasdrubal and expanded by the Romans. It is now an independent emirate and an important shipbuilding center, with agriculture and mining supplementing its economy. A number of Gangrel, loyal to the Almohads, make their home in Cartagena, as do several Assamites, who monitor comings and goings in the port.

VALENCIA

The province of Valencia stretches from Vinaroz in the north (some 200 miles south of Barcelona) to Torrevieja in the south (some 50 miles east of Murcia). Throughout the region, the countryside is dotted with fortifications, many of which are currently under hasty repair, many more of which are in dire need of it. North of Valencia is the Costa del Azahar (the orange blossom coast), a green and mountainous region of orange plantations and old Roman settlements. The city of Sagunto, only 15 miles north of the provincial capital, has been settled since the fifth century BC. The Romans rebuilt it (as Saguntum) and the inhabitants still make use of their structures.

THE CITY OF VALENCIA

Valencia is an important seaport, lying on a bend in the Turia River some two and a half miles from the ocean, almost exactly halfway down Iberia's east coast. The Romans, following Greek and Carthaginian settlements, founded Valentia in 138 BC. The Romans established the town as an agricultural center, constructing irrigation systems and laying the foundations for the region's later reputation as the fruit and vegetable basket of Iberia. These systems would be expanded and improved under Arab rule.

When Rome collapsed, the Visigoths moved in, but they were in turn displaced by the first wave of Muslim invaders in 711. Delighted with Valencia, the Muslims developed the city's economy. Valencia soon became a rich agricultural and industrial center, noted for its ceramics, paper, silk, leather and citrus fruits. The city itself is somewhat drab, however, with no spectacular mosques or monuments. This is more than made up for by the exuberance of the *Valencianos*. A generous mix of Christian, Mozarab, Muslim and Jew, they are vibrant and friendly, lifting the mood of the city with their reveling, keeping the masters of the city (mortal and immortal) on their toes.

The center of the city is a market and meeting place. The city's mercantile districts surround the plaza to the east and west. Thursdays see the *Tribunal de las Aguas* (the court of waters) at which local farmers resolve irrigation disputes. To the south of the city is the industrial quarter. Across the river, to the east and northeast lie the houses of the wealthy and powerful; to the north is the oldest (and poorest) quarter of the city.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Valencia has always been a profitable, energetic city. But prosperity has led to idleness — the city's leaders grew somewhat lax during the eleventh century. In 1095, Rodrigo Díaz, the Castilian adventurer better known to history as El Cid, conquered Valencia. He held her until his death in 1099 and his successors did so until 1102.

Upon Díaz's death, the city was unable to stop the advancing armies of the Almoravids and the Christians were put to flight. Their Islamic revival was short-lived, but the city has not fallen prey to corruption and indolence like some others. The proximity of the Christians (and the lessons taught by El Cid) guaranteed the rulers' vigilance. The Almoravids were unable, however, to prevent the ascendancy of Muhammad ibn Mardanish (El Rey Lobo), who with backing from both Castile and Aragon seized control of Murcia and Valencia in 1146. Ibn Mardanish kept his enemies at bay until his death in 1172, whereupon the Almohads quickly established control, which they have maintained ever since, treading a careful path between their rivals and enemies.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

Valencia grew into a Cainite center under Muslim rule, attracting a mix of Assamites and Lasombra, with a scattering of others, principally Nosferatu, Toreador and Gangrel. The Ashirra of Valencia were not displaced by the Lasombra who supported El Cid; they accepted the rule of their new prince with little complaint, as directed by their sultan, the Malkavian Abdullah the Wise. El Cid died in 1099, and the influence of the Christian Lasombra quickly evaporated. The few Christian vampires who came to the city

with El Cid (mostly Lasombra and Toreador) either left or made their peace with their Muslim brothers; those who would not did not survive long.

When El Rey Lobo took the city in the mid-1100s, a small group of Ashirra decided to take action. The local Ashirra religious leader, Imam Abu al-Fulani, usurped Sultan Abdullah and condemned him to Final Death for his complacency under Christian rule. The Malkavian managed to escape and has not been seen since. All Cainites in the city were given a choice — defend Valencia against any further Christian incursions or face execution. To the surprise of the new sultan, most of the city's Christian and Jewish Cainites agreed to defend their city under his guidance. When El Rey Lobo died, the Cainites quietly welcomed the Almohad Cainites into the city. Al-Fulani has declared that the faith must be renewed and has set about restoring orthodoxy. His advisors direct his energies to the defense of the city against the Christians, who are clearly on the verge of a major campaign, but Abu sees himself as imam first and sultan second.

Into this volatile mix, Abdullah the Wise has secretly returned. He has secured the loyalty of a few senior *'alim* (Islamic scholars) among the Ashirra and is planning to return the city to its former prosperity. So far, he has met with limited success, but adding to his woes is the discovery of his haven (in nearby Sagunto) by the Gangrel Shabaqo the Nubian. He has not revealed his presence yet and is considering how best to use the information.

ELSEWHERE IN VALENCIA

To the South, the terrain becomes steadily more arid, while inland the mountainous terrain of El Maestrazgo is dotted with ancient pueblos perched on rocky outcrops and ridges, populated by hardy miners and herders. In the Maestrazgo's southern corner lies Morella, one of Iberia's oldest continually inhabited towns, a hilltop fortress with a castle enclosed by a wall over a mile in length. It is home to a number of ancient Nosferatu and younger Gangrel, none of whom have any interest in religion — only survival.

BALEARIC ISLES

Settlements in the Balearics date back to at least 5000 BC and were regular ports of call for Phoenician, Carthaginian, Roman and Visigothic traders. The inhabitants lived in stone houses and manufactured pottery, tools and jewelry. The Muslims, in turn, conquered the islands. The inhabitants took to the culture of their new masters with enthusiasm. The four main islands — Mallorca, Menorca, Formentera and Ibiza — have each retained their own character and the only major city — Palma, on Mallorca — remains an important outpost of the Muslim faith. Summers are hot and dry, winters cool and wet. Fishing remains an important

activity for all the islands, as do the traditional crafts of pottery and jewelry.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

The Balearics have always been somewhat removed from the mainstream of Cainite politics, Christian and Muslim alike. The Moors conquered the isles very early in their campaigns, and the governors have long enjoyed a very relaxed lifestyle. Indeed, a close-knit series of Arab merchant-noble families, the Abu-Kalifa, Al-Myrani, Al-Tikriti and Al-Ubaiyidh, dominated the Balearic Islands right from the initial Islamic conquest in 720. In 1015, Mujahid al-Amisss conquered the isles, which he ruled from Denia, on the coast of Valencia. His son, Ali, continued the rule, but the Almoravids snapped up the islands and held them until as recently as 1203, when a small Almohad force finally succeeded in bringing them to heel.

Throughout these conquests, the merchant-nobles paid lip service to their new rulers and continued their lives largely undisturbed, their wealth and isolation allowing them to bully and dominate local officials and do what they liked. But this arrogant and often thoughtless independence has isolated the islands, and constant raiding of Christian commerce in the eastern Mediterranean made them prime targets for Christian reprisals. Apart from raiding, the merchants of Mallorca pay little heed to the actions of Christians because their trading network is part of the wider Islamic world. They have ignored the growth of Christian power and refuse to support Almohad attempts to build up naval forces on the islands to counter the King of Aragon's advances along the Iberian coast.

Despite the reversals in al-Andalus proper, these are good years on Mallorca, even considering the Almohad conquest. New villas for the noble-merchants, new mosques and a massive new *suq* are the most obvious signs of a wealthy and successful Islamic trading community. A thriving trade in olive oil and cargo looted from Christian ships pays for all the building projects, cultural endeavors and the luxurious lifestyle of the nobility. The various Almohad governors are increasingly powerless, though the noble-merchants are happy to use the impotent officials to run the day-to-day business of the islands. This does not include spending money on defenses or the military, since the nobles worry about coups led by the mercenaries who would be necessary to man new walls and warships.

Eventually King Jaime of Aragon, backed by naval forces drawn from every Christian port in the eastern Mediterranean, will feel strong enough to challenge the pirates of Mallorca in 1229. In doing so, he calls the bluff of the noble-merchants, and the islands prove almost completely defenseless against the massive Christian fleet. Some nobles will flee before the Aragonese advance, but those less fortunate are able to ransom



IBERIA BY NIGHT

BATHING

The Romans had a long tradition of building public baths, but the Moors elevated the practice to a fine art. Each town has a number of baths, or *hamman*, with the main baths close to the mosque for ritual bathing. The rich and the powerful, of course, have their own baths built in their residences.

Construction follows a standard pattern. Bathers enter through an open-air courtyard that leads to an entrance hall where they are welcomed and the men and women separate. There are three bath rooms: cold, warm and hot. The cold room (*bait al-mislay*) is for undressing. Clothes are removed and replaced by towels, slippers and bath robe. The warm room (*bait al-wastani*) has pools, as does the hot room (*bait al-sajini*), where the high humidity brings on a sweat that cleans out the pores. The sides of the pool are areas to rest and have a massage or haircut. A wood furnace that distributes the warmth under the floor also heats the water and air. The roofs are simple, vaulted constructions with star-shaped apertures. Walls have glazed tiles, while floors are of absorbent flagstones. Pillars and rounded arches — salvaged from Roman ruins — support the roof.

Baths are generally well staffed, with attendants supplying all a bather's needs (towels, soap, perfumes, oil, etc.). Other attendants stoke the furnace or clean the baths. Barbers and masseurs ply their trades. For the bathers, of course, the baths are a place for relaxation, gossip and business.

Ashirra and other Cainites preying on Muslim populations see no reason not to partake of these pleasures. Most of the larger cities have baths that are operated by Cainites. With docile vessels on hand, the Ashirra drink special preparations that make them sweat blood. When the vampire has lost enough blood to feel the Beast's hunger stir, she drinks from a vessel. This process of purging and sating repeats itself throughout the bather's stay. It is said to be both relaxing and invigorating, a pleasure not easily forgotten. Of course, such baths are often the scene of subtle questionings, forbidden trysts and secret deals. Without exception, the Cainite proprietors of such establishments adhere to a strict code of silence, some going so far as to use only deaf attendants so there is no risk of a conversation — or some other activity — being overheard.

themselves and their families and escape to North Africa. A Christian governor takes power and Mallorca's place of prominence in trade and culture comes to a bitter end.

MALLORCA

The Sierra De Tramuntana dominates the north-west coast of Mallorca. A region of great beauty, the coast is replete with olive groves, pine forests and small villages. In spring, its wildflowers attract the wealthy, but for most of the year, the locals are left to their own devices. The coastline is rugged, a string of sandy bays and open beaches. Rocky cliffs line the southern coast. The center of the island is a flat, fertile plain studded with agricultural settlements and workshops.

Palma de Mallorca is the island's only city, an attractive sprawl of cobbled streets; broad, tree-lined boulevards; narrow, winding laneways; and churches, mosques and synagogues. The main mosque sits back from the ports proper, behind a small park. A bathhouse is only a few minutes' walk to the east — a series of underground chambers with domed ceilings supported by columns. An adjacent courtyard is a popular spot for the city's wealthy and powerful to relax and discuss business. Sultan Jasmin makes her headquarters in an old Christian chapel on the outskirts of the city.

CAINITE AFFAIRS

The vampires of the Balearics enjoy their isolation from the mainstream of Cainite society, forming a motley collection of hermits, eccentrics and misfits. All four islands are supposedly within the domain of Sultan Jasmin of Palma, an Assamite sorceress of Almohad origin. She had managed to reenergize the faith of the isles' Ashirra, but she has been less successful in getting them to appreciate the Christian threat. They simply do not believe that the *Reconquista* will affect them. In this they are most certainly wrong.

Jasmin has cultivated a friendship with Julius, the ancient Gangrel who roams Ibiza. But Kassib, the leader of a *ribat* (Ashirra war band) secretly established on Formentera, envies the sultan's position and has falsely reported to her that Julius has discovered their *ribat*. If Jasmin has Julius killed, she is likely to lose an important ally and alienate the rest of the locals. If she does not, Kassib believes he'll be able to justify her removal to his

superiors. Unknown to Kassib, Julius has indeed discovered the *ribat* and is trying to convince Jasmin that her clanmate is a dangerous fanatic, out to destroy them both.

MENORCA

Menorca, the easternmost of the islands, has a cooler and wetter climate than its sisters, a blessing in summer. In winter, however, the island is buffeted by the chilling Tramuntana winds. The main settlement, Mao, is on the cliffs at the island's eastern end. The northern half of the island is a series of undulating green hills with a rocky coastline. The southern half, flatter and drier, has a smoother coast, with sandy beaches and high cliffs. The island's main products are cheese and leather goods. Dotted with prehistoric ruins, the south coast features a number of cave systems, including burial caves that date back to the island's earliest settlements.

IBIZA

Ibiza and Formentera are known as the *Islas Pitiusas* ("islands of pine trees"). Ibiza receives little rainfall, and the island itself is harsh and rocky. In addition to the pines, the island's farmers grow olives, figs and almonds. The coast of Ibiza is a mix of sandy beaches and rocky shorelines. The island's few unliving inhabitants include Julius, an ancient Gangrel who marched with Caesar's legions and his companion, the sturdy Toreador Zara, a poet entranced with the sea.

FORMENTERA

Formentera is the smallest and least developed of the four main islands. Predominantly flat and rugged (some would say bleak), Formentera nevertheless has beautiful beaches with rolling sand dunes framed by jagged cliffs. In the island's central and eastern reaches, a few farmers scrape out a living, but most of the island consists of pine forests, salt beds and grazing land. The remainder of the population lives in fishing villages scattered along the coast. The vampiric population of Formentera is made up entirely of a *ribat* of Ashirra zealots led by the Assamite warrior neonate Kassib.





Chapter Four: Powers That Be

*Give me, Raquel and Vidas, your
hands for promise sure
That you will not betray me to
Christian or to Moor.
- The Song of the Cid*

CAINITE GROUPS

Even more than their mortal prey, Iberian Cainites exist in a state of shifting alliances and balances of power. In other parts of Europe, powerful Cainite lords may claim domain over entire regions with confidence, but not so here. Elders do stretch their ancient muscles, of course, but the rapidly shifting borders of the *Reconquista* benefit those more recently Embraced. Neonates and ancilla have the mental flexibility and drive to succeed in the midst of war. They come to the fore much more than their elders.

The Lasombra Sylvester de Ruiz holds the unofficial title of preeminent Cainite in the region, but his claim is hardly secure. Indeed, the few other active elders on the peninsula barely acknowledge him, and the young more often pay lip service to him than actually follow any firm orders. Cainite Iberia is thus more the story of individual princes and sultans, Cainite knights and amirs, than of secure factions. Among the Christians, the Lasombra Archbishop Monçada of Madrid and the Malkavian Prince Roque of Pamplona cast perhaps the longest shadows, while the Lasombra Miriam bint Aisha, her clanmate Sultan Badr of Granada, and the Assamite vizier Umar al-Rashid do so among the Moors.

Nevertheless, there are some loose associations that have prestige and authority, at least in name.

CLAN LASOMBRA AND THE SHADOW RECONQUISTA

The Iberian Peninsula is rotten with Lasombra on both sides of the religious divide. Historically, the Magisters have stood united against outsiders and made a very solid claim for Iberia being their domain. Indeed, internal differences have largely been subsumed under the preeminent concern of showing that all others feed in Iberia at the Lasombra's pleasure. The mortal conflicts between Muslims and Christians have always been the major challenge to this unity because of the large number of supposedly devout Magisters on both sides of the conflict. Up until the end of the eleventh century, however, the clan maintained its unity.

The fall of that façade accompanied a series of blows to Magister unity. The first came at the dawn of the eleventh century, when the *Amici Noctis* refused to allow the Embrace of the great Muslim leader al-Mansur unless he volunteered for it. The

great general did not, and Ibrahim, eldest of the Moorish Lasombra and al-Mansur's prospective sire, took some time to recover from the setback. Ibrahim had long been a master of reconciling his faith and the interests of his clan, so when he withdrew from a leadership position, the cause of unity couldn't help but suffer. Indeed, the Muslim Lasombra who rose to preeminence were Badr, a religious zealot who rose to the sultanate of Granada, and Miriam bint Aisha, an unparalleled schemer. In the mortal sphere, the glory of the Cordoban Caliphate collapsed and the chaos of the *taifa* kingdoms took its place, encouraging opportunists on both sides of the religious divide.

At the end of the century came the invasion of the Berber Almoravids, who attempted to return order to the Moorish house. On their heels arrived an influx of Assamites supporting their cause. Haqim's brood had been present in Iberia ever since the dependent emirate period, but the Almoravid invasion seemed to signal a new phase in their involvement. Umar al-Rashid, a powerful member of the vizier caste, established himself in Sevilla and let it be known that Alamut wished to support the Muslim cause as never before, and perhaps claim the peninsula as its own. Despite Ibrahim's entreaties, Miriam refused to take a strong stand against this, preferring to use intrigues to duel with Umar. Even worse, Badr emerged as a vocal supporter of the Assamite-Muslim push. Christian Lasombra elders, most notably Sylvester de Ruiz, whispered it was time for the Clan of Shadows to put the Assamites (and Moors) in their place.

The career of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, known as El Cid, against the Almoravids gave the Christian Magisters, especially the young, an example to look to. Ibrahim blocked his Embrace as al-Mansur's had been, but his legend ended up being even more electrifying to Christian Lasombra than his unlifelike could ever have been. Indeed, to this night, Lasombra (and some others) dedicated to defeating the Moors stand vigil at El Cid's tomb for a full day. The term "Shadow *Reconquista*" came to vampiric lips soon after El Cid's death, to mean the efforts of those who had taken such a vigil. The decades after de Vivar's death also saw the rise to prominence of one of his companions, Tercio Bravo, taken under the shadow. A Lasombra firebrand, he became an early leader of the Shadow *Reconquista* and argued for the summary execution of all Ashirra (Muslim Cainites) in Toledo. Such a massacre did not come to pass, but Bravo remains a powerful and divisive figure.

VIGIL

Lasombra who are part of the Shadow *Reconquista* spend a day in vigil at the tomb of El Cid, and swear not to rest until the Moors have been driven back to North Africa. They also swear not to take up arms against a fellow Lasombra engaged in the same work, though this oath is honored more in the breach than the observance. Of late, the numbers of adherents to the Shadow *Reconquista* has been growing, particularly among the younger Lasombra eager to impress their elders.

The day's vigil at the tomb of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar is not restricted to members of Clan Lasombra, although others who wish to undertake it must seek approval from a Magister warrior of the Shadow *Reconquista*. Other Lasombra, not strictly affiliated with the *Reconquista*, may also make the vigil, but to do so is usually seen as a sign of moral support for the efforts to push back the Moors.

Not all Lasombra are so happy with this veneration of de Vivar, and certain Muslim Cainites (most notably the one calling himself Tariq) make a point of assaulting those Lasombra who stand vigil. However, to complete a day's watch successfully and faithfully is a sign of great willpower, and earns the Cainite a measure of respect even from his enemies.

Even more powerful, however, is Archbishop Ambrosio Luis Monçada. A childe of Sylvester de Ruiz, Monçada is a devout Catholic who calls for the reconquest of the peninsula at every turn. Embraced in 1153, it took him just a few decades to become second only to his sire in influence among Christian Lasombra in Iberia. This has much to do with de Ruiz's patronage, but also with the Archbishop's own personality and ruthlessness. As Monçada has risen to be the political and spiritual leader of the Shadow *Reconquista*, he has recruited outsiders to strengthen his position. The Ventrue warlord Nastasio is now the warlord of the Shadow *Reconquista*, a move designed to keep Bravo in his place. Many other non-Lasombra have come to fight under his leadership and seek out their fortunes on the frontier, including Toreador entranced by chivalry and bloodthirsty zealots like the Lions of Rodrigo (see p. 86).

So, by the 1170s, Lasombra unity in Iberia was largely a convenient fiction. Magisters on both sides paid lip service to the *Amici Noctis* when push came to shove but faced each other at court and on the battlefield. Even that pretense collapsed in 1172, when the Almohads captured Murcia from the Castilian vassal who held the city. In the shadows, the Lasombra al-Aziz rose to the sultan's throne with the support of Almohad Assamites by assassinating the previous sultan and a Christian Lasombra envoy named Ermengol. Al-Aziz committed the Amaranth on the hated Ermengol without calling for a Court of Blood, as is the Lasombra practice. When neither Badr nor Miriam raised an objection, the Christians among the Iberian *Amici Noctis* were outraged.

INSIDE THE AMICI NOCTIS

The so-called Friends of the Night are the ruling body of the Lasombra clan, and the efforts to maintain supremacy in Iberia have been high on their agenda for several centuries. At its essence, the *Amici* is the body of all those Lasombra who have proven themselves worthy of full membership in the clan. The group's members are often called upon to sit in judgment on disputes between clan members, set policy and form the infamous Courts of Blood, which grant permission for clan members to seek Amaranth on others. Any members of the clan may be called upon to serve as a Friend, although the honor usually only comes after several decades under the shadow. The call to serve is the highest honor the clan can bestow on one of its own. The existence of *Amici* is an open secret among Lasombra, and members and nonmembers alike openly seek the organization's favor.

The divisions in Iberia are thus a primary concern of the Friends. The unauthorized execution and diablerie of Ermengol, himself an *Amicus*, could not stand — the Friends decided upon a new policy. The clan as a whole called a blood hunt upon the diablerist al-Aziz, and the Friends imposed a ban on any member of the clan, Christian or Muslim, bringing any question relating to the *Reconquista* before them. Muslim Lasombra from across the Islamic world were unimpressed by this policy and claimed never to have been consulted in the diplomatic flurry that occurred mainly between Madrid and Sicily. Yet, with the support of the Methuselah Montano behind it (and through him, of Lasombra himself), the policy became law.

Over the intervening 40 years, the policy has only further divided the clan. The Friends of the Night rarely if ever sit in a great assembly. Instead,

THE POWERS THAT BE

THE LIONS OF RODRIGO, SHADOW CRUSADERS

From the Pyrenees to the Pillars of Atlas, the Lions of Rodrigo have carved themselves a name as one of the most violent and brutal groups of knights in the service of the Shadow *Reconquista*. Regardless of the task they face, the Lions enjoy their bloody work. They enjoy it a little too much according to some Cainites who feel their piety is weaker than their lust for blood and battle. In their work to restrict the marauding Muslims, the Lions have been in close proximity to a number of Cainites found diablerized in their havens. Still, the Lions claim to prey only on heretics and the enemies of the faith, and with none to say otherwise and a pressing need for soldiers, Sir Nastasio has not pushed the issue. The local princes and other Cainites are well aware of the Lions' reputation, and few are willing to house them in their domains. The anarchic way they operate does not help, and Nastasio is often frustrated by the fact that they claim they have no other leader but God. He cannot deny the piety of it, but it does make the Lions almost impossible to control when unleashed upon a foe. More than a few elders have expressed the view that if the Lions should meet the Final Death during the last battles of the *Reconquista*, it would be a useful way of disposing of a dangerous weapon that has outlived its usefulness.

The Lions are a dangerous combination of impetuous neonates and hardened ancilla, all convinced of the righteousness of their cause, and hungry for glory and domain in conquered lands. Many members first serve as ghoul soldiers. Only those who have proved their willingness to spill blood in the name of the Lord get to join the Lions. The rumors of attacks on Christian Cainites are all too true however, for the Lions have no time for those who do not throw themselves into the fight against the invaders as did King Rodrigo, the last Visigoth monarch of Iberia. If others do not use the gifts of their blood properly, the Lions see no problem in taking that blood from them. Since the arrival of Sir Nastasio, they have had to moderate their behavior somewhat, but they still manage to cut down a few cowardly dogs when in the field. The membership of the Lions shifts with every year, as the band loses members to Muslim enemies and gains them from the mortal warriors they Embrace or the ambitious Cainites they attract. Their most well established members include the Brujah ancilla Felipe, leader of the Lions and a true zealot, his childe Roy, and the Lasombra Tancred. The Lions would be dismayed to know Tancred was born Saleh and still serves the Moorish Lasombra as a spy.

local Friends meet to decide matters that affect them and then use couriers to consult fellow Magisters if need be. This has made it easy for the bad blood over Iberia (and the Crusades) to split the *Amici* along religious lines. Muslim Lasombra meet with other Muslim Lasombra to decide matters that concern them and rarely think to consult Christian brethren. Some have gone so far as to say there are now two distinct groupings of Friends of the Night: the Christian *Amici Noctis* and the Muslim *Asdiqa' al-Lail*. This view seemed confirmed in 1202 when Cainites of many factions gathered in Venice to debate the course of the assembled Fourth Crusade. Among the delegates were Tommaso Brexiano and Lucita of Aragon speaking for the *Amici*, and Khadijah Saadeh speaking for the Muslims in the clan. (For more on these events, see the *Bitter Crusade* chronicle.)

THE GRAYBEARDS' DEAL

As far as the young are concerned, this paralysis and division remains the state of affairs. The young

fight their battles in the Shadow *Reconquista* without calling on the *Amici* or the Courts of Blood. But deeper in the shadows, the elders have come to a decision. Following the Fourth Crusade, Lucita of Aragon and Gabriella of Genoa provided detailed reports on just how well the Cainite Heresy took advantage of the chaos surrounding the crusade, implying that divisions among the Clan of Shadows had been a key problem. What's more, the blood hunt against al-Aziz had proved frustratingly unsuccessful as the diablerist remained (and remains still) ensconced in Murcia with a cadre of Assamite bodyguards. Something had to be done.

Key players on either side of the divide, most notably Ibrahim, Sylvester de Ruiz and Elieser de Polanco, have brokered an agreement. This so-called graybeards' deal sets out the conditions under which the Muslim Lasombra of Iberia will accept the Christian reconquest. It does not call an end to the Shadow *Reconquista* or the opposition to it, but outlines how Lasombra in good standing can main-

IBERIA BY NIGHT



tain their position when territory changes mortal hands. The ultimate objective is to maintain Lasombra in place while pushing out Assamites and others. In this way, de Ruiz hopes to ultimately solidify his domain across the peninsula.

With the Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa, the graybeards are in the process revealing this agreement to key players across the peninsula. Monçada, although a fervent Catholic and Embraced in part to be de Ruiz's firebrand of the *Reconquista*, seems amenable to such an arrangement. Tercio Bravo on the other hand has rejected it outright. On the Muslim side, Miriam bint Aisha is willing to use the agreement as another tool against her Assamite rival Umar al-Rashid, while Badr has pointedly refrained from commenting.

THE ASHIRRA OF AL-ANDALUS

Ashirra is Arabic for "brethren," and it is the name that Islamic Cainites have taken for themselves. The Ashirra form a very loose sect spread across the Muslim world that promotes a belief that

Islam holds out the promise of salvation to vampires. The sect lays out a variety of guidelines for Cainite behavior based on the demands of the Qur'an and Hadith, as interpreted by the wise men of the sect. These include several prayers each night, almsgiving and a form of blood fast during the month of Ramadan. Drinking blood is a problematic issue among the Ashirra, since it is proscribed by the Qur'an. Most practice a form of ritual purification of blood that involves placing the blood in a bowl and praying to Allah for forgiveness. These vampires generally keep healthy herds from which to feed. Many others feed as they see fit, saying the cause of jihad outweighs the sin of blood-drinking. Those Assamites on the Road of Blood do not restrain themselves at all, of course.

The sect is so widespread in the Islamic world that the term "Ashirra" has become a generic term used by vampires in Muslim lands for one another. Some are far more devout than others, of course, and what the sect has in expanse, it lacks in organization. There are a few luminaries with some influence across Islam, but no one with anything approaching true domain across the region. Just as in Christian Europe, the vampiric world is a patchwork of do-

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mains claimed by sultans great and small. The Ashirra sect has religious leaders and teachers — called imam — but they are almost always watched by the local sultan. If anything, these divisions are more evident in Iberia than elsewhere.

(For more on the Ashirra sect across the Muslim world, see *Veil of Night*.)

RELIGIOUS LEADERS

For the most part, devout Ashirra across al-Andalus go about their unlives as best they can, looking to the local imam and their fellows for guidance. In the nights of the Cordoban Caliphate there was far more unity of purpose, but with the waves of invasion and the unrest of the *taifa* system, local interests seem to take precedence. There are nevertheless two vampires who cast long shadows in religious matters: Badr of Granada and Umar al-Rashid of Sevilla.

Badr is the zealous Lasombra sultan of Granada. He has also taken for himself the title of imam and preaches a very martial brand of Islam. Intolerant of infidels and highly cognizant of the fact that the Christians are winning their precious *Reconquista*, he calls for desperate measures. He wishes to see all the vampires of the *taifas* submit to his authority and guide their herds to face the Christians with renewed vigor. Despite his proclamations of religious fundamentalism and his title of imam, Badr is very much a political animal and argues that the necessities of jihad justify suspending some of the niceties of Muslim life. Thus his followers generally ignore protections for Jewish and Christian Cainites, restrictions of feeding and other limitations.

Umar al-Rashid is a powerful Assamite vizier who nests in Sevilla. Al-Rashid arrived with the Almoravids and is responsible for the attempts by his clan to assume primacy of domain in Moorish Iberia. He has made Rida, the Lasombra imam of Sevilla, his pawn and religious mouthpiece. Rida calls for stricter religious observance and a more subtle political maneuvering designed to weaken the Christians with intrigues rather than the force of arms. It was Rida who authorized the diablerie of Ermengol, the Lasombra envoy to Murcia in the 1170s. He believes this was a successful effort to break the Christian hold on the *Amici Noctis*. More accurately, it was an effort by al-Rashid to break, once and for all, Lasombra communication across the religious divide.

OTHER LEADERS

While Badr and Umar al-Rashid are the greatest religious leaders in al-Andalus, they are hardly the only vampires of influence. Among Ashirra, as among mortal Muslims, it is often difficult to separate religious and secular power, and there are several other vampires who still have a great deal of authority in Moorish lands. At the height of Cordoban power, the Assamite sultan Hilel al-Masaari and his Lasombra advisor Ibrahim were the preeminent leaders on the peninsula. They both withdrew from the scene at about the time the caliphate fell, Ibrahim because he could not Embrace his chosen al-Mansur and al-Masaari for his own enigmatic reasons. Both are back, but with somewhat reduced authority.

Miriam bint Aisha also lurks in Córdoba. A schemer and manipulator, she plays one *taifa* against another in an intricate chess game. She has many allies and is a rival of Umar al-Rashid, but she seems not to have any plan for the peninsula beyond her own amusement. Finally, there is Shabaqo the Nubian. A truly ancient Gangrel, he is a friend (if such a word truly applies) of Hilel al-Masaari. He converted to Islam several centuries ago; this prompted others of his clan to do the same and become warriors of the faith, calling themselves Taifa Gangrel. Shabaqo never issues orders or claims domain, but the elders of al-Andalus pay him heed because of his power and age.

THE APOSTLES OF THE THIRD CAINE

The Apostles are an offshoot of the Cainite Heresy that broke away from the See of Nod sometime around the year 1000. Its leaders believed that Narses of Venice, then Archbishop of Nod, was too concerned with temporal matters and not enough with the spiritual needs of his flock. Like several of the mortal Catholic monastic orders, the Apostles are a reform movement within their faith. They hope that their austere and simple ways can inspire other Heretics to abandon the indolent See of Nod and join them in preparing the way for the vampiric Messiah to come.

This messianic streak — some would say obsession — distinguishes the Apostles from most other sects of the Cainite Heresy. The Apostles genuinely believe that the prophecy of the Third Caine shall come to pass within the next few years. However, their interpreta-

tions of certain cryptic passages within *The Book of the Shining Blood* are most unusual. In particular, they expect the Third Caine to come from among the ranks of mortals. They believe that vampires cannot redeem themselves; that is a task only mortals can perform. Thus, an exceptional person will appear among the children of Seth. He (or she — the Apostles are not explicitly adverse to a female savior) will reveal his messianic status through signs and portents. Once these signs are recognized, it falls to the Apostles to grant this mortal the Embrace so that he or she may assume his proper place as the Third Caine — and savior of all Cainites.

The Apostles have interpreted recent events across Iberia as fulfillment of Heretical prophecies, and have established strongholds in the Christian north, most notably in Navarre and Aragon. They use the rugged mountains of these areas to hide themselves and travel by night, seeking out further signs of their messiah's identity. The Apostles are convinced that the mortal destined to become the Third Caine has been born and is living in Iberia. The wars of the peninsula and the carnage they have wrought only further convince these true believers. After all, does not *The Book of the Shining Blood* say that "He shall come amid bloodshed and war, and strife shall be His herald?"

The Apostles' faith in their twisted version of the Heresy is unshakable, despite the best efforts of the See of Nod to dissuade them from it. Their elders lead lives of remarkable austerity, rejecting the opulence and wealth that characterize mainstream Heretics and their Crimson Curia. It's these differences between the ancestral faith and that of the Apostles that contribute to their righteousness. Their scriptures tell them that "The powerful He shall destroy, but the humble shall be His servants, feasting at His side at the time of His coming." Can there be any surer sign that the See of Nod has gone astray from the "pure" version of the Heresy that the Apostles represent?

The fall of Narses from the leadership of the Heresy has not tempered their antipathy toward the See of Nod one wit. This is in spite of recent efforts by the new archbishop, Nikita of Sredetz, to court the Apostles. Too much time has passed since the original schism for there to be any healing of the breach. Moreover, many pious Heretics — especially in Portugal — view the Apostles as reprobates whose own actions have made it difficult for the true faith of Caine to make inroads in Iberia. They view

HERESY BASICS

The Cainite Heresy is a dark religious movement among purportedly Christian Cainites, mostly but not exclusively Lasombra, and a growing flock of human priests and clerics. An outgrowth of the Gnostic and dualist heresies that thrive in certain parts of Europe, the Heresy believes that Caine was a being of spirit and matter rejected by the physical Demiurge. Christ was the Second Caine, pure spirit sent to guide humanity to the Embrace (and thus to Caine). The Heresy expects the corrupt physical world to end with the arrival of the Third Caine. According to some popular interpretations of the Heresy's holy text, *The Book of the Shining Blood*, the Third Caine should have entered the world in 1206, will remain in it for 33 years and then bring on Gehenna in 1239. Needless to say, this rapidly approaching date causes a certain manic tension among Heretics.

Although the Heresy is used cynically by some as a route to power, there are a great number of true believers within its ranks, including both Cainites and ghouls. Up until very recently, the overall leader of the Heresy (called the Archbishop of Nod), was Narses, the Prince of Venice. Ten years ago, however, he helped manipulate the Fourth Crusade toward Constantinople, fulfilling an ancient desire for vengeance but putting the interests of the Heresy a distant second behind his own. This has cost him dearly, and the Crimson Curia (the Heresy's ruling council) has just divested Narses of his title and granted it to the Tzimisce Nikita of Sredetz. (*Bitter Crusade* details some of these events.)

In Iberia, the mainstream Heresy is particularly prominent in Portugal, where it is led by Bishop Vibius Fimbria in Lisbon. Although Fimbria is a Lasombra, he is dedicated to bringing about the advent of the Third Caine, and allies not with other Lasombra but with his coreligionists. As such, belonging to the heretical sect is frowned upon by the *Amici Noctis*, and Heretics are liable to be punished or destroyed if found out. Archbishop Monçada leads efforts to do so, although his influence in Portugal is minimal.

Nikita's efforts at reconciliation as cynical and unworthy of the new archbishop. For their part, the Apostles are no more well disposed toward the Heretics, seeing them as decadent servants of a false god.

ORGANIZATION

The Apostles of the Third Caine organize themselves much like any small cult, acting in secret and hiding their existence from prying eyes. True to their origins, the Apostles have a less hierarchical structure than the mainstream Cainite Heresy. They reject such structures as being untrue to the plain words of *The Book of the Shining Blood*, which counsels against "bowing and scraping before one's brothers." Consequently, it is illicit — even immoral — to treat any Cainite as superior to any other. The Apostles believe there should be no distinction between priest and believer. They recognize only distinctions of age — the Apostles usually defer to elder vampires in most matters. Even there, such deference is not universal but only a general rule. If asked about their unusual structure, the Apostles are fond of quoting the passage that says, "You shall have no king but Caine."

When they gather to worship, they do so in a less formal fashion than their Heretical counterparts. Religious services do not follow the Liturgy of Childeric. Instead, they resemble impromptu blood feasts in which vitae is exchanged between members of the cult, sometimes resulting in ecstatic behavior and visions. Indeed, the Apostles have a charismatic bent, often manifesting unusual abilities and Disciplines as the result of their communal worship. The Apostles point to these occurrences as evidence of their favor in the eyes of the true God.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER GROUPS

Most members of the Apostles are Caitiff vampires, brought up without a clan. Those who are not Caitiffs have rejected their clan associations and have little to do with the traditional power structures of the Cainite world. Naturally, this is one of many reasons almost every Cainite group or clan treats the Apostles as pariahs. For their part, the Apostles view this hatred as proof of their piety, for *The Book of the Shining Blood* says "they shall reject you and spit upon you because of your love for His name." Thus, persecution has only made the Apostles more fervent in their beliefs — and more dangerous.

The Apostles have little to do with mortals. Unlike the Cainite Heresy, they rarely admit mortals to their worship. Neither do they take them as ghouls or servants. Those few they do initiate into

their mysteries are usually well placed within mortal hierarchies, whether ecclesiastical or civil. The Apostles generally concentrate on civil hierarchies, both because it avoids the attention of the mainstream Heresy (which usually subverts the Church) and because their interpretations of Cainite scripture tells them that the Third Caine lives as a great mortal leader before his Embrace. Thus, they prefer to use mortals whom they believe further their efforts in identifying the man or woman who will one day become their messiah.

As noted above, the Apostles are strongest in Navarre and the Crown of Aragon (especially Catalonia). They have a minimal presence in either Castile or Portugal, as they are opposed in both realms by powerful Cainites. In Castile, it is Archbishop Monçada with whom they contend, while in Portugal it is Vibius Fimbria and other dogmatists of the mainstream Heresy. In the case of Castile, the Apostles have deemed it best to conserve their limited resources and avoid direct confrontation with Monçada. In Portugal, however, a group within the Apostles has done just the opposite by strengthening their presence in the face of Heretical resistance. This group, led by the Asturian Cainite Balesquida, believed King Sancho of Portugal was the Third Caine. His death just last year came as a blow to them, although some of Balesquida's followers openly wonder whether the king's death is merely a ruse to pave the way for his eventual return in glory. That they know of no Cainite to have Embraced Sancho only strengthens their belief.

CURRENT CONCERNS

The Apostles believe the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa to be one of the very last signs of the arrival of their vampiric messiah. If so, he or she must already be born and living among mortals. Thus, the group spends much of its time and effort attempting to find and locate the Third Caine so that they might hasten his arrival and the end of the material world that he heralds.

Unfortunately for the Apostles, they have no clear criteria by which to determine the identity of the Third Caine. The passages of *The Book of the Shining Blood* to which they usually turn are remarkably vague, describing the messiah in only the broadest terms. In fact, more detail is given to the circumstances under which the Third Caine is to appear than to the characteristics of the savior. This fact has proven frustrating to the Apostles and is a source of ridicule from their Heretical persecutors.

IBERIA BY NIGHT

Nevertheless, the Apostles have a leading contender to the messianic mantle: King Pedro II of Aragon. The group points to Pedro's numerous victories against the Muslims as well as his willingness to break with Christian tradition as proof of his future role. Of course, they admit this identification is uncertain, which is why they have gone to great lengths to infiltrate the Aragonese government — all the better to examine their putative messiah. These efforts have drawn the attention of elders within Clan Lasombra, who have their own plans for King Pedro. Monçada's childe Lucita is perhaps their most dangerous enemy at court.

Archbishop Nikita of Sredetz has ordered adherents of the Cainite Heresy to refrain from overt action against the Apostles. He hopes such a move might heal the rift between the religious groups — and give the Heresy more power. Naturally this directive divides the loyalty of Heretical Lasombra, who must now choose between their faith and their clan.

Balesquida's group instead looks to Sancho of Portugal as a potential Third Caine. They point to the Brujah support for him, as well as the Heresy's attempts to keep them out of Portugal as evidence of their belief. Their disagreement with their fellow Apostles is an amicable one, as both factions recognize the precariousness of their situation. In addition, both know that it's always good to hedge one's bets. As the *Reconquista* enters its endgame, the future is far from certain, but the Apostles intend it to include their ultimate victory.

MORTAL GROUPS

There are countless mortal groups and associations with influence across Iberia. From the various Christian dynasties to Mediterranean pirates and *taifa* emirs, they dot the landscape like trees and hills. But some groups have a broader or more profound impact as far as the childer of Caine are concerned.

THE KNIGHTS OF SANTIAGO

The Order of Santiago, more properly known as the Military Order of Saint James of the Sword, is the premier military order of Christian Iberia and ranks among the other great orders of the day — the Templars, Hospitalers and Teutonic Knights. The order was originally a small military brotherhood based near Cáceres in Extremadura. Legends within the order claim Ramiro, King of Galicia, founded their brotherhood in 846, but such claims are not readily accepted by outsiders —



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especially rival military orders. In any event, the original purpose of the order was to provide safety to pilgrims making their way to the great religious site of Santiago de Compostela in Leon (see p. 51). Muslim bandits have long attacked pilgrims, creating a need for protection that the order has filled over the centuries.

Sometime between 1164 and 1170, 13 knights — one each for the twelve Apostles and Christ — attached themselves to the order of regular canons of the monastery of Sant'Eloi in Galicia. They promised to give the monastery military protection and adopted the rule of Saint Augustine as their own. Those knights were wealthy men, possessing 20 castles among them, which they promised to use in defense of pilgrims. In return for a share of any revenues generated in their activities, the monks agreed to care for any wounded knights and to set up a hospice for pilgrims. This agreement was formalized in 1175. The master of the knights, Don Pedro Fernández traveled to Rome, where Pope Alexander III received him and formally approved the order.

Upon obtaining papal confirmation, the order gained the immediate support of King Fernando of Leon, who granted the town of Caceres to be used as its headquarters. Eventually, King Alfonso IX of Castile offered the order the Castle of Uclés, where they established their principal seat following the loss of Caceres to the resurgent Muslims. Within ten years of their founding, the order had founded hospitals at Toledo, Avila, Talavera and Cuenca, and in 1186, they opened a leper hospital at Villa San Martín. They were also granted extensive properties in Portugal, including the town of Palmella. As word of their good deeds and noble actions continues to spread throughout Europe thanks to grateful pilgrims, the order has gained holdings in numerous other countries as well, some as far away as England and Hungary.

Like the Templars and Hospitalers have elsewhere, the Order of Santiago has acquired extensive feudal powers throughout Iberia. When acquiring new estates, whether by gift or conquest, the order typically establishes some kind of defensible buildings and, in larger towns, builds a substantial fortress. They dedicate the area immediately surrounding the fortress to food production so that the knights can support themselves during a siege. The larger fortresses tend to attract peasants and laborers who construct villages in the vicinity. In this way, the order becomes an even more powerful feudal lord.

The various grants to the order are usually on frontier areas bordering Muslim settlements. In some cases, kings grant them in exchange for towns or castles the order holds that are now situated well behind the lines. To help support the order, royal grants are sometimes also made of monopolies or other forms of income, such as control over mines or other natural resources. It is not uncommon for the order to be charged with resettling Christians in formerly Muslim lands. At this they excel, as their strength of arms reassures colonists that their new homes are protected against the Saracens. Consequently, the order has earned the love and respect of many Christians for this aspect of their duties alone.

ORGANIZATION

The Knights of Santiago make vows similar to those of the Hospitalers and Templars. They are allowed to marry, however, provided they remain chaste within their marriages. Members of the order agree to care for the sick and injured whom they encounter in their duties. They are also agents of conversion, bringing the Gospel both to those who have fallen away from the Church as well as those who have never heard it, like Jews and Muslims.

The head of the order is given the title of master and rules over the Council of Thirteen, in recognition of the thirteen knights who began the modern order. In his duties, a deputy — given the title of grand commander — assists the master. The grand commander is a member of the Council of Thirteen renowned for his wisdom and skill at arms. A council of thirteen knights also rules each castle, one of whose members serves as its leader. Some local chapters of the order allow members of religious communities (such as priests or deacons) to become members. In such a case, these religious members answer only to their own ecclesiastical superiors, not to the council. This is a source of friction in some instances, and the practice remains rare.

Each of the order's castles has its own administration, subordinate to the local commander, with groups of knights, sergeants and foot soldiers. Because each of Iberia's monarchies attempts to curry the favor of the order, it has acquired lands and castles throughout the peninsula. Unfortunately, this isolates many such fortifications from the central leadership, contributing to divisions within the order. Because of this, decision-making is often slow and ponderous — and the order is thus more easily manipulated by outside forces.

CURRENT CONCERNS

The order's tendency to play one kingdom against another is becoming more and more of a liability. The rivalries it has profited from remain the chief reason the *Reconquista* has not yet completed its task of driving the Muslims from Iberia. Worse still, the order has occasionally served the political interests of one kingdom against those of another. For example, in 1176 the knights joined the King of Castile against Sancho VI, King of Navarre. This action gave the Almohads an opportunity to attack Uclés, whose battlements they seriously damaged in the attack.

When Master Fuentes died in 1184, the order almost dissolved under the weight of its members' divided national loyalties. The knights in Leon fell under the sway of King Fernando and elected Don Sancho Fernández as master of the order. Meanwhile, the knights in Castile — encouraged by their king — elected Don Fernando Díaz. For two years, this dispute ravaged the order, as Castilians and Leonese promoted their own candidates. Fortunately for the Order, the Castilian Díaz withdrew his claim to leadership in 1186 and ceded the position to Fernández.

In 1195, the Order of Santiago, along with the Orders of Calatrava and Alcántara, suffered a bitter defeat against the Moors at Alarcos. Master Díaz was fatally wounded, and many of his knights were killed. Soon thereafter, war erupted between Castile and Leon, and the order, which possessed influence in both realms, was again forced by politics to elect two masters. This second dispute ended with the acceptance of Gonzálo Ordóñez as sole master in 1203. But this hasn't quelled national ambitions within (and around) the order. The knights fight as often against other Christians (usually the Navarrese) as they do against the Muslims. This trend has alarmed more traditional members of the order, who believe it has strayed from its original purpose of protection of pilgrims and conversion of heathens.

CAINITES AND THE ORDER

The Order of Santiago is, for the most part, a society of human knights. Some are devout, some ambitious, and many are both in equal measure. Most are free of the direct influence of vampires. Most, but not all. Indeed, young Toreador, Ventrue and others entranced by the promise of chivalry and glory have infiltrated the order, if not as knights, then as patrons and advisors.

Vampires of Clan Lasombra also have influence over some parts of the order. Prince Reynaldo de

Rubio of Compostela has the most direct power, and several cabals of vampiric and ghoulish knights within the order owe him personal fealty. Reynaldo cooperates with other prominent Lasombra to ensure that the order continues to receive the approbation of Iberia's many kingdoms. These courtly manipulators include in their number Lucita of Aragon in Lérida. Reynaldo has been frustrated by the national rivalries that regularly threaten the order's integrity.

Some enthusiastic Brujah are also tied to the order's holdings and hope that the knights might be instruments in ushering in a new age upon the peninsula. Demesio, a Brujah knight who once served in the Lions of Rodrigo, is a notable example of this trend. He and some fellow vampiric knights have taken to guarding the pilgrimage route to Compostela and have made ghouls of several mortals within the order. Reynaldo de Rubio is keeping a weary eye on him.

THE SWORD OF ST. JAMES

The Knights of Santiago are not the only ones taking inspiration from the legends of the Apostle James. The Sword of St. James is a group of Christian men dedicated to the rooting out of supernatural evil wherever they find it. Rodrigue de Navarre, an Iberian nobleman, founded the group after he inadvertently stumbled upon the existence of the Cainite Heresy. Stunned by this revelation, Rodrigue decided to learn more about the Heresy. He spent several years, beginning in 1190, looking for further proof that "creatures of the night" (as he calls Cainites) did in fact exist and that they acted behind the scenes of Christendom. His investigations have taken him far and wide, where he has collected a great deal of evidence that unholy monsters use mortal men as pawns for their own foul purposes. In fact, his experiences during the disastrous Fourth Crusade added further proof of his fears — and steeled his resolve. (For more on Rodrigue during the Fourth Crusade, see the chronicle supplement *Bitter Crusade*.)

Since his time with the crusade, Rodrigue has shared his concerns with a few others whose opinions he could trust. When they too became convinced that he had uncovered genuine evidence of a dark conspiracy beneath the surface of Christian Europe, they joined him in his quest. With these first followers, Rodrigue created the Sword of St. James as a guerrilla army in the war against darkness. They look to the legendary exploits of St. James the Greater as an example of what they hope to accomplish. Just as St. James aided Iberian Christians by defeating the

invading Moors, so too does the Sword wish to do against the bloodsucking monsters that plague Christendom.

In its efforts, the Sword of St. James suffers from two related problems. The first is that most of its members have never encountered a genuine Cainite. Only Rodrigue and his earliest followers — those who accompanied him on the Fourth Crusade — have any direct experience dealing with vampires. Consequently, their knowledge of the enemy is largely theoretical, gleaned from observation and snippets of blasphemous tomes, such as *The Book of the Shining Blood*.

This lack of experience almost cost the Sword dearly in 1209, when Xalbador, a childe of Roque, the prince of Pamplona, became interested in their activities. Although demented, Xalbador was nevertheless a keen observer of human nature. He recognized unusual patterns of activity among Rodrigue's followers, leading him to suspect the existence of the Sword of St. James. Unfortunately, the Malkavian allowed his curiosity to get the better of him, an act that led to his Final Death at Rodrigue's hands. Xalbador is actually the only vampire that Rodrigue has killed, but the Sword has destroyed several ghouls and other Cainite pawns, and has sent two vampires into torpor. Like most witch-hunters, they have no understanding of the distinctions between these types of beasts.

Although Xalbador was a mere neonate, his ability to get close to the Sword has led to the group's second problem: paranoia. After the young Cainite uncovered the existence of the Sword, Rodrigue became obsessed with security. He now worries that other vampires may follow in Xalbador's footsteps. Thus, the group keeps its contact with outsiders to a minimum, ever fearful that a misstep could lead to the demise of their entire undertaking. A great irony is that Xalbador's sire is very much aware of the Sword's existence — a fact that would undoubtedly frighten Rodrigue were he to learn of it. For the moment, Roque watches the Sword with amusement rather than concern. He has kept its existence to himself and his closest advisors, as he believes they pose a threat only to the foolhardy. Moreover, the prince is certain the Sword will one day make useful pawns; there is no point in destroying them prematurely.

At the moment, the Sword of St. James remains a small and isolated group. Their paranoia grows with each year, as does Rodrigue's instability. Yet, they remain convinced that their mission is a holy

one, entrusted to them by divine providence. Rodrigue sees his initial discoveries as evidence of God's call; he cannot turn away now that he has heard it. Therefore, the Sword watches and waits, all the while gathering the information that they hope will change the face of Europe forever — and rid Christendom of these damnable night-demons.

ORGANIZATION

The Sword of St. James has yet to number more than a few dozen people. Rodrigue de Navarre hand-picks all members, selecting only those he considers both trustworthy and useful. Both qualities are equally important, since Rodrigue hopes the Sword can not only survive in the face of Cainite opposition, but defeat the dark menace as well. Emboldened by his destruction of Xalbador, he sees no point in merely gathering information; he seeks to use that information to fight evil. Quoting from the *Letter of St. James*, Rodrigue reminds his followers that "faith without works is dead."

The Sword of St. James usually operates in small groups, no more than two or three at a time. This organization provides safety and ensures that there is always more than one group active at any given time. The composition of these groups varies, depending greatly on the needs of its current mission. Thus, a trip to the archives at Barcelona might require someone skilled in the reading of Latin and Arabic, while a meeting on the docks of Lisbon would require someone familiar with the sea.

Rodrigue has gone to great lengths to seek a diversity of recruits. Although Iberians — especially Navarrese — predominate, there are a goodly number of Provençal members as well. Rodrigue has also recruited three Italians, a pair of Germans and a lone Englishman. Their skills are equally diverse, ranging from theology to engineering to linguistics.

To date, the Sword has lost only one of its members to the Cainites, Rodrigue's old friend Zelige Berganza.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER GROUPS

For the moment, the Sword of St. James has tried to keep its existence secret. Nevertheless, Rodrigue has made tentative contact with others who seem to share his goals, both in Iberia and beyond, in the interest of gaining his movement more resources. These allies are usually people Rodrigue has come to know in his travels, including many scholars and priests, who give the Sword access to archives and other records. Others helpers are soldiers and knights

associated with military groups, including the Order of Santiago. Rodrigue believes that in the coming battle, the Sword of St. James must be as sharp as possible. Having allies trained in martial matters is one way to ensure this happens. Rodrigue does his very best to keep these allies in the dark about the existence of the Sword as an organized movement and the extent of his own knowledge of the occult. He views the death of his friend Zelipe Berganza in 1210 as a cautionary tale for the Sword. Berganza broke the group's silence by speaking of the destruction of Xalbador to a priest in Barcelona. Not long thereafter, both Berganza and the priest were found dead — surely at the hands of monsters.

CURRENT CONCERNS

The Sword of St. James is dedicated to the elimination of the Cainite Heresy in Iberia. Since 1190, Rodrigue has amassed a vast storehouse of information about the Heresy, its beliefs and activities. He has also identified the locations of several Heretical strong-

holds, including one in the Pyrenees. Armed with this information, the Sword is preparing to draw out the hidden masters of these strongholds and destroy them. He is aware that the Heresy is rife with monsters of many types — demons and their acolytes, most likely — though he remains ignorant of the full extent of their power. Rodrigue worries that his followers are still too inexperienced to combat them effectively, which is why the question of military allies occupies such a prominent place in his plans.

Of course, the Sword has accumulated enough information to realize that the Heretics they are pursuing are just one facet of a larger species of evil. Indeed, they have good reason to believe that Iberia's Heretics are but an offshoot of a grand conspiracy that stretches throughout Christendom. Certainly, Rodrigue saw evidence of this while on crusade. Therefore, the Sword of St. James must overcome its natural paranoia and seek out allies if its goals are to be anything more than the ravings of a few lone madmen.







Chapter Five: The Damned

*That Christians may not
see it, let them come for them
by night.*

- The Song of the Cid

ASSAMITE

NAZIRAH, SORCERESS OF GRANADA

Background: It was another hot, dusty day in Jerusalem when Nazirah learned that her father, Gadi, had met his death taking the Latin kingdom of Edessa from the infidel. The coming of the Second Crusade only strengthened her conviction that he had died in the service of God, and she decided to abandon her old life and dedicate herself to the destruction of the infidel.

Her opportunity came even sooner than she had prayed for. One night, returning home from evening prayer, Nazirah ran ahead of her mother. She literally stumbled across a Christian soldier, wounded and living as a beggar. As she searched for a weapon with which to dash out his brains, a shadowy figure descended. Silence enveloped the scene and Nazirah watched in horror as the Christian had his blood drained. The silent killer then turned to Nazirah, smiled, and she could hear again. The monster told her there were many ways of striking at the armies of the cross. If she would study under the eyes of the monster's masters, perhaps she would be found worthy of joining them. If not, she would be destroyed. The next day she bid her family farewell, and following the directions given her the night before, made her way to some of Haqim's brood. There she struggled to reconcile bonds toward Haqim and duty to God, and threw herself into her studies. After the Embrace, she became a formi-

dable sorceress, commanding spirits and powers far older than those of Muhammad's religion.

Nazirah petitioned to be allowed to travel to al-Andalus, hoping that by immersing herself in Haqim's plans for the peninsula, she would be able to serve both her master and her God and find the balance she sought. Arrangements were made, and in the Winter of 1197 she arrived in Granada. Nazirah allied herself to the Lasombra Sultan Badr, the city's devout leader. She spent several years assisting the sultan, driving out any non-Ashirra Cainites from the city and rooting out Badr's rivals. She performed her duties well, but always felt uneasy when called upon to act against her fellow Muslims. Once the sultan's hold on Granada seemed secure, she withdrew from nightly activities to study the sorcery and society of al-Andalus.

In the intervening decade, she has come to two heart-wrenching realizations. The first is that God is paramount in her life, not Haqim. The second is that the Muslim cause in Iberia is ultimately doomed. These realizations have put her at odds with the Assamite elders in Iberia, especially Sultan Hilel al-Masaari of Córdoba, whom she blames for having not taken advantage of the momentum the Berber invasions brought to Muslim Spain. She hopes to preserve what she can of Moorish Spain, first by collecting the occult teachings of the region, and second by supporting a Muslim state that might hold fast against the Christian tide. She believes Badr's Granada might well be that state but is very much aware that he is a political animal, willing to compromise his faith for continued power. She quietly looks for other Ashirra who might stem the tides of fate.

Image: Nazirah is a short, lithe young woman, handsome rather than beautiful. Her movements seem awkward and jerky, almost uncoordinated, but she has never been seen to stumble or accidentally bump anything. She generally adorns herself in plain black robes of excellent quality; on the rare occasions when she must dress for physical action, she wears a baggy blouse and trousers and a carefully wrapped headscarf, all in black.

Roleplaying Hints: You understand the need for strong action and unity, but you feel uncomfortable killing other Muslims. This, you believe, tells you that your first loyalty is to God, not to Haqim. You are certain that sooner or later, you will be forced to make your choice publicly. You dread that day, and pray nightly for the strength to be true to your convictions when it comes.

Haven: Nazirah makes her haven in a small mosque just outside Granada proper. She takes great comfort from sleeping in (actually, under) a house of God. The faith of the Mosque causes her continual discomfort, but she sees it as a (spiritually) comforting reassurance that God will still allow her in his house. This nightly test of her endurance affirms her continued worth. The mortal attendants are aware of her and her nature, at



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first serving her because they thought her a messenger of Gabriel. Now they serve her as ghouls.

Secrets: In the course of her investigations, Nazirah has been privy to the machinations of many Taifa kingdoms. She has also spirited away a healthy store of occult texts and artifacts across the frontlines.

Influence: Nazirah has a healthy network of contacts among Iberian sorcerers and mystics. Most are unaware of her true nature; those who are tread carefully. Among Cainites, she is one of the leading Assamite sorcerers in Iberia and has made close associations with many other occult scholars in Al-Andalus, including the Cappadocian Aliyyah and the Lasombra Ibrahim. Her association with Badr gives her additional political influence in the Ashirra courts.

Destiny: Nazirah will be horrified by the fate of Islam in Iberia, blaming it on the faithlessness of the Ashirra. Her convictions are only strengthened by the survival of Granada as an Islamic state until the late fifteenth century. She leaves Iberia in the thirteenth century and is active in Asia Minor for decades before returning to her beloved city, where she is destroyed fighting against the Christians as they complete the *Reconquista* in 1492.

Clan: Assamite (sorcerer caste)

Sire: Malik al-Wali

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Judge

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1151

Apparent Age: early 20s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Acting 3, Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Archery 2, Etiquette 4, Melee 3, Ride 2, Stealth 4

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 3, Law 2, Occult 3, Politics 3

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Quietude 2, Assamite Sorcery 4 (see *Libellus Sanguinis* 3 or simply use Thaumaturgy 4)

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Mentor 4, Resources 1, Retainers 2, Status 2

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 3

Road: Heaven 5

Willpower: 7

HILEL AL-MASAARI, SULTAN OF CORDOBA

6th generation warrior, child of Pelagon

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: 580

Apparent Age: late 30s

One of the first of Haqim's brood to convert to Islam, al-Masaari was a great proponent of the early Muslim conquests. He led the Assamite effort to use that wave of expansion to displace or subvert the interests of other clans across the region. Said to be undefeated in battle, and once the favorite of the warrior caste's caliph, al-Masaari fell victim to politics and intrigues. Stalking through the shadows around the early Umayyad Caliphates, he followed the conquest to Córdoba, from which he hoped conquest would continue north across the Pyrenees and into the European mainland. Fate did not have such things in store, and al-Masaari became sultan of a grand Muslim city that suited his warrior's spirit not in the least.

Unable to surrender his claim to domain without opening himself to attack from enemies within Alamut, al-Masaari has been something of an absent ruler. For much of the last few centuries, he has been seen only by the warriors of Córdoba. A series of viziers have ruled in his place. For some of that time, al-Masaari has been in the field, using the Almoravid and Almohad invasions as cover for his own martial forays north. But seemingly before their drives were even begun, those Berber dynasties rotted and imploded. Now, al-Andalus is a chaos of warring Taifa, and the Christians are sweeping south at an alarming rate. Leaving his domain to be taken is still out of the question for the sultan, so he prepares to come out of retirement and fight a last terrible battle.



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UMAR AL-RASHID, ALMOHAD PUPPETEER

7th generation vizier, childe of Benoa

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 992

Apparent Age: late 40s

Once a *qadi* (Islamic judge) in Egypt, Umar moved west early in his unlife to the Atlas Mountains and the Maghrib. There he saw the potential of the fundamentalist fervor among the Berbers and decided to use it to both spread the influence of Alamut and raise his own profile. There had long been an Assamite presence in Iberia, but hardly an overwhelming one. But when the Cordoban caliphate collapsed, Umar set about changing all that. He convinced others in Alamut that the Almoravid dynasty had a great future and would restore the fierce spirit of Iberian Islam. As the Berbers invaded Iberia, they unwittingly brought a wave of young Assamite warriors along with them. Many of these neonates met their Final Deaths, but others displaced complacent Ashirra and Christian Cainites. Soon, Umar arrived in Sevilla with a network of clanmates indebted to him.

Umar, typical of the vizier caste, did not attempt to take the sultanate for himself. Instead he supported the converted Jew Gerushah bint Yoav for the post and plied his intrigues across the peninsula. As the Almoravids succumbed to the sedentary lifestyle, he

supported further Assamite arrivals with the Almohads and gained further contacts and allies. For a few decades, it seemed that Umar was well on his way to being the true power among the Cainites of al-Andalus. His only rival seemed to be the Lasombra Miriam bint Aisha, who cast webs of influence as well and as subtly as he.

Things could not last, however. First, Umar's great sponsor in the clan, Alamut's high vizier Khaldun, surrendered his position as caste leader to his rival Rebekah in 1171. Since then, the Almohads have not been able to rally the various Taifa against the Christians, and the *Reconquista* marches on. So stripped of his best-placed allies and with his local mortal cover crumbling, Umar has had to turn to damage control. In Sevilla, he has given support to the Lasombra who wish to displace Gerushah, letting on that the current sultan should take some of the blame for Almoravid and Almohad failings. Among Assamites, he lets loose the same rumors but also smears Hilel al-Masaari, the ancient warrior sultan of Córdoba. Al-Masaari seems to be emerging from his long isolation, but it is likely too late to save his reputation. All the while, he guards against his rival Miriam bint Aisha, who is surely behind a fair share of his troubles.

BRUIAH

FELIPE, SPEAR OF THE GODLY

7th generation, childe of Pelayo

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: 1030

Apparent Age: early 20s

Embraced in the midst of the bloody battle with the Muslims when he was only eighteen, Felipe is the closest thing to a leader the Lions of Rodrigo have (see p. 86 for more on the Lions). It isn't intelligence or tactical skill that causes the other Lions to follow his lead, but rather his mindless fanaticism and taste for blood. This attitude is what attracted Pelayo, the founder of the Lions, to the young warrior. Empowered by his Embrace, Felipe has become even more manic and aggressive over the years, especially following Pelayo's death at the hands of the powerful Muslim Gangrel Shabaqo the Nubian outside Madrid in 1135. Having already diablerized older Cainites, Felipe is more powerful in blood than many elders realize and is looking forward to sating his taste for the vitae of other Cainites in the battles to come.

ROY, BURNER OF MOSQUES

9th generation, childe of Felipe

Nature: Child

Demeanor: Fanatic



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Embrace: 1085

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Standing no more than four feet tall, Roy is often mistaken for a child, though in fact he was fully grown when Embraced during the siege of Toledo. It was not an Embrace meant to mean anything; his sire Felipe was merely creating shock troops to clear the city of its Ashirra defenders. Against all odds, Roy survived. In fighting those who had mocked and belittled him, he found something that fired a sense of purpose and fearlessness that would have surprised his old master who had paraded him through the streets for alms. After Roy survived the fall of Toledo, Felipe and his crusading band tracked him down and celebrated his victory. They took to his fierceness and thought he would make a perfect spy and scout, and soon he was one of their number. Roy has come to worship his sire Felipe and follows him blindly, his constant praise partly responsible for the Lions' leader's increasingly egotistical actions.

CAPPADOCIAN

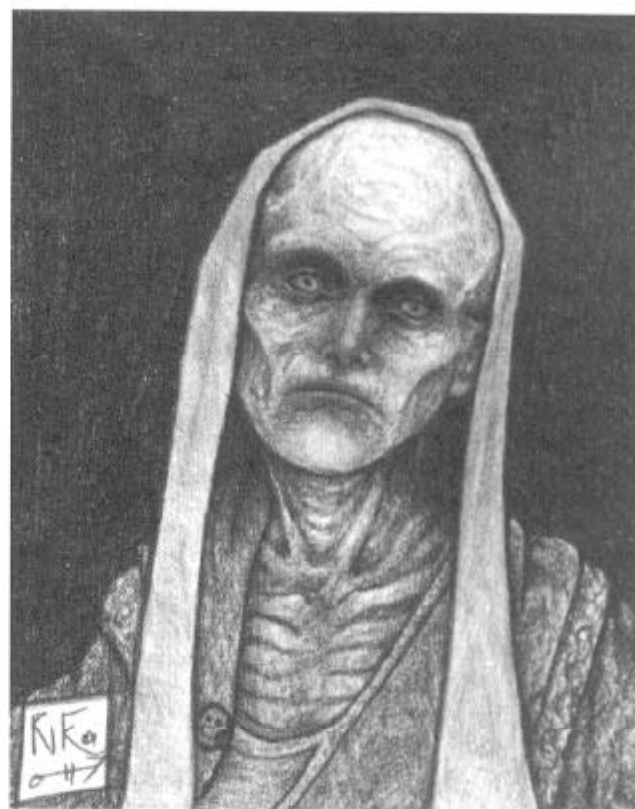
JAKEEM IBN ALIYYAH, THE LURKER IN THE CRYPT

Background: Jakeem al-Fulani seemed to have been richly blessed by Allah. The son of a very wealthy merchant, he was born and raised in Córdoba when the city was at the height of its power and influence. His interest in scholarship bloomed and he studied medicine, philosophy and science at the college. Not content with what he had learned, he spent several years in Egypt examining ancient texts and debating with Copts, Muslims and some who worshipped even older gods.

His life took a sudden turn when his father took ill. Jakeem returned immediately, determined to nurse him back to health. But his father had different ideas. He knew he was dying and he wanted his son to promise to give up his dilettante lifestyle and settle down to running the family business.

Jakeem was shattered by his father's death. All his knowledge, all the science and medicine, all the years of studying the mysteries of life, its origins and purpose and causes had not enabled him to save the life of his beloved father. The day after his loss, and over the protests of his mother and sisters, Jakeem sold the family business to his father's partners. He could not bear to remain in Córdoba and he hoped to spend time with a number of prominent natural philosophers who had recently taken up residence in Sevilla.

His desire to unlock the secrets of life was destined to remain unfulfilled. Years of study brought him no closer to his goal and he became increasingly bitter and withdrawn. Only the prospect of debate, the discovery of a rare text to add to his horde, or the promise of practicing his skills as a surgeon drew him away from his



apartments. Eventually, Jakeem's hope died. He realized that life would not yield up its secrets. So he changed his emphasis and began an intensive study of death itself, hoping to unlock some hope, some clue as to the nature of this great mystery. He began associating with like-minded scholars, mystics and madmen, convinced that this time, he would succeed.

Jakeem realized only when it was too late that he had been guided to his dark studies. A ghostly pale woman had haunted his nights since he arrived in Sevilla and one evening she came to him while he worked at a dusty tome. Her name was Aliyyah and she was a scholar of Clan Cappadocian. In the years since his Embrace, Jakeem has served as an assistant and tool for his sire, who has established a brood in the Roman ruins of Italica north of Sevilla.

Ten years ago, Aliyyah sent Jakeem back to Córdoba to ten the libraries there as the great city fell from grace. Free from her cloying presence, he has rediscovered his own drive and established his own domain. He fears Aliyyah has had him under some form of blood oath and never wishes to repeat that experience, and so has started to gather tools to fight against her. One major tool is a new understanding with Viktor, a young Tremere in search of the mysteries of the Moorish world. He has also made ghoul of several Cordoban scholars.

Image: Jakeem was a rangy man when alive, tall and strongly built, but as his obsession grew he became pallid and gaunt. When he received the Embrace, his

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appearance became even more inhuman. He cares little for such trivialities as grooming or fine clothes, and typically dresses in a selection of expensive robes that have become increasingly threadbare over the years. His ghouls often urge him to wear new clothes when meeting with other Cainites and he sometimes indulges them, but not often.

Roleplaying Hints: You realize now that your whole existence has been a social experiment carried out by your sire. Even your early, mortal years studying medicine may well have been her doing. You see her clammy hands in every memory, living and dead. Soon you will strike back at those hands, using the very same tools she has.

Haven: Jakeem has made his haven in a series of chambers beneath the homes of his mortal puppets in Córdoba. A number of tunnels connect the residences and he is quite content to spend weeks below ground, absorbed in his researches.

Secrets: Jakeem has made sure to remain appraised of the broader movements and struggles in both mortal and Cainite society, but in truth has little interest in politics. The secrets he is interested in are of a different nature.

Influence: Jakeem has relatively little influence in the mortal world, but is known as a scholar and procurer of secrets by the Ashirra of Córdoba. As envoy of Aliyyah, he also gains a measure of respect from the unliving.

Destiny: Aliyyah vanishes with the fall of Sevilla to the Christians, but Jakeem remains unconvinced of her destruction. His creeping paranoia shows him her hand in even the most coincidental act. What he doesn't see is Viktor of Clan Tremere luring him into his labs.

Clan: Cappadocian

Sire: Aliyyah

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 9th

Embrace: 1013

Apparent Age: mid-50s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Dodge 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 2, Herbalism 5, Melee 2, Stealth 2

Knowledge: Academics 4, Hearth Wisdom 2, Investigation 3, Linguistics 4, Medicine 5, Occult 4, Science 4

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 4, Dominate 1, Fortitude 2, Mortis 5

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Herd 3, Resources 4, Retainers 3

Virtues: Conviction 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 2

Road: Bones 5

Willpower: 8

ALIYYAH, THE WHISPER OF DEATH

8th generation, childe of Lonas

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Innovator

Embrace: 843

Apparent Age: late 20s

Called the Sultan of Italica by some, she is the mistress of that ruined city north of Sevilla and leads efforts to research the ghostly happening there. But scholarly pursuits are hardly her only interest, and she has played the role of advisor and even assassin for several prominent Ashirra over the last centuries. Gerasah bint Yoav, the Sultan of Sevilla, benefited from her advice during the Almoravid period and the subsequent chaos, and Aliyyah has also served as an ally of the Lasombra Ibrahim. She seemingly withdrew from the political stage with the arrival of the Almohads, when she realized that the Assamite vizier Umar al-Rashid was pulling a very many strings. In fact, she has simply become a more subtle player, trying to ensure the survival of those things she values in al-Andalus and making certain that those who deserve to fall on the pyre of history do so.

In the last fifty years, she has set about creating a network for her own research and other occult studies. She has forged a quiet alliance with the Assamite sorceress Nazirah and sent her childe Jakeem to scour the libraries of Córdoba. She is aware that Jakeem is becoming a liability, but believes she has his treachery well under control. In Sevilla, she seeds dissent against the sultan and against the vizier Umar, moving the two to fight one another and further weaken their position. Aliyyah agrees with her acquaintance Nazirah that the Christian advance is irrevocable, but she shares little of the Assamite's despair at the situation. Instead, she has made plans to deal with it. Her ally Ibrahim has brokered a deal with the Christian Lasombra Elieser de Polanco to allow her to continue her research as long as she hands over both Umar and Sultan Gerasah when the time comes. She is only too happy to oblige.

FOLLOWERS OF SET

SALAH IBN QABOOS, THE AMIR OF CHAINS

Background: Born to a prosperous clan of Persian-Arab slavers in the great city of Baghdad in 925, Salah was his father's only son and spoiled rotten from his birth. Salah grew into a handsome, talented and supremely arrogant young man who has gotten away with his superior attitude because of the success he brought to the family business. Whether it was leading slaving expeditions to the African coast or negotiating deals

with the caliph's vizier of slaves, Salah seemed to be blessed by God. Wealth and power flowed to the family in equal measure. In private, Salah's youthful willfulness turned into psychotic rages and the family's slaves lived in fear of his lash and knife. Once he was married, Salah took the lash to his wife and eventually his children. In 957 however, Salah's life changed when he met a vibrant and enticing merchant from Sidon called Qaboos ibn Achmed in Baghdad's great *sug*.

Qaboos entranced Salah, and he soon found himself willing to do anything for his lover, sacrificing profits to help organize caravans to odd parts of the empire and spending a fortune to buy old scrolls. Eventually Qaboos revealed his true nature to his catamite and, as planned, Salah loved him all the more for it. The slaver willingly threw off his half-hearted Muslim faith for the worship of Set and gave himself entirely over to his master. Salah gained the reward of becoming a ghoulish priest for Qaboos. He served as such for many years before his lack of aging forced him to leave Baghdad. Wherever he went, he kept slaving, his great talent for the trade furnishing much wealth and blood to the Followers of Set.

Eventually Qaboos recognized that his servant merited more than a taste of the blood of Set and Embraced Salah. After an abbreviated period of training, Qaboos released his child to spread the cult of Set. The two had once traveled to al-Andalus and been dismayed to find that their faith had not survived the coming of the Almoravid invaders. Qaboos spoke darkly of zealous Ashirra who took advantage of chaotic times to carry out purges against the "idolatrous" cult of Set. Salah knew a challenge when he heard one and arrived in Sevilla in 1202 burning with ambition and a desire to excel.

Salah has every intention to have Ashirra sins return to feed upon that damnable sect. He sees the Christian wave coming and recognizes the fire of ambition when he sees it. There are many knights and lords, both mortal and Cainite, who will gladly pay a price in piety for a larger share of glory. By cataloging the havens and vulnerabilities of the Ashirra power structure in the city — and elsewhere — he hopes to ingratiate himself with several of these ambitious lords. In this way, he can avenge the cult of Set and spread the faith into Christian Europe. He has already made contact with a few prominent Christians, including Lucita of Aragon.

Image: A tall, regal man with hawkish features and wide shoulders of one used to the outdoors, Salah is the very image of a refined, cultured and suave courtier. His clothes are made of the finest silks and most expensive linens, his beard and hair carefully oiled, and he always stays in vogue with the latest fashions from the great cities of the Levant.

Roleplaying Hints: You have been a merchant slaver for so long that you play the role of a purveyor of



flesh with consummate skill, putting customers and victims at ease with charm, wit and guile. Like any good slaver you are patient — after all, you don't want to damage the merchandise. Beneath it all, though, you are a merciless megalomaniac, likely to frenzy if seriously checked or humiliated. You are well aware, however, that such a lack of control could damage the very delicate balance of alliances upon which you depend. You relish the moments when you can let loose and feed your Beast.

Haven: Salah rarely sleeps in the one place more than few nights in a row and uses a mobile temple of a Setite merchant instead of the fixed haven favored by those on safer ground. His ghouls move his sleeping body between various warehouses, ships, and houses depending on what locations are available.

Secrets: Salah is slowly building up a spy network throughout al-Andalus, relying on the many slaves that he has brought under his control. He sells and trades information with Muslim Cainites, acting as they expect a "useful pagan" to act. All the while, he collects information to trade to his Christian allies when the time comes.

Influence: Salah is highly influential among kine slavers. Through his control of the supply of slaves and the herd they represent, he has developed a lot of pull in Sevilla, Córdoba and the Taifa States.

Destiny: Salah's basic plan is indeed successful, although his vengeance against the Ashirra does not go

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unnoticed. The Gangrel elder Shabaqo the Nubian uncovers some of his treachery and hunts him throughout the later half of the thirteenth century.

Clan: Follower of Set

Sire: Qaboos

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Caretaker

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1005

Apparent Age: early 30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 2, Dodge 2, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Crafts 4, Etiquette 4, Melee 2, Ride 2, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Knowledges: Academics 3, Linguistics 4, Occult 2, Politics 2

Disciplines: Obfuscate 4, Potence 2, Presence 4, Serpents 4

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Herd 5, Influence 1, Mentor 3, Resources 4, Status 3

Virtues: Conviction 4, Instinct 2, Courage 2

Road: Serpent 5

Willpower: 7

GANGREL

SABELA, THE NOBLE SAVAGE

Background: Sabela had always lived a life of privilege and luxury. The eldest daughter of a wealthy Valencian nobleman, she received an excellent education and in due course was married off to the equally wealthy son of one of her father's friends. She quickly settled into the life of a noblewoman, bearing children, managing the household and entertaining herself with petty schemes and intrigues.

Then the Muslims came. Her world crumbled when her husband and eldest son died defending Valencia. Fleeing the advancing armies, her caravan fell prey to bandits. She and her daughters were taken to a bivouac where it was clear they were to be used to sate the lusts of the men. That night, when he forced the daughters to watch the violation of their mother, the bandit chief died as the suddenly determined Sabela scratched his eye out and dashed his brains with a stone. The other bandits drew their weapons, but a filthy, naked woman stepped out of the shadows with a feral glint in her eyes. The beast-woman dispatched the thugs and wordlessly bit deep into a stunned Sabela's neck. She drank deeply. Sabela nearly died from the ecstasy of the Embrace, but her sire had another lesson to teach her. With an insane shriek, Sabela gave in to the raging hunger that welled up within her. She and the woman

fell upon her daughters, draining them dry and fleeing into the night.

Mara, her sire, hardly ever spoke, but communicated enough to teach Sabela to survive in the wilds, harrying Muslim and Christian alike. One night, however, a group of Assamites ambushed them in retribution for their slaughter of several retainers and ghouls. Mara sacrificed herself to delay the Assamites, and Sabela escaped.

The young Gangrel eventually drifted back to the Christian civilization she had known as a mortal, settling in Barcelona and resuming her life of luxury. But her time in the wilderness, her dark hungers and her bitterness over the deaths of her children and sire (both of which she blamed, not entirely without cause, on the Muslims), roused her from her comfortable life. She wanted to strike back but realized that the Christian kingdoms would take some time to be strong enough to drive the Moors from Iberia. She decided to meet the enemy head-on and moved back to Valencia in 1097, during the reign of El Cid. The city's tolerance and independence suited her purposes well and she even "converted" to Islam, being careful to take sufficient time to make her conversion seem credible. She found that other Muslim Gangrel (called the Taifa) also wore the trappings of civilization. She integrated into the community as one of their number. In her case, however, her conversion was hardly sincere.

By the time the *Reconquista* began in earnest, she was a recognized member of the Ashirra community in Valencia, and as trusted as any convert. She has gathered detailed information on the city's defenses and the Ashirra community. She has also established a small network of couriers who know the roads across the borders as well as she.

Sabela intends to send all of this information to Elieser de Polanco, a Lasombra in Toledo with whom she has maintained a secret correspondence. Unfortunately several of her ghoul couriers have met terrible fates recently, suggesting a hidden enemy. She plans to find some dupes to carry the information close to the border with Catalonia so she can tip off Elieser, who will arrange for them to be ambushed and relieved of their burden by his allies in the region.

Image: Sabela dresses as a wealthy Muslim woman, confident in her place in the world. She greets guests with the utmost courtesy and humility but is careful to seem a little nervous and eager to please; too perfect a cover might look suspicious.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a consummate actor and manipulator and have fooled the Ashirra of Valencia into thinking your conversion sincere. You may lack the sheer animal ferocity of your sire, but you more than make up for it in deadly cunning. You fear no Cainite, nor most physical challenges, but you understand that now is not the time for direct action. That time will come soon enough.



Haven: Sabala's haven lies beneath the stables of a large inn she runs. She has several emergency havens and boltholes scattered around Valencia and the surrounding countryside, including a fortified haven in nearby Sagunto.

Secrets: Sabala has compiled a remarkably complete dossier of information on Valencia. There are a number of crucial omissions (such as an accurate estimate of the number of Assamites who have entered the city in recent years) but overall, her documents reveal a great deal of strategic information about the city.

Influence: Sabala commands a fair degree of influence in the city and is often approached by members of the Ashirra who are seeking advice on how to deal with the Christian and Jewish Cainites in the city.

Destiny: Sabala's treachery goes undiscovered for many years, and Valencia falls to the Christians in 1238. She retires to Barcelona where she lives in comfort for several centuries. Sometime in the nineteenth century, evidence of her betrayal comes to light. In 1917, a team of Assamites extract vengeance for crimes centuries old and burn her to ash.

Clan: Gangrel

Sire: Mara

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Caretaker

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 712

Apparent Age: early 30s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

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

Skills: Animal Ken 4, Etiquette 4, Herbalism 3, Melee 4, Ride 3, Stealth 3, Survival 5

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 4, Linguistics 3, Politics 4, Seneschal 3

Disciplines: Animalism 4, Dominate 3, Fortitude 3, Potence 2, Presence 3, Protean 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Herd 3, Influence 2, Resources 4, Retainers 4, Status 2

Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 3, Courage 4

Road: Heaven 5

Willpower: 7

SHABAQO THE NUBIAN, TAIFA GANGREL

5th generation, childe of Kurru

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Barbarian

Embrace: 1290 BC

Apparent Age: early 30s

Fourteen hundred years before the birth of the Prophet Jesus, Shabaqo was born in Napata, ancient capital of the Kingdom of Nubia. The son of a royal huntsman, Shabaqo followed in his father's footsteps, providing sport and food for the god-kings of Nubia. As fierce as the animals he hunted, Shabaqo soon became a favorite of the court, often leading expeditions for the Crown Prince and High Priest of Amon. His position allowed him to buy a good wife, and his masters gave him many gifts. As he grew more skilled, Shabaqo was often asked to lead hunts at night for the gods themselves, for some enjoyed hunting of hyenas, lions and crocodiles in the darkness. The very spirits of the beasts sometimes appeared, and Shabaqo would join his gods in fighting the horrid monsters that came out of the darkness. It was during one of these hunts that Shabaqo was given his first taste of vitae. As a ghoulish, he watched his wife and children grow old and die, but knowing the gods had chosen him, he served with all his soul for many generations. In 1290 BC, he was part of a strong force the gods sent to defend the great temple of Amon at Jebel Barkal from attacks by the demon Followers of Set. Eventually the Serpents won the battle to dominate Upper Egypt, moving the Nubian capital to Meroe to assert their new dominance and driving the remnants of Nubia's other Cainites into the desert. Shabaqo was badly injured in the final defeat. Rather than let the loyal ghoulish die, a Gangrel Methuselah who at that time went by the name Kurru Embraced him and took him into the desert.



The revelations brought on by his Embrace and Kurru's stories shattered Shabaqo's faith in the living gods. He was lost without purpose or belief. He followed Kurru for a few years but soon forsook all company, living off the blood of animals and travelling the Sahara from the Red Sea to the Pillars of Hercules. He fought various beasts and hunted a few Followers of Set, but for centuries Shabaqo walked alone and contemplated the night. As the years progressed, he would occasionally visit temples and talk to holy men who also existed alone in the desert. He briefly reentered the world to investigate the new religion sweeping through his people, but he found nothing to answer his questions in Christianity. Several centuries later, even in the depths of the desert, Shabaqo felt Islam's force. Intrigued, he emerged from the deep desert to investigate. He admired much of what he found but was still not able to fully commit himself, feeling that any truth revealed to man must necessarily not fit the needs of the Damned. Yet the tenets of Islam and the stories of a small desert people shaking the world aroused in Shabaqo a desire to travel to new places in a manner he had not felt in centuries. He journeyed from one end of the Empire to the other, finally making his way to al-Andalus in the tenth century.

The fertile plains and rivers, the striking mountains and the harsh plateaus felt good to Shabaqo. The mix of faiths and ancient philosophy gave him much to think on. He entered into a decades-long, off-and-on conversation with Hilel al-Masaari, the Sultan of Córdoba and one of the first Assamite

warriors to convert to Islam, and eventually came to believe again. In 1005, he converted to Islam. By virtue of his age, generation and skills as a hunter, he influenced other Gangrel to do the same. Those who followed his example took the name Taifa Gangrel and became scholar-warriors instead of animalistic predators. While the movement has spread, Shabaqo remains in al-Andalus.

Shabaqo has no interest in leading the Taifa Gangrel as any sort of ill conceived army. He is glad that younger members of his clan have found inspiration in his choices, but he strongly believes each vampire must face God alone. He does his part to bring down those Christian Cainites who offend his sensibilities, and hopes that God will judge him worthy of salvation when the time comes.

LASOMBRA

ALFONSO PALACIOS, THE DISGRACED PHYSICIAN

Background: Sancho the Fat had a rare commodity in a king: He appreciated ability more than breeding. That meant that his court was peppered with bootstrappers and self-made men, those who'd earned their reputations rather than inheriting them. This led to tremendous competition among Sancho's subjects to succeed and thus earn the king's favor. It also led to a bitterly divided court, with the established nobility looking askance at the brash newcomers.

Alfonso Palacios entered this world as a physician, called to tend Sancho in one of his frequent illnesses. The son of a poor merchant, Palacios had managed to apprentice himself to a healer and escape the possibility of inheriting his father's failing business. By the time he was 30, he had a reputation as one of Iberia's finest practitioners of medicine, and as a result was summoned from Zaragoza to see if he could assist the ailing Sancho. This he was able to do, and the king rewarded him with gold, honors and place at court.

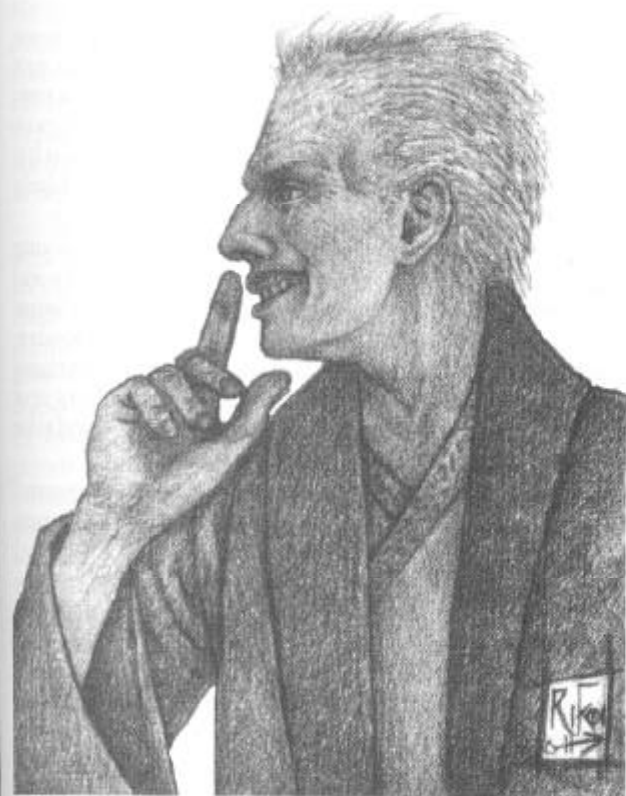
Palacios stayed with Sancho for several more years but was unable to heal the king of a later illness. This was the moment Alfonso's enemies had been waiting for. When the sage and rabbi Hasdai ibn Shaprut was able to cure Sancho where Palacios had failed, his rivals proclaimed that he had tried to poison the king. Sancho himself was too weak from his illness to act in the matter, and the former royal favorite was driven from court in disgrace.

Bitter and humbled, Palacios moved from town to town, offering his services as an itinerant healer. He never mentioned the position he had once held, and he never sought to return to public life. Instead, he traveled the length and breadth of the peninsula, crisscrossing Muslim and Christian kingdoms alike. His journeys were not unobserved, however. An ambitious Lasombra

named Fernando de Rincón had been an infrequent observer at Sancho's court and had liked the manner in which the young physician had carried himself. He was further impressed when he saw how Palacios handled his disgrace, and after several years of observation, extended to him the chance to become Lasombra. After due consideration, Palacios accepted.

Image: Tall and slender, Palacios has unusually long arms and legs. His hands and fingers are also elongated, as befits a physician. A thinning shock of gray hair covers his scalp, and his face is weathered from his years on the road. Palacios sometimes dresses in court finery, particularly when cajoled to do so for state occasions, but when on his own he prefers the clothes of the itinerant healer.

Roleplaying Hints: The quest for knowledge has replaced the quest to end suffering. In your centuries of existence, you have seen enough plagues and murders to know that the physician's work is ultimately useless, and that in the end death claims all. A small part of you wonders if the benefits of the blood of Caine could be extended to the world at large — with proper guidance, of course — but that's just a passing fancy. Now you seek out medical texts for their own sake, nothing more. Be courteous to visitors, but say nothing of your past. Those who bring up your expulsion from Sancho's court are not your friends, but those who share your expertise are.



Haven: Palacios dwells in a series of rooms underneath the Plaza de Maria Magdalena, near the college in Zaragoza. He spends approximately half the year here, researching and experimenting, and the other half on the road seeking to commune with other scholars and add to his collection.

Secrets: An infrequent dabbler in intrigues, Palacios is aware of the deals being cut to reunite Iberia under Christian rule. His apparent disinterest in politics keeps him safe from being killed for this knowledge, but he has been in contact with the poet Yusuf and the dreaded Miriam bint Aisha in hopes of trading for some Muslim medical texts he covets.

Influence: Palacios has relatively little influence, but in recent years has concentrated his studies on vampiric diseases of the blood. Whether this will prove useful in the years ahead remains to be seen.

Destiny: The former physician spends the next several centuries expanding his knowledge of diseases of the blood, and by 1450 is regarded as Europe's most learned authority on the subject. Students travel from around the Mediterranean to study with him for a year or two, and his fame grows among Caine's childer. With fame comes envy. In 1485, shortly after the establishment of the Inquisition in Zaragoza, Palacios is betrayed by a rival. His haven is invaded and he is hauled off as a prisoner to the Aljaferia, the fortress where the Inquisition had its headquarters. Rumor has it that Palacios cut a deal with the Inquisitors: He would assist in their labors in exchange for the right to use certain prisoners as he saw fit. Whether this is true or not no one knows; the only certainty is that Palacios never emerged from the Aljaferia once he was taken, and his priceless library was burned.

Clan: Lasombra

Sire: Fernando de Rincón

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Caretaker

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 960

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Talents: Acting 1, Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 4, Empathy 5, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Crafts 4, Etiquette 4, Herbalism 5, Melee 2, Music 1, Ride 3, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 5, Hearth Wisdom 3, Investigation 4, Law 1, Linguistics 4, Medicine 5, Occult 2, Politics 3

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Dominate 2, Obtenebration 5, Potence 3, Presence 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 4, Mentor 3, Resources 2, Retainers 1, Status 2

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Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 5, Courage 2
Road: Heaven 4
Willpower: 8

MARCELLUS RUFUS, THE GUARDIAN OF LAS MEDULAS

Background: Rumor says that ghosts haunt the ravaged countryside of Las Medulas, but those rumors tell only half the story. For even the ghosts of the slaves who died there are careful to give a wide berth to Marcellus Rufus, though he once was numbered among their ranks.

In his mortal days, Rufus was a scion of a wealthy family that dwelt in Ostia. Bored with the urban lifestyle and fascinated by his grandfather's tales of the good old days of the Republic, Marcellus decided to disappoint his father and enlist in the legions. His mind aflame with visions of the virtues of men like Marius, he joined up and was rapidly assigned to a unit pushing west into what later became known as Castile. Unfortunately, Rufus' gentleman's education neglected a few areas vital for a soldier, namely gambling, drinking and whoring. His inexperience at all three quickly shone through, and before long he found himself massively in debt, overfond of wine and with several rivals for a particular camp follower's attentions. Arrogant in the assumption that his family name and status would protect him, Rufus was extremely surprised when his enemies decided to consolidate their efforts, recoup their debts and remove a pest in one fell blow. They kidnapped him, beat him and sold him into slavery to work the new gold mines at Las Medulas. The slavers met his protestations that he was an officer with laughter. After all, everyone knew that the centurion Marcellus Rufus Ostiani had been killed in a raid by one of the tribes of Iberiacelti. In other words, he was just another slave.

Casualties at the site were extremely high, as the Romans forced their slaves to rechannel rivers and dig thousands of feet of conduits that would serve to help blast a mountain's guts out into the valley below. Most of the laborers, unable to endure the grueling pace and sadistic taskmasters, succumbed sooner or later. Their bones lined the tunnels they dug, the hollowed-out mountain serving as their grave marker. Rufus, however, thrived. Holding himself against the mythical standards of conduct from his grandfather's tales, he refused to let the labor overcome him. After all, he was a patrician of Rome, and even if he died, he would not die like a slave.

This steadfastness of purpose paid off a decade later. The powerful Magister Boukephos had heard of the mighty undertaking and determined to view it for himself with an eye toward Embracing the *imperator* overseeing the site. Instead, he found himself less impressed by the soldier than by one of the slaves, who

bore himself nobly and directed others in their labor. Thus it was that Marcellus Rufus Ostiani was brought under the shadow.

For several centuries thereafter, Marcellus traveled intermittently with his sire, but always he returned to the gold mines where he had toiled as a slave. Eventually Boukephos judged him fit to make his own way and released him into the world. At first he tried to settle in Ostia, but it had changed beyond recognition in his time away. His family had descended into poverty and obscurity, and his former home was now the residence of a far merchant with fatter daughters and no virtues worthy of the name.

Disgusted, he turned his back on Rome and sojournd to the only place he considered home: Las Medulas. There he's remained for centuries, preying on those who come to scavenge the mountain's corpse for gold. Mostly Rufus absents himself from Cainite affairs, but he is very clear about two things: his claim to domain over Las Medulas and his expectations of the clan and those it Embraces. If he hears of a new initiate who, in his opinion, shames the Lasombra, Rufus may well journey forth from his mountain home to express his displeasure.

Image: Marcellus is a broad-shouldered man of medium height, with coal-black hair and a patrician nose. His body is muscled to an almost absurd extent, the result of his labor in the mines, and his skin still shows the effects of the harsh summer sun. While not so dated as to wear strictly Roman garb, Rufus tends toward simplicity in his garments. He never wears anything more confining than sandals and a loose tunic, and often eschews even them. The only piece of adornment he wears is a ring with his family's crest, made from Las Medulas gold and crafted by a smith now centuries dead. It is more precious to Marcellus than his very existence, and any comment on it will most likely make an enemy of him in perpetuity.

Roleplaying Hints: The carefree, idealistic young man who joined the legions is centuries dead. Slavery and centuries of isolation have made you a stoic in every sense of the word. Bide your time when dealing with outsiders and make sure they know that you hold all the advantages. Reward honorable dealing, but pay back treachery and thieving with death. Guard your privacy fiercely, and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure it.

Haven: Owner of a variety of havens in and around the hollowed-out mountain, Marcellus shifts from one to the other at random. All are appointed simply and buried deep within the massif. Most are guarded with a variety of pits, tripwires and the like. At the very base of the mountain is another chamber on which Marcellus has been working for centuries. When the time is right, he intends to retire to it and slumber, triggering a landslide to cover it before he does so. This haven is more lushly furnished than the others, and Marcellus



has stockpiled a fair amount of gold there as well, for use against the day when he reawakens.

Secrets: Marcellus is not privy to many secrets other than his own. While he is respected and feared because of his age and lineage, he mostly holds himself outside of clan politics. What he does know is the country around his havens — every twist, turn and cavern, and on rare occasions he allows other Cainites to take refuge in his domain. Those he allows to do so are in his debt, and are keenly aware that they will have to repay him at some point.

Influence: Marcellus has little direct influence over anything except his immediate domain. Indirectly, his pleasure or displeasure bears on decisions made by other Lasombra across the peninsula. As a dutiful worshipper of Jupiter Stator, Marcellus has little love for either Christians or Muslims, and frankly doesn't care who eventually wins out so long as they are, by his standards, honorable. Of late, Marcellus has grown increasingly disgusted with the excesses committed in the name of the *Reconquista* and has announced that he will grant sanctuary at Las Medulas to any Cainite or Ashirra willing to remove himself from the conflict permanently. While few have thus far dared the journey, the very existence of Marcellus' offer is a challenge to both the princes of Iberia and the sultans of the Taifa. Younger Lasombra opposed to the conflict now have something of a sponsor.

The other weapon in Marcellus' arsenal besides sanctuary is gold. He has a great deal of it at his disposal,

and when sufficiently roused, he is not above spending it to support those he respects or admires.

Destiny: Marcellus guards his home against ever more frequent intrusions until the middle of the twentieth century. Finally disgusted by the excesses of the Spanish Civil War, and not a little mad, he retreats to his carefully prepared tomb and seals it behind him, to await the coming of a more honorable world.

Clan: Lasombra

Sire: Boukephos

Nature: Loner

Demcanon: Survivor

Generation: 5th

Embrace: 112

Apparent Age: late 20s

Physical: Strength 8, Dexterity 7, Stamina 8

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 5, Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Intimidation 5, Leadership 4

Skills: Animal Ken 3, Archery 5, Crafts 2, Melee 5, Ride 3, Stealth 4, Survival 5

Knowledges: Hearth Wisdom 2, Linguistics 4, Occult 2, Politics 2, Science 2

Disciplines: Celerity 5, Dominate 8, Fortitude 6, Obtenebration 7, Potence 8, Presence 6

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 2, Mentor 5, Resources 5, Status 3

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

Road: Chivalry 9

Willpower: 10

MIRIAM BINT AISHA, WEAVER OF TAIFA INTRIGUES

Background: Miriam was born in Málaga during the early days of the dependent emirate, the only child of the city's vizier. The period was marked by fierce factional infighting, and whether her father liked it or not, Miriam learned politicking at his knee. Miriam's father was a practical man, however, one who realized that every resource was needed in a time of crisis. When his daughter began to demonstrate a remarkable talent for statecraft, he was quick to put it to his advantage.

With the warring factions, however, came warring Cainites who were also looking for any advantage. Aisha bint Salah first noticed Miriam during a desperate flight through Málaga, but when she returned later under more congenial circumstances, she began grooming Miriam for life under the shadow. She was Embraced in 736, and soon served as bint Salah's primary advisor. However, the long years with Aisha quickly grew boring. She was conservative, and tiresome, and saw her only as a tool to be wielded. Secretly she sought and

received permission to end her sire's existence, and in 934 she did so.

Fortunately, there was something new to pique her interest. The burgeoning Taifa, with their petty kings and petty squabbles, offered her the perfect chessboard on which to play games of politics. Accordingly, she settled in at Córdoba and began spinning her webs of alliance, betrayal and deceit. While the Almohad and Almoravid invasions temporarily discomfited her, she could not be displaced. It is said that when one of the Children of Haqim who had traveled in the Almoravids' wake was foolish enough to threaten her, she calmly immobilized him and then informed him that he would be her prisoner until the invasion receded. This is, in fact, true, and deep within her chambers the Saracen warrior waits, miserably. But that same warrior was a tool of the vizier Umar al-Rashid, another master of intrigues, who notes Miriam's presence with interest.

While it is not fair to say that the conflict between Miriam and Umar is responsible for the instability that threatens the Taifa, neither has hesitated to use it to their advantage. In addition, Miriam frankly enjoys experimenting with the burgeoning chaos, lending support here and putting strain on a fragile alliance there. She cares little for the ultimate outcome and — unlike her Assamite rival — is aware of the gentlemen's agreement among the *Amici Noctis* on the Shadow *Reconquista*. Rather, she cares for the game and for besting Umar.

Image: For such a fearsome figure, Miriam is quite unprepossessing. Short, dark-skinned, and possessed of hawklike features, she is not at all beautiful. Her gaze, however, is striking, as her eyes are extremely large and all black. Miriam's hair is long, and she wears clothing that is shockingly revealing for a woman of her station.

Roleplaying Hints: You consider your safety assured, and as such regard no visitor as a threat. All that matters to you is the struggle between the Taifa. Reward those who play well; punish those who play poorly. Interesting and challenging visitors are always welcome in your chambers, but dullards risk extermination. You have done very well for yourself over the ages, and you have little patience for those who see you as "just a woman." You can mask your annoyance indefinitely, until the moment is right to show them what a mere woman can do.

Haven: Miriam dwells in great splendor near the Alcázar in Córdoba. She makes no effort to hide herself, and in some quarters is spoken of as a guardian of the city. She has no real interest in challenging Hilel al-Masaari for the title of sultan, however, especially as that ancient Saracen warrior is a largely absent ruler and a rival of Umar's. She is happy to be an advisor and manipulator instead. Miriam's residence is opulent beyond belief, and is decorated in relics that once belonged to the Umayyad emirs.

Secrets: Miriam is a font of knowledge about the various Taifa intrigues. She keeps informed about the wider goings-on in the clan, but her interest lies in the game at her doorstep, not in Sicily or beyond.

Influence: Many Cainites in the Taifa seek her favor. Miriam is well known and much feared, though her blessing is sought by all who know of her existence.

Destiny: With the fall of the Nasrids in 1492, Miriam finally relents and releases her prisoner after extracting an oath that he will not seek vengeance. He doesn't. Many of his peers, however, do.

Clan: Lasombra

Nature: Tyrant

Sire: Aisha bint Salah

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 736

Apparent Age: 28

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

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

Skills: Crafts 4, Etiquette 5, Herbalism 4, Melee 3, Music 1, Stealth 4

Knowledges: Academics 3, Law 5, Linguistics 4, Occult 4, Politics 5, Seneschal 4



Disciplines: Auspex 4, Celerity 3, Dominate 5, Obtenebration 5, Potence 5, Presence 4

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

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

Road: Humanity 3

Willpower: 10

RAFIQ IBN HAROUN, THE PATIENT ONE

Background: Rafiq has lived in Lucena since the late eleventh century. He loves the city like he loves nothing else on this earth. Originally part of the Almoravid military force that put down a rebellion in the city in 1090, Rafiq stayed on as garrison commander when the rest of his troop moved on. He soon came to love the city, and served its viziers faithfully and well for many years.

Rafiq grew old in harness, and on his deathbed he received a strange visitor. The man, a Berber like Rafiq himself, asked him what he wanted most. Dying, ibn Haroun replied that more than anything else he wished to keep his city safe from harm forever.

"You desire that more than you desire Paradise?" asked the stranger, who laughed.

Rafiq's blood grew cold, for he feared he had failed some test and would be sentenced to Iblis as a result. But on his deathbed, he would not lie to man or angel. "This is what I desire," he said.

"So be it," was the stranger's response, and he granted Rafiq the Embrace.

Since that time, Rafiq has haunted Lucena's walls and barracks. He has proclaimed the city his, inviolate and sacrosanct, and will allow no other Cainite to enter its walls without first petitioning him for permission. Those who do so are his honored guests; those who do not are often found as dust before the city's gates.

Of late, Rafiq's sleep has been troubled by mysterious dreams. He sees the stranger who gave him immortality, a torch in one hand and a sword in the other, and he offers Rafiq the choice of which to take. Always, Rafiq wakes before he chooses, but he is sure that sooner or later, he must select one — and that the fate of his city depends on it.

Image: Rafiq is an old man with a full, white beard and a bald pate. His body has made little concession to age, however, and might have belonged to a much younger man. He wears rough military garb, as he always has, and rarely sets forth without a rather worn scimitar that he has wielded in defense of the city many times.

Roleplaying Hints: The city of Lucena is your first and last concern. Be courteous to your guests and unyielding to your city's foes. The squabbling between the Taifa disturbs you, and you fear no good can come of it. No matter what happens to the other cities, you will ensure your adopted home's survival.



Haven: Rafiq has numerous havens within the city, though his favorite is a chamber just south of the Corral de Carbón. It is appointed like a soldier's barracks, Spartan and rough. He keeps few decorations, but his quarters always include a single empty chair, kept against the day of his sire's return.

Secrets: Rafiq knows Grenada intimately. He's also aware of what Yusuf has been muttering about, as the poet stayed with him recently. Furthermore, he has received two visits from Elieser de Polanco regarding his potential cooperation should the Shadow *Reconquista* succeed. De Polanco is holding out a promise that Granada would be taken unharmed; Rafiq is still considering what this embassy means.

Influence: Rafiq is all-powerful within Lucena but regarded as a bit of a lunatic elsewhere. His counsel is relentlessly conservative and religiously orthodox, and he exhorts his peers to return to the glory of the Almoravids. They, in turn, ignore him, though they grant him the honor of referring to him as the Sultan of Lucena.

Destiny: In his dream, Rafiq finally chooses the sword. Somehow, he knows this dooms him even as it saves Lucena, and he makes this choice willingly. For the next two and a half centuries, he defends his city against all comers but eventually he yields to the inevitable and makes alliance with de Polanco. Thus it is that the city is spared much indignity when it is finally taken, and Rafiq retreats to his chambers to await the inevitable. It does not take long. Within a year, Rafiq's

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sire returns and commends him on his choice. Had he selected the torch, Rafiq himself would have escaped, but the city would have been burned to the ground. Again, the stranger asks Rafiq what he desires most and, with the city safe, he replies "Paradise."

Smiling, the stranger grants him his wish.

Clan: Lasombra

Sire: Unknown

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Survivor

Generation: 11th

Embrace: 1109

Apparent Age: early 60s

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

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

Skills: Archery 4, Etiquette 1, Melee 4, Ride 3, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Law 3, Linguistics 2, Occult 3, Politics 1, Seneschal 1

Disciplines: Dominate 2, Fortitude 2, Obtenebation 4, Potence 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 2, Mentor 3, Resources 1, Status 2

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

Road: Humanity 7

Willpower: 9

SILVESTER DE RUIZ, LORD OF SHADOWS

Background: Silvester de Ruiz was at Covadonga when — for the first time — a Christian army repulsed an advancing Muslim force. The fact that the battle was a small one and the Muslim army just a small expeditionary troop mattered little in the end. By the time the poets and legend-makers were done with the tale, it seemed as if all of Islam had been massed on the field of battle.

But no matter how grandiose the accounts of the battle became, they never mentioned Silvester. This is because Silvester was neither knight nor squire, but rather something entirely different. He was a spy. It was de Ruiz who discovered the path the advancing Muslims were taking, who brought that information back to the Christian knights who opposed them, and in a feat of near-suicidal daring, who offered his services to the invaders as a guide to ensure that they did not escape the doom that awaited them. Needless to say, others received the fame and glory that went with such an illustrious victory. Silvester received a large payment and a steady stream of work that lasted the next two decades, as the Christian kingdoms began the long, slow process of the *Reconquista*.

Lasombra on both sides of the debate watched de Ruiz's exploits with some interest. So successful was he

that he became a *cause célèbre*, as various members of *Amici Noctis* fought for the right to either destroy or Embrace him. Eventually it was decided that he should be left alone to find his own fate, and that when his days in the field were finished, whoever got to him first could do with him what they pleased. Fortunately for de Ruiz, his sire Cleobolus got to him first.

In the intervening centuries, de Ruiz has risen steadily in the clan's ranks. Serving at first as a messenger, he graduated to more and more delicate assignments. The elders of the clan chose him to serve as their go-between with Sicily after only a hundred years under the fang, and he was among the youngest ever of the clan to sit in judgment with *Amici Noctis*.

And now, after a mere five hundred years in darkness, it is Silvester de Ruiz who guides the destiny of the Lasombra in Iberia.

Image: Silvester is a small man, dark and wiry. He has a silvered mustache and goatee, and his hands are constantly in motion as he speaks. He has a thin scar that runs along his left cheek from ear to nostril, the result of a close call back in his living days, and another that creases his belly. Now that he is no longer in the field, Silvester is something of a dandy and wears only the finest clothes. He has a pack of three ghouls whose only duties are to attend to his appearance, and as a result he is always impeccably groomed.

Roleplaying Hints: Your hands are always involved with something — the air, a knife, a construct of shadow. Speak quickly and to the point, and make sure that you recognize that there is value in the lowly as well as the



great. After all, you were just a humble spy once yourself. If necessary, drive that point home to your fellow Lasombra; some of them have a tendency to get too caught up in themselves, and such habits are dangerous.

Haven: De Ruiz has two havens. One is a chamber in Castel d'Ombro in Sicily. The other is in Madrid, comfortably close to the residence of his childe and pupil, Monçada. Both are lushly furnished in late Umayyad style, a curious choice for someone who served the Christian cause. Perhaps it is a gesture extended to the Muslim members of the clan, to show that de Ruiz considers himself above such loyalties. Or perhaps it indicates something deeper....

Secrets: If there is a secret in Iberia that relates to the Clan of Shadows, de Ruiz is privy to it.

Influence: Every major decision that is made involving the Lasombra in Iberia goes through de Ruiz. Of late, Monçada has been testing his limits, and de Ruiz has been letting him do so, but it's rare for any Lasombra, or indeed, most Cainites in al-Andalus, to cross de Ruiz on anything.

Destiny: De Ruiz gives Monçada a bit too much leeway, and in 1424 the former archbishop mounts a coup. Some observers view this as the opening shot fired in the Anarch Revolt.

Clan: Lasombra

Sire: Cleobolus

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Judge

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 732

Apparent Age: early 40s

Physical: Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 7

Social: Charisma 7, Manipulation 7, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 6

Talents: Acting 4, Alertness 5, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 5, Empathy 3, Intimidation 4, Larceny 5, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Archery 3, Etiquette 4, Melee 5, Music 2, Ride 4, Stealth 4, Survival 2

Knowledges: Investigation 4, Law 3, Linguistics 3, Occult 1, Politics 5, Seneschal 3

Disciplines: Auspex 4, Celerity 4, Dominate 7, Fortitude 6, Obtenebration 7, Potence 5, Presence 4

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

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

Road: Chivalry 8

Willpower: 9

VICENTE DE CARDONA, THE UPRIGHT MAN OF LISBON

Background: Vicente was an ambitious man, the son of a wealthy merchant who made it his business to profit

from the shifting waves of alliances that washed across Iberia. In theory, Vicente's home was Madrid, but from the age of nine he traveled with his father, learning both the ways of business and of men. He saw firsthand how men could easily be bribed, threatened or cajoled away from their duties, and this made a great impression on the boy. It was hardly a surprise, then, that young Vicente grew to manhood thinking that the world consisted of two types of men: Masters and fools, and that he and his father were the only two masters to be found.

All this changed with the coming of spring 1164. A routine trading trip turned ugly between Bejo and Lisbon when a band of bandits — deserters from the Crusade — overtook the de Cardona caravan and wreaked bloody havoc upon it. Vicente saw his proud father begging for his life, and saw the bandit chieftain laugh as he struck the senior de Cardona down. Vicente himself escaped with a ruined right hand and a scarred face, presents from the bandits as they rode off.

Vicente survived his injuries, and even succeeded at rebuilding his father's commercial empire. However, he was never loved as his father had been; instead, his brooding demeanor, savage temper and insistence on vengeance for even imagined slights made him a very unpopular man. The wreck of his appearance did not help either, as the formerly handsome Vicente banned mirrors from his presence while still insisting on wearing the most expensive finery he could afford.

This combination of drive, achievement and odd personal habit quickly brought de Cardona to the attention of the Lasombra, and after much debate he was brought into the clan in 1182. However, Vicente did not turn out quite as his sire had hoped. Rather than continuing to expand his mercantile operations from beyond the grave, Vicente let his operation slide except for a profitable sideline in transporting Cainites. Instead, he began lobbying his elders to extend their authority to Portugal. While doing so had a certain appeal to *Amici Noctis*, they saw Vicente's lobbying for what it was: a transparent attempt to extract some sort of vengeance for his wounds and his father.

Eventually Vicente's sire wearied of his fractious childe and gave him precisely enough rope with which to hang himself. Vicente was ordered to go to Lisbon and not to come back until all of Portugal was in Lasombra hands. Vicente himself, however, has decided this means that his sire recognizes his worth and the validity of his plan, and that the rest of the *Amici* have been conspiring against him. With a combination of high hopes and black-hearted thoughts of vengeance, he has relocated and set about trying to destabilize the Portuguese Brujah. One of his major tactics has been to send envoys to Muslim cities along the Portuguese frontier, where he is trying to strike deals with the local Lasombra. He offers them survival and the maintenance of their local domain, in exchange for fealty to him.

THE POWERS THAT BE

Image: Vicente is a short, dandified man. He always wears gloves, and when circumstances permit, a mask as well. His hair is black and wavy, and his build is slender and wiry. He dresses in immaculate finery, and keeps a stable of ghouls to tend to his appearance. As for his wounds, his right hand has been slashed across the palm so severely that the hand itself has curled up into a claw, and the right side of his face is a trackless maze of scars. He can barely see from his right eye, a fact that he does not advertise.

Roleplaying Hints: Tonight Lisbon, tomorrow night all of Portugal — that is your plan, and you see no reason why it should fail. You are convinced that only your sire can be trusted, and so you spurn any and all outside contact as potentially treasonous (particularly if you catch a whiff of the *Amici Noctis*). Be obsequious to your superiors (if you decide you have any) and disdainful of your inferiors, and leave no doubt as to the fact that it is your capabilities that will bring Portugal into Lasombra hands. Then, perhaps, those old fools who sit in shadows will recognize your brilliance.

Haven: Vicente havens in a luxurious chamber underneath the storehouse formerly owned by his mercantile operation. Should he need them, Vicente also has other, similarly appointed havens all over Iberia. He ensured that much, at least, before abandoning his life's work.

Secrets: Vicente knows everything there is to know about shipping, smuggling and moving across the peninsula. He can get anyone into or out of any city in Iberia, and has contacts at a dozen port cities around

the Mediterranean as well. Most of the Lasombra in Iberia actively regard Vicente as an impetuous fool; those few already in Lisbon before his arrival actively hate him for the way he's blundered through their carefully laid schemes.

Influence: Vicente's influence lies mainly in the favors he is owed by those for whom he's arranged travel. Among the Lasombra, his name is not one to conjure with; mentioning him as an ally marks one as either gullible, weak or a fool. Of late, Vicente has begun toying with the notion of waylaying some of his Cainite cargo and either interrogating or devouring it. His schemes in the Muslim cities south of Lisbon do seem to be paying off, notably in the port city of Silves, where the Lasombra Sultan Muhammad ibn Farouk seems very receptive to gaining protection from a Christian clanmate.

Destiny: Vicente's plan for Silves goes off without a hitch, catapulting this less-than-skilled manipulator to the post of lord of southern Portugal and a contender for the principedom of Lisbon. Muhammad ibn Farouk becomes a trusted advisor and vassal, and Vicente never quite realizes that he has become the pawn in this game or that his supposed clanmate is in fact a disguised Baali. Vicente's child Rodrigo Toca does, however, and presents evidence to that effect to the *Amici Noctis* in the latter half of the thirteenth century. He commits the Amaranth and takes Vicente's place in Portugal, but by then the Baali has vanished into the night.

Clan: Lasombra

Sire: Hector de Oviedo

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Gallant

Generation: 10th

Embrace: 1182

Apparent Age: 35

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 2, Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 2,

Intimidation 3, Larceny 2, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 3, Melee 3, Ride 4, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 4, Law 3, Linguistics 3, Medicine 1, Occult 1, Politics 5, Seneschal 4

Disciplines: Dominate 3, Obtenebration 2, Potence 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 5, Herd 3, Resources 4, Retainers 3

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

Road: Humanity 5

Willpower: 6



IBERIA BY NIGHT

AMBROSIO LUIS MONCADA, KEEPER OF THE FAITH

6th generation, childe of Silvester de Ruiz

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1153

Apparent Age: mid-50s

Monçada is a devout Christian who believes utterly in his own damnation and yet still offers the sacrament to his flock. He is a steadfast foe of the Cainite Heresy, holding staunchly to the written Gospels but commissioning acts of unimaginable blasphemy. Furthermore, he has an astonishing amount of power and respect for one so young in the blood, and not all of this can be attributed to his high station in life.

Perfectly content never to leave his haven in the heart of Madrid's central church, Monçada has turned his home into a deathtrap of shrines to saints, chained guardians and devout followers. He welcomes all those who seek his guidance, but only on his terms, and to be invited to take sacrament from him is a high honor indeed. Curiously enough, Monçada has also opened channels of communication with his counterparts in the Taifa, and several Muslim Lasombra are frequent visitors to Madrid under the archbishop's protection.

Monçada's sire, Silvester de Ruiz, has noted the growing status of his childe proudly, and encourages Monçada in his efforts. At the moment, the former archbishop (who still wears his robes of office) is content

to consolidate his power and extend his network of supporters. Many of the city priests and royal confessors of Iberia were appointed under his watch, and as a result they still hold some allegiance to him. Through them, he has an ear in every palace, and a useful way to affect policy from one end of the peninsula to the other. In person, Monçada has an almost overwhelming personality. While his demeanor is one of piety and humility, there is little doubt of his immense determination and force of will. Visitors come away impressed, wary or not at all.

If Monçada has a weakness, it is for his childe Lucita. Many observers have noted some small cracks in the archbishop's formidable detachment when her name is mentioned, though if they are wise they do not press the matter. Monçada is also fond of chess and will give tokens of his esteem to those who give him a good game. Few, if any, ever beat him.

BADR, SULTAN OF GRANADA

8th generation, childe of Marcos

Nature: Fanatic

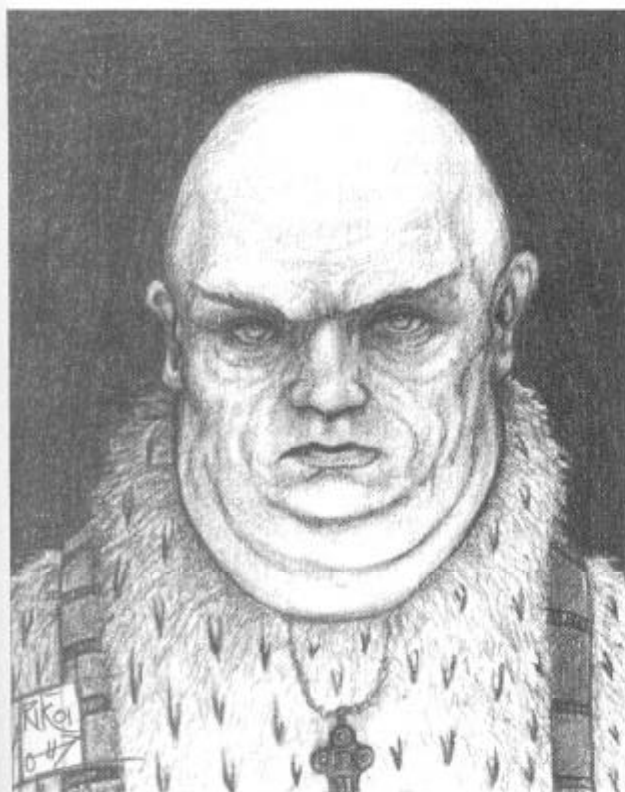
Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: 809

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Little is known of Badr's past. This is due in part to the fact that she has systematically eliminated any who knew her ere she came to power in Granada, for fear that they would reveal her terrible secret. For while Badr is the most feared and respected of all the sultans of al-Andalus, and while her power more than speaks for itself, still she takes great pains to hide her true identity and gender. For Badr sees herself as the only one who can unify al-Andalus' Cainites to resist the *Reconquista*, but she also knows that her only hope of doing so is to hide her true face. She harbors no illusions as to whether her supporters will follow her into battle if they discover that she is a woman, so she disguises herself. To date, the ruse has worked; though there have been whispers that the sultan is a eunuch, there have been none that she is a woman. And so, disguise firmly in place, Badr works patiently to bring all of the Taifa courts under her command, the better to resist the stratagems of Christian kings and Silvester de Ruiz.

With the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa a recent catastrophe, Badr has been forced to reassess her plans. Many of her allies are accepting the "graybeards' bargain" and abandoning the peninsula, but she has resolved to stay and fight it out. However, in the face of the overwhelming Christian victory, she is acting more quickly and more openly than she would like. Now it is no secret that Badr seeks to rule all of Iberia, and she actively courts the favor of the Muslim *Amici Noctis*. She also has made a habit of sending emissaries to other Taifa with a mandate to use strong-arm tactics if necessary to get the local sultans in line. This is winning her few friends and may be doing more to fracture Ashirra unity than to promote it.



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Of late, Badr has also begun to realize that the true danger is not from de Ruiz, but rather from his childe, Monçada. His arsenal of temporal power, strength in the blood, and faith makes the archbishop a most formidable opponent. However, Badr's insistence that Monçada is more dangerous than his sire is not shared by many, and as such, her tendency to focus on the priest has made many of her supporters wonder if she is in fact the one to lead them.

ELIESER DE POLANCO, GENTLEMAN OF TOLEDO

7th generation, childe of Hector Aguilera

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1031

Apparent Age: 38

De Polanco is quiet, sophisticated and effortlessly graceful. The latest in a long line of mortals groomed to join the Lasombra, he has spent centuries working for the Shadow *Reconquista*, albeit with a personal agenda. As much as he once believed in a unified Christian Iberia, he now believes in a unified Cainite Iberia under his domination. Over the years, Elieser has acquired an appreciation for Moorish art, poetry and science, and a disdain for the sort of ravaging barbarism exemplified by Tercio Bravo. This does not mean he's grown any less effective in his duties, but rather that he is no longer quite as willing to view the ultimate end as justifying the means, particularly when the means includes allying with Tercio.

De Polanco maintains a permanent residence in Toledo, though he is often in the field. Of late, he has taken to making solo expeditions south into Moorish lands in an effort to preserve books and works of art he feels may not survive the coming conquest. More subtly, he has also been making deals to ensure the allegiance of various Muslim Lasombra against the day when all of Iberia is Christian, offering his protection and high status in exchange for their lack of opposition. A surprising number have accepted.

Elieser's other crusade is against Tercio Bravo, and with ruthless efficiency he has been tightening the net around his rival. Everywhere de Polanco has friends, there are whispers against Bravo, and every city that houses an ally to Elieser is closed to his enemy.

IBRAHIM, HE WHO REMEMBERS

8th generation, childe of Kareem ibn Zuhr

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: 769

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Ibrahim (he bears no other sobriquet) is far older than most of his fellow Muslim Lasombra. In fact, he has been around longer than most Muslim kingdoms. A courtier in the service of the Umayyads, he fled with 'Abd ar-

Rahman Iad-Dakhil from Damascus and established the first independent emirate in al-Andalus.

An able administrator and a poet of some repute, Ibrahim was one of the primary architects of the Umayyad emirate, and much of its enduring nature can be traced to his efforts. So impressive was his work (not to mention some of his poetry) that the Lasombra who hovered around the court felt that he, and not his emir, was an appropriate choice to be brought into the clan.

While a faithful Muslim, Ibrahim has an appreciation for the finer things in life, and he was mildly appalled by the havoc wrought on the Umayyad culture by the Almoravids and Almohads. That being said, he has consistently and skillfully fought against the Shadow *Reconquista*. While he has the utmost respect for foes such as Elieser de Polanco and will gladly share an evening's conversation with the man, when it comes to the field of battle Ibrahim is all business.

Ibrahim still harbors some bitterness for the treatment of the Taifa by the Berber invasions, and is prone to wax rhapsodic about the beauties that have been destroyed. A man of many talents, he is as skilled a diplomat as he is a warrior, and sees no dishonor in using negotiation as well as skill at arms to gain his ends. He is also an accomplished gamesman, and has begun a rivalry with Monçada that is at once friendly and deadly serious.

ISMAEL, THE FATEFUL ERROR

7th generation, childe of Ibrahim

Demeanor: Autocrat

Nature: Barbarian

Embrace: 781

Apparent Age: pre-pubescent

It is a saying among the Ashirra that their mistakes do not haunt them; instead, their mistakes call them "sire." Ismael is Ibrahim's mistake, and one he regrets bitterly but is powerless to correct. Embraced a bare dozen years after Ibrahim himself was, Ismael was a very observant child in the household of the vizier of Ceuta. One night, Ibrahim visited and, in the guise of a humble traveler, offered his skill as a gamesman to while away the evening. So confident was he of winning that he offered anything in his possession to anyone who could beat him at chess.

The young boy Ismael, who was very observant, did two things that were quite clever. The first was to memorize Ibrahim's game against his father, and use that against the traveler. The second was to notice that the traveler did not once breathe or call for refreshment. And so, when the boy humbled Ibrahim, he asked for the traveler's curse.

Ibrahim was honorbound to grant it. He left Ceuta that very night, leaving the boy to his own devices and praying that death would take him by morning.

Alas, it was not to be. The child flourished. He was savage and clever, and it was not many years before he first tasted the fruits of the Amaranth, and found that he liked

them. Using his mastery of shadow to hide his visage, the boy systematically built a stable of allies, disposed of his enemies and eventually ascended to the sultanate of Ciudad Real.

Currently, Ismael is hatching plans to bring all that remains of al-Andalus under his rule, in preparation for launching a counterassault on the armies of the *Reconquista*. Unfortunately, the first step in this plan involves humbling the other Taifa Lasombra so that he can easily seize control. His campaign of subterfuge and terror against his peers is startlingly effective, and already there have been grumblings about him to *Amici Noctis*. Ibrahim, too, has been approached but feels he cannot raise his hand against his own childe. In the meantime, Ismael consolidates his power and waits for the right day to strike, unaware that Badr may well strike at him first.

LUCITA OF ARAGON, PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

7th generation, childe of Ambrosio Luis Monçada

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: 1190

Apparent Age: late teens

The daughter of Alfonso II of Aragon and the daughter in darkness of Archbishop Monçada, Lucita was both born to — and resurrected in — power. She is willful, proud and dangerous, and she is just coming into a realization of her own strength.



Lucita's mortal existence was constrained by her duty to her father and her station, restrictions which she chafed against. Her intelligence and will, however, were displayed prominently in her acts of rebellion against her father, and word of these talents reached Monçada through her confessor. Searching for an amenable pawn in Alfonso's court, the archbishop paid her a visit — and found himself fascinated. Before returning to his lair, he Embraced Lucita, promising her freedom from her father's laws and power beyond her comprehension. The rest of her new condition he left for her to discover.

Vampirism suited Lucita, and she rose through the ranks of the Lasombra. The fact that Monçada was a doting foster-father and patron certainly helped her, though she has begun to suspect of late that his motivations are less than entirely altruistic. As such, upon her return from Venice, Lucita has decided to distance herself slightly from her sire. She has taken up residence in Aragon, moving from city to city in an attempt to stay one step ahead of her sire's messengers. She's also begun casting around for other allies in the Lasombra, and has made a few overtures to Marcellus. Monçada's goodwill is not a thing to set aside lightly, but Lucita cannot help but wonder at its ultimate cost.

RODRIGO TOCA, THE MODEL CHILDE

11th generation, childe of Vicente de Cardona

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Survivor

Embrace: 1184

Apparent Age: 31

In an effort to make up for the sins of his boorish sire, Rodrigo makes an astonishing effort to be the Lasombra's Lasombra. He is courteous, devilish, graceful, proud and formal, and he is never less than utterly polite to his betters. In social situations, he makes it perfectly clear that while he has the utmost respect for the sire-childe relationship, he considers Vicente to be an idiot. All of this wins him points with *Amici Noctis*, who privately refer to Toca as "the rose on the dunghill of Lisbon."

In life, Toca was a child of wealth and privilege whose father traded with the de Cardona family. He saw and envied Vicente's freedom, and made a point of sustaining the business relationship when both his father and Vicente's passed on. De Cardona remembered this and, when he was Embraced, sought to repay perceived favors that Toca had given him.

Rodrigo is well aware of the disdain others have for his sire, and he long ago grew disillusioned with the figure he once thought so heroic. He has rapidly been distancing himself from de Cardona, both politically and geographically. Currently, he makes his home in Santarém, and he'd move farther away if he dared. However, Toca is very wary of de Cardona's increasing

paranoia, and moves very slowly so as to avoid sparking his sire to any rash action.

TANCRED, SHADOW AMONG LIONS

9th generation, childe of Ibrahim

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Rebel

Embrace: 1073

Apparent Age: early 30s

The Ashirra of al-Andalus have been subtly working to undermine the forces of Christendom for centuries. The fierce and untamed reputation of the Cainite crusaders known as the Lions of Rodrigo (see p. 86) made them easy dupes.

Tancred (or Saleh, as his parents in Córdoba knew him) was a bodyguard of his sire, the Muslim Lasombra potentate Ibrahim, for many decades before being sent to infiltrate the Lions. A trained soldier, he was dispatched to join the forces of the prince of Barcelona in 1105, supposedly a mercenary Cainite seeking employment. Tancred performed credibly, showing great zeal and a taste for bloodshed as he had been told to do. It took almost a decade, but eventually Tancred had the opportunity to join the Lions. Ever since, he has been manipulating them into being as dangerous to their own cause as to al-Andalus. Thus it was at Tancred's urging that the Lions' chieftain Felipe began attacking Christian Cainites whose faith was supposedly lacking. In doing so, Tancred has ensured that the Lions have destroyed a number of powerful opponents of Islam as well as brought Final Death to many of his masters' enemies, not all of them Christians. Since the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, he has yet to be contacted by Ibrahim but is gathering all his resources in preparation for his role in the final battles against the infidel.

TARIQ IBN ZIYAD, WOULD-BE CONQUEROR

11th generation, childe of Yehuda ibn Nagrella

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: 1102

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Contrary to the stories he tells of himself, Tariq is not the Tariq ibn Ziyad who first conquered in the name of Musa and Islam. However, by adopting that name and waving that banner, Tariq hopes to re-ignite a conquering fervor among his clanmates and coreligionists, and once again sweep north and east.

Currently dwelling in Granada, Tariq moves from Taifa to Taifa, gathering adherents and raising support for another war of conquest. His elders view him suspiciously, more worried about clinging to their eroding positions of power than risking everything on another assault. This has done nothing to dim Tariq's persecution complex. On occasion he rides north to raid where

he can, and he has a particular fondness for interrupting the vigils of young Christian Lasombra at El Cid's tomb.

Tariq has a band of seven other Lasombra, all much younger than he is but equally hot-headed. They back him in any fight or argument. Whither he goes, they follow; the results are usually bloody.

TERCIO BRAVO, LAST REMEMBRANCE OF EL CID

7th generation, childe of Offa

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Rogue

Embrace: 1097

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Tercio's personal history is shrouded in mystery. What is known is that he fought for years alongside El Cid and had a reputation as the most bloodthirsty and skilled soldier in that band of warriors. Embraced two years before his warlord died (some say as part of an effort to lure El Cid into the Clan of Shadows), Bravo has spent the intervening decades laboring for the cause of the so-called Shadow *Reconquista*. Most of his time has been spent in the field, working to destabilize the various Muslim Taifa or to advance the borders of the assorted Christian kingdoms.

Having left his post with the prince of Toledo under a cloud of disgrace, Bravo is once again a free agent. Over the past century, his record has grown increasingly erratic, as personal hatreds and long-simmering feuds with other Cainites have taken precedence over his strategic judgment. As a result, Bravo has been more and more thoroughly isolated, and his few confidantes note that he often rambles about being conspired against. However, while he is no longer as thoroughly feared on the battlefield as he once was, he is still a Cainite of significant personal power and charisma. His enemies have not yet dared to strike at him directly.

YUSUF IBN SHAMSID, THE WANDERING POET

9th generation, childe of Farouk ibn Hakim

Nature: Gallant

Demeanor: Child

Embrace: 974

Apparent Age: early 50s

Yusuf has outlived his time and his usefulness, and he's well aware of it. Formerly a courtier in the court of Sevilla, he refused to leave even after his Embrace. Instead, he spent decades "dying" and returning to court under various guises so that he might ostensibly keep a finger on the pulse of the palace while enjoying its poetry, music and arts.

Unfortunately, Yusuf's last return to Sevilla coincided with the reign of the poet-king al-Mu'tamid, who was displaced and forced to menial labor by the Almoravids. Shocked and dismayed, Yusuf fled and has

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since flitted across southern Iberia looking for another haven like the golden Sevilla he remembers. Of course, no place that harbors him ever quite lives up to his memories, and so after a year or a decade, he is off again.

Yusuf is a ham-handed conspirator and was most probably a poor choice for a Lasombra, but he inspires a certain affection in those who know him. He is also a most accomplished poet and often wins his shelter from the sun with an improvised song of his host's praises.

Currently Yusuf is talking a bit too much for his own good, as he is rapidly running out of new places to stay and blames the clan elders for this state of affairs. As of yet, no one takes him seriously, but should he continue to speak unwisely, someone may feel it is necessary to teach him a lesson.

MALKAVIAN

QASIM IBN DABIR AL-HAKIM, HE WHO SEES

Background: Qasim had always experienced visions. Even as a child in a town near Granada, he was able to see glimpses of the future and find lost children and cattle. He was also blessed with impressive religious insight for one so young, and his teachers considered his gifts to be righteous. He was still a child, however, and when he received a vision of a powerful local imam committing adultery, he did not understand what it meant. Knowing no better, he told his teachers, who were quick to bring accusations against the imam. The imam was able to confuse and outwit the boy, and escape with his position (if not his reputation) intact. He arranged to have Qasim abducted some months later; such a precious gift needed careful nurturing, after all.

A Malkavian named Dabir had passed through Qasim's town some years before and noted the child's gift, but had decided against Embracing him; he was clearly tortured enough without also receiving the gift of Marid (the Arabic name for Malkav). Fatefully, Dabir was returning from his travels and heard about young Qasim's fate. Dabir felt the boy's soul call out for the Embrace and he responded. Without so much as consulting the boy, Dabir came to Qasim and gave him an existence away from his captor, powered by the blood of Marid.

The Embrace didn't drive Qasim mad so much as fire his visions with an even darker power. Whereas his visions had once shown ways to help people, now they showed the depraved acts of the wicked. Dabir was puzzled by his childe's reaction to the Embrace and traveled with him for several years. It did not take long for Qasim's madness to manifest itself: When he located a den of sinners, a savage warrior spirit took over the normally placid vampire and he moved to destroy the unrighteous in a fit of rage.

Qasim remembers little of these frenzied possessions during which he surrenders to the impulses from beyond. Dabir theorized that his childe was awakening the spirit of Marid and others have called Qasim's furies the will of



God Himself. Qasim is not concerned with the specific theological source of his visions and rages — he simply knows they are part of his obligations to God and he follows them.

Dabir said farewell to his childe once he was confident that he could find his own way in the world, and Qasim's dreams have kept him wandering. Several militant Ashirra have encountered and made use of Qasim over the decades. Sultan Badr of Granada has employed several catspaws to direct the boyish monster into Christian lands, where he can seek out and destroy infidels. He has done some damage on the Christian frontier, but not always in the manner his patrons had hoped. Indeed, neither simply being Christian nor even fighting under the Cross qualify as sins in Qasim's eyes. It is only Christians who abuse children who suffer his wrath.

Qasim sometimes feels he should return to Granada. He is well aware that his supposed allies have been using him for their own ends and in his darker moments he wishes to extract some vengeance for that. But that is not his way. He refuses to betray his calling for something so petty as personal satisfaction. Indeed, a strong voice is drawing him further and further north, where greater understanding of his gift might lie.

Image: Qasim was Embraced when still in the transition from child to man, and he looks like a wiry, slightly underfed Arab boy. He dresses simply, sometimes going so far as wearing nothing but rags in order to pass as a harmless beggar.

Roleplaying Hints: You have been both blessed and cursed to hunt the unrighteous and sinful, whether they go

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in Christian, Muslim or Jewish guise. God must surely have a plan for you and you do your best to discover what it is. In between savage furies and dark visions, you try to live as a good Muslim and atone for your own sins. You long for greater insight which might allow you to break this cycle of hunt and frenzy.

Haven: Qasim has been based in the *taifa* of Silves for over a decade. He has established a haven in the cellar of a disused church. He is tortured by the whisperings of the Christian ghosts whenever he sleeps, but considers this the penance he must pay for his dark acts.

Secrets: Qasim's visions of sin have taught him much about the depravities suffered by children, especially poor children, at the hands of mortal and vampiric monsters.

Influence: Qasim has gathered a small band of followers, but his true influence comes from the elders and ancilla who pay attention to him. Sultan Badr sees him as a useful tool and keeps her fellow Ashirra from striking at him, while Roque, the Malkavian prince of faraway Pamplona has other plans for the wayward Madman.

Destiny: Qasim's destiny lies north, in Pamplona, where Roque is ready to help him make some sense of the visions in his tortured mind.

Clan: Malkavian

Sire: Dabir

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Penitent

Generation: 9th

Embrace: 1155

Apparent Age: early teens

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Intimidation 3, Larceny 2, Leadership 3

Skills: Melee 4, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Knowledges: Academics 1, Hearth Wisdom 3, Linguistics 2, Occult 1

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dementation 4, Fortitude 2, Obfuscate 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Herd 3

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 2, Courage 3

Road: Heaven 5

Willpower: 6

ROQUE OF PAMPLONA, PRINCE OF THE MAD

7th generation, childe of Taurus

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 743

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Perhaps the most influential vampire in Navarre, Roque is somewhat isolated from his fellow princes in the Christian north, both by geography and blood. A

IBERIA BY NIGHT



Malkavian prince is never a common thing, and in a peninsula dominated by the Lasombra and the martial concerns of the so-called "high clans," it's all the rarer. But Roque rules his domain with surprising skill and restraint. His court is not ostentatious, and his advisors are not sycophants. His practice of using Toreador knights as emissaries to other princes has gone a long way toward smoothing out relations. He has also quietly helped stem the influence of the so-called Apostles of the Third Caine, a troublesome offshoot of the Cainite Heresy.

Roque's true influence, however, is rarely recognized. Indeed, he is a potent member of the secret Malkavian cult known as the *ordo enigmatis*. Dedicated to a twisted form of enlightenment through occult mysteries, the order is a subtle influence among the elders of Malkav's brood. (For more on the *ordo*, see **Libellus Sanguinis 4: Thieves in the Night**.) Roque, whose madness expresses itself in fastidious planning and machinations, sees in the chaos gripping Iberia an omen of the future for the scions of Caine. He also feels that the key to surviving this chaos may well lie in its midst. He has felt the holy madness of a vampiric prophet to the south and has summoned that young visionary — a Malkavian named Muhammad. It remains to be seen if he will respond.

NOSFERATU

CRISTINA, THE SCHOLAR IN THE HILLS

Background: Cristina had a hard life. In turn, she became a hard woman. The eldest daughter of peasant farmers in the agricultural districts around Tortosa in the south of Catalonia (15 miles south of the province

of Valencia), she and her family cowered in fear when the Muslims came. To their surprise, however, their new rulers — despite their new religion and strange ways — seemed to appreciate the no-nonsense, work-hard-and-play-hard attitude of the peasants. This did not mean that their life became any easier, simply that Cristina and her family survived the invasion and continued to till the soil. Simple Christian peasants, they tried as best they could to continue their simple lives. In time, she married a sturdy and hardworking man and gave birth to sturdy, hardworking children, who in turn bore children of their own. Cristina her simple life without complaint, without rancor.

When a withering sickness took hold of her, however, she felt something new — bitterness. Lying in her sickbed, free of the daily struggle for survival for the first time in her life, she looked back. To her horror, she found nothing of value, nothing that made her ceaseless efforts worthwhile. Like the dirt she had sprung from, like she had spent her life cultivating and soon would be returned to, she simply existed. It was not enough. She cursed the God she had worshipped all her life for condemning her to such a futile existence.

Perhaps God was listening, because as she lay dying, she saw a misshapen figure shuffling toward her. The creature moved with a sudden burst of speed, fell on her and hungrily drained her blood. It dragged her, barely conscious, to the outskirts of the village and embraced her, leaving her delirious and half-mad in a clutch of Roman ruins.

She awoke the next night with a terrible hunger; she found a terrified pig and an elaborately bound book

in the ruins. To her initial horror, she tore the animal's throat out and greedily drained its blood.

Over the next few months, she began to understand her new condition and its requirements. She preferred not to feed from mortals but was not averse to doing so should the need arise. She carried the book — which she could not read — with her, wondering what its significance was.

Soon enough, she found out. She was pursued by an unknown assailant, who fell upon her one night as she fed. Fighting with a strength born of desperation and her determination to survive, she fled. The figure, badly wounded, pursued her and she was driven south, into Valencia, where she was met by several Nosferatu who made the mountains their home. They explained that her sire was an esteemed member of the Christian branch of their clan who had retrieved a tome that had been stolen; her pursuer was likely a servant of the thief.

The Mutasharidin (as Moorish Nosferatu call themselves) took her in. She did not need to learn from them how to survive as a vampire, as she had already taught herself. They did, however, teach her how to read. She was enthralled, and spent many months devouring the texts in the Nosferatu libraries. For the first time, reading history and philosophy and science, she felt that she might be able to discover some connection to humanity, some purpose in her existence. Cristina set out to add to her clan's library, seeking out rare texts and ancient tomes.

Cristina traveled widely and has become a recognized member of her clan on both sides of the religious divide, transporting messages and books throughout Valencia and Catalonia. In recent decades, with the situation in Valencia deteriorating, she has begun looking for ways to save as many books as she can. She has contacted the Mutasharidin of Valencia proper, and a covert smuggling operation has begun, with the covert support of the Assamite sorceress Nazirah, who havens in Granada.

Image: Cristina is a gnarled old woman with rough hands and feet and a deeply creased face. Most of the time, she is the color of dirt, a result of her constant travels. She dresses in simple peasant garb.

Roleplaying Hints: At last, you have a life worth living. Learning to read has been the single greatest experience of your life, even greater than dying (which just promised to continue your futile struggle for existence). You would do anything to protect your books. In fact, you much prefer books to most Cainites or mortals. You have no compunction in stealing books, and no compunction in killing those who stand in your way. You care nothing for the foolish religions of mortals and believe that Cainites who seek the answers to the questions posed by their new lives in the holy books are — despite the books' exquisite writing — fools.



Haven: Cristina has a small chamber in the Valencian mountain city of Morella. There she stores a number of books that she has acquired for herself, but most of her acquisitions are for the city's library. When traveling, she relies on the hospitality of other Nosferatu or the security of old Roman ruins to protect herself.

Secrets: Cristina knows a great deal about the procurements and peccadilloes of most Valencianos, the better to target them and their libraries.

Influence: Cristina has little influence in the mortal world. Within her community, she has considerable status due to her dedication and her simple wisdom. Her recent alliance with the sorceress Nazirah gives her some pull in faraway Granada as well.

Destiny: After the fall of Valencia, Cristina retreats to Granada, where she becomes a research aid of sorts to Nazirah. After the fall of Granada claims her ally, she heads to Alexandria. During the Second World War, she falls to a band of Assamites who mistakenly blame her for the loss of Moorish occult texts.

Clan: Nosferatu

Sire: Domenec

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Survivor

Generation: 10th

Embrace: 849

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Larceny 5, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Animal Ken 5, Crafts 3, Stealth 5, Survival 5

Knowledges: Hearth Wisdom 5, Linguistics 3, Occult 2

Disciplines: Animalism 5, Auspex 2, Fortitude 3, Obfuscate 5, Potence 3, Presence 1

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Resources 1, Status 2

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

Road: Humanity 6

Willpower: 9

HAMAD AL-BADAJOZI, THE ENGINEER

Background: Born to slaves working in the great quarries near Badajoz in 890, Hamad grew up expecting to follow in his parents' footsteps. But as a child he became the favorite of one of the caliphate's builders who came inspect the stone. He ended up working as the old man's apprentice as well as being his lover.

Hamad proved to have such a talent for mathematics and engineering that he had earned his freedom before he turned 30. By the time he was 40, he was in charge of the restoration of Córdoba's massive series of catacombs and

sewers. It was at this time that Hamad's talents came to the notice of the Nosferatu and Cappadocian residents in the city, many of whom had suffered from flooding and collapses due to the poor maintenance of Córdoba's Roman-era underground structures. On seeing that the young engineer was honest, diligent and talented, that he was carrying out the restoration to the best of his abilities and not corruptly using second-rate materials and pocketing the difference, they used their influence to ensure that Hamad's career became a notable success.

Building is not a safe occupation however, and in Hamad's 44th year, he was in a sewer tunnel deep beneath Córdoba's old city when it collapsed on top of him. Eventually, after evening fell, his workers succeeded in digging him out, but Hamad's injuries were such that his death was merely a matter of time. Rufina, one of the elders of Córdoba's Nosferatu, decided she could not do with Hamad's skills and gave him the Embrace.

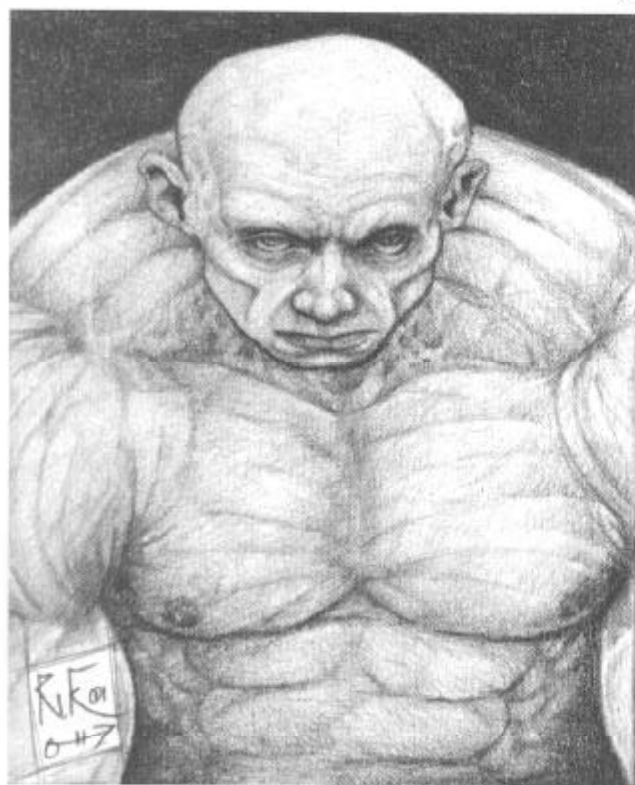
At first, his new condition shocked and dismayed him, but he eventually came to terms with it, helped by the knowledge he garnered from other Cainites on building and architecture and the opportunities available to him in the underground world of his new clan.

While he cares little for religions or wars among the kine, Hamad has found constant employment in building secret and fortified havens for Cainites all over Iberia. The profits he has built up through such construction go to his library of Roman and Arabian manuals and plans, and ensures him access to the best materials to be had for his work. He cultivates contacts that can help him expand his collection, and the Follower of Set Salah ibn Qaboos has proven an especially useful source. Hamad has not entirely abandoned the mortal world however, still taking some small role in encouraging and supporting massive building works. His abilities have made him a favorite among the Toreador. Mane Henriques, the Artisan Sultan of Jaén, recently lured him to that city with the ambitious task of designing an underground citadel to protect a massive collection of art and literature.

Image: Hamad was always heavily built, a legacy of his childhood in the quarry and years working as a builder. After his Embrace, he became grossly muscled, his arms hanging nearly to the floor and his shoulders so knotted that he appears hunchbacked. Thus while he is five and a half feet tall, he actually appears much smaller. His granite gray skin is devoid of hair and allows him to hide quite adeptly in the tunnels and catacombs.

Roleplaying Hints: You can't pass by a building without giving its construction a look over. Any building project draws you like honey. Apart from that, you don't really care for any of the goings-on around you, Cainite or kine. Let others sneer that you dare work for Christians or the Serpent Salah ibn Qaboos. You have no interest in discussing anything that does not relate to your latest project.

Haven: Hamad has a permanent haven built into the foundations of Córdoba's great bridge, though at present



he is living in the new citadel he is building in Jaén. He also has other havens hidden around al-Andalus, each cunningly concealed and virtually undetectable.

Secrets: Hamad knows most of the secrets of the underground tunnels and catacombs of every city in Iberia: where the bodies are buried and havens are located, which passages lead to what buildings. As a result, he can hide, spy and flee unimpeded by Cainites if he needs to.

Influence: While Hamad may have access to many secrets, he has no use for them and thus little influence beyond the debts he has built up by constructing havens and defenses for other Cainites.

Destiny: The Christian storm that breaks over al-Andalus does not greatly disturb Hamad, although he is concerned that some of his clients find their havens overrun by Christian vampires. This only inspires him to seek out new skills, and he becomes intrigued by the new building techniques and styles that are being born in northern Europe. He travels for a while before ending up in Paris, where he survives into the Final Nights.

Clan: Nosferatu

Sire: Saleh

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Innovator

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 934

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2
Talents: Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Subterfuge 2
Skills: Crafts 5, Stealth 2, Survival 3
Knowledges: Academics 3, Hearth Wisdom 1, Linguistics 3, Science 4, Seneschal 1
Disciplines: Auspex 2, Animalism 1, Fortitude 3, Obfuscate 4, Potence 5
Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Herd 3, Status 2
Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 3, Courage 3
Road: Humanity 5
Willpower: 6

TOREADOR

BENEDICT AL MUSA

Background: The baptized son of Muslim slaves owned by the Cathedral of León, Benedict stumbled into trouble early. He was first arrested for theft in 889, at the tender age of seven. A severe flogging and further indignities were not enough to deter him. By the time he was 14, he had left the bitter world of his parents behind to live among the thieves of León's poor quarter. Smart and cunning, Benedict soon moved from simple street theft to running with a gang that specialized in raiding tombs, ruins and churches for antiquities, gold and relics. As the years progressed, so did Benedict's knowledge of his chosen field of endeavor, especially his ability to locate valuable items for the rest of the gang to steal. By the time he was 30, Benedict had been able to give up the risk of theft himself and instead acted as the scout and fence, posing throughout Iberia as a respectable wool merchant.

Various French Toreador had been customers of Benedict's gang for years, and a number had noted the talents of the runaway slave and continued to watch him carefully. Finally in 917, while on a trip to Toulouse, Benedict was seduced into becoming the ghoul of the prominent Toreador Portia. She had located certain texts in al-Andalus that she required, and Benedict was the perfect tool. He remained Portia's thrall for over a century, becoming a recognized envoy of hers in Iberia and bringing her great prestige among the burgeoning Courts of Love. Finally, she gifted him with the Embrace.

As a blood-addicted ghoul, Benedict had seen the terrible beauty of the Toreador. As a neonate, he saw the selfish monstrosity. The Artisans of Toulouse had appreciated him as a procurer of rare treasures, but they disdained him as a clanmate. He had no true appreciation for beauty and art, they said—he was a mere grave robber and temple thief. Sickened by the sneers of his former clients, Benedict asked that upon his release, he be allowed to return to Iberia to establish his own domain. Portia agreed, so long as he remained her vassal and supplier.

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Since then, Benedict has returned to what he does best and thrived on the frontier of the *Reconquista*. His erstwhile clanmates, as much as they look down on him for his inferior breeding, are very happy to buy the items he acquires. After a few close calls and a realization that most of the interesting items in Europe were safely under the eye of one Cainite or other, Benedict chose to restrict his endeavors to al-Andalus, where his thievery could count on at least passive support from the Shadow *Reconquista*. Those Ashirra interested in preserving Moorish treasures are his greatest enemies.

Image: Tall, dark and gangly, Benedict's thin build is a legacy of childhood starvation. The pockmarks on his face mark him even more as an outsider among the Toreador. Proud to a fault, Benedict refuses to stoop to fancy clothing as some less handsome Toreador do to cover up physical shortcomings. In defiance of clan fashion, he still wears the good but plain clothing of a successful wool merchant.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a thief and find the pretensions of noble Cainites amusing and despicable at the same time. You love the taste of blood, the power, and the fear in the eyes of those who once lorded over you. You will not lose what you have gained even if in defending it you meet Final Death.

Haven: Benedict has havens hidden in various warehouses in southern France, northern Italy and Iberia, all of which are associated with his mercantile operations. His main haven is located under a plush home in León, where he keeps the rare items that catch his fancy.

Secrets: Benedict is privy to few intrigues. Few Cainites trust him because of his mortal background and even fewer still because of his industrious tomb robbing. His knowledge of the treasure houses of al-Andalus and safest ways to get to them is impressive, however, and he has made himself very popular with some members of the Shadow *Reconquista* because of it. The Lions of Rodrigo have been known to use his services on raids south of the frontier.

Influence: Benedict has built up a very powerful position among the thieves and scoundrels of the eastern Mediterranean. While more-noble Cainites are like their kine counterparts in looking down on society's wretched and rejected, Benedict has found in them a powerful and flexible resource with a reach far greater than might be expected.

Destiny: The theft of items of Islamic art and learning keep Benedict busy until the late thirteenth century, by which time he has set himself up as a leading Toreador in the new kingdom of Spain. When the business of theft becomes too dangerous, Benedict turns to his wool trading interests and survives as a great patron of the arts. With the discovery of the New World, a new avenue of art theft is opened for him, but



in 1720 Benedict vanishes in the jungles of Peru while searching for ancient tombs.

Clan: Toreador

Sire: Portia

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Rogue

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1073

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 3, Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Larceny 5, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Melee 2, Ride 2, Stealth 4

Knowledges: Investigation 4, Law 1, Linguistics 3

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Celerity 3, Presence 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 5, Herd 4, Resources 4, Retainers 5, Status 1

Virtues: Conviction 2, Instinct 2, Courage 2

Road: Devil 5

Willpower: 4

MANE HENRIQUES, SULTAN OF JAÉN

Background: Born to one of the first Visigoth lords of Valencia in 580, Mane grew up wishing he had been born at the height of the Roman Empire. His father found little good to say about a lad who seemed more interested in relics and writing than in horses and swordsmanship. The

only thing his father could think to do with Mane was pack him off to the priesthood. While Mane felt little or no regard for God, the arts and learning available in the monastery opened a new window in his soul. Mane became one of the best-known painters and calligraphers in Iberia, his work decorating books and churches from the Pyrenees to the Pillars of Hercules. Despite his success, Mane was not a happy priest and was reprimanded on a number of occasions for showing far too much interest in the pagan arts of the Romans. The strain on his soul was eventually too much, and in the loneliness of his monastic cell under Valencia's main cathedral he hung himself. Before he could die, however, strong arms cut him down. He knew pleasure beyond anything he thought could exist before a blistering pain sent him to oblivion.

When Mane awoke, his sire Volaginius Tatian of Clan Toreador — Prince of Valencia and a keen follower of his artistic journey — greeted him and offered to show him the heights of art and beauty. Mane spent the next century studying every aspect of art, from sculpture to mosaics, under Volaginius's careful tuition. Unaware of wider happenings, Mane was shocked when the Berbers assaulted the city. Along with the rest of Volaginius's brood, he fought fanatically to prevent the barbarians from destroying what they had left of Rome. At some point during the battles with the invading Ashirra, Mane was caught in a burning building and would have been destroyed had the floor not collapsed and dropped him into an old cellar below. He lay in torpor until 910 and was amazed when he emerged to discover a society as rich in the arts and learning as Rome.



Mane fell in love with Islamic culture. He traveled to Córdoba and had no qualms about swearing allegiance to the Assamite Sultan Hilel al-Masaari, just so long as he could take in the wonderful creations in art, music, literature and architecture. Mane never converted to Islam but became thoroughly enmeshed in Islamic culture. Over the centuries Mane floated between Córdoba, Sevilla and Valencia, sampling the artistic communities like a gourmet at a grand banquet.

The conquest of Toledo in 1085 brought his carefree lifestyle to an end. In a sudden flash of insight Mane realized that, like Visigothic Valencia before it, al-Andalus was doomed and with it all that it had achieved. Mane believes that Islam is the new Rome, a cultural oasis in the midst of howling Christian barbarism. He sees the *Shadow Reconquista* as the beginning of a new Dark Age and hopes to salvage something of what has been created, so he has claimed domain over the town of Jaén. He plans to build a citadel in which he can protect some portion of the beauty around him. Mane has influenced the local lords to heavily fortify the city above while he has created a great archive of art below with the help of the Nosferatu engineer Hamad al-Badajozi.

Image: Tall, heavily built, with reddish blonde hair and blue eyes, Mane is the very picture of a Visigoth barbarian. Closer inspection tells a different tale, for his hands show he is not a man of war. He tends to walk with a stoop from so many years laboring over a copyist's desk. Mane dresses simply in the manner of an Islamic scholar, always carrying a bag with paper and ink to capture a moment of beauty.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a Mozarab, Arab in culture, but supposedly Christian in religion, and you see the *Reconquista* in cultural rather than religious terms. Only works of beauty can alleviate your fixation with the coming battle and even then only for a while. Already determined to die rather than see another age of ugliness and barbarism, you are a malevolent, relentless and fearless foe to the Christians from the north.

Haven: Mane sleeps in the secret underground he is having Hamad al-Badajozi build beneath Jaén.

Secrets: Mane is aware that others are trying to preserve some of the treasures of al-Andalus, but he does not trust their judgment. He hoards such treasures for himself alone.

Influence: Mane has little or no influence beyond Jaén.

Destiny: Mane's supposedly impregnable haven is breached by members of the *Shadow Reconquista* soon after Jaén falls to the Christians in 1226. He dies with accusations of treachery on his lips. And yet, his collection of treasures becomes a symbol of great appreciation among his erstwhile clanmates. By the sixteenth century, he is fondly remembered as a great patron of the arts among the Spanish Toreador.

Clan: Toreador

Sire: Volaginius Tatian

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Nature: Celebrant
Demeanor: Defender
Generation: 8th
Embrace: 615
Apparent Age: mid-30s
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 1, Leadership 2
Skills: Crafts 5, Etiquette 3, Melee 2, Music 3, Ride 2
Knowledges: Academics 4, Linguistics 4, Politics 2
Disciplines: Auspex 5, Celerity 4, Dominate 2, Fortitude 4, Potence 2, Presence 5
Backgrounds: Allies 3, Herd 4, Influence 4, Resource 4, Retainers 5
Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 4
Road: Humanity 6
Willpower: 7

TREMERE

VIKTOR NAGY, THE BLACK MAGUS

Background: As a child in Hungary, Viktor was a bully. His family was humble and decent, and Viktor was packed off to a local monastery. His quick wits and cunning, rather than native genius or intellectual discipline, saw him taken from the order by House Tremere. As a magus, Viktor was reckless and headstrong. He preferred to meet his enemies with direct, overwhelming force, destroying them before they had any chance to gather their strength. He also relished physical confrontations and challenges. But his brash ways made him less than popular with his fellow sorcerers, and when the opportunity arose to study the mystic arts in Córdoba, he jumped at the chance to make a new beginning.

When Viktor was recalled to Ceoris for a special ritual, he gladly gave up his mortal life. Indeed, he had dealt with some of the unliving things that lurked in Cordoban libraries and knew that the Tremere needed agents capable of moving among them on an equal (or nearly equal) footing. That his masters also believed his methods would be visible and credible enough that the clan's other agents might enter the peninsula unnoticed did not bother him in the least.

Viktor returned to Córdoba and quickly established himself in Cainite society as a brash seeker of mystical knowledge, tolerated because he was undeniably powerful and yet easy enough to manipulate or outmaneuver — which is exactly what Viktor wants his rivals to think. He prefers his allies and enemies (friends, he believes, are nothing but a comfortable lie for the weak of heart) to underestimate him. He has made a useful dupe of the Cappadocian Jakeem ibn Aliyyah (or so he believes) but he knows others are more leery.



Image: Viktor is a powerfully built Eastern European, with a thick accent, long black hair and a droopy moustache. He typically dresses in black and generally looks as if he's about to go hunting or hawking. His sword never leaves his side, nor do the knives he conceals on his person. He tends to swagger but is careful never to appear too well informed or in command of a topic.

Roleplaying Hints: You are surrounded by fools. Nothing matters to you except your own power and that of your clan — in that order. You enjoy letting others underestimate your abilities, although you do sometimes tire of the charade and entertain visions of conquest and destruction. You would never admit it, but the strain of your constant deceit and paranoia is beginning to tell.

Haven: Viktor's main haven lies beneath a small Christian home on the outskirts of the city, where he has made the inhabitants his thralls. He has a number of emergency havens scattered around the city; essentially, he regards himself as living in hostile territory.

Secrets: Viktor is good at pumping others for information and many of the city's less careful Cainites have let slip their plans, havens and alliances when in his presence. None of the city's elders have been so careless.

Influence: Viktor has less influence than he would like to think. Several of the more skilled Ashirra neonates of Córdoba are weary of him and have kept their allies isolated from his wiles.

Destiny: Viktor remains in Iberia through the *Reconquista*, forming his own chantry. He remains leery of the silent shadows that might hide the Assamite and Lasombra killers who pledged revenge against him for any one of his many crimes. Eventually, those shadows claim him.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Jervais

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Innovator

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1194

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Talents: Acting 4, Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3,

Dodge 4, Intimidation 4, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Archery 3, Etiquette 3, Herbalism 4, Melee 4, Ride 3, Stealth 4, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 2, Linguistics 2, Medicine

2, Occult 3, Politics 4, Science 2, Seneschal 3

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Thaumaturgy 4

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Herd 3, Influence 3, Resources 3, Retainers 4

Virtues: Conviction 5, Self-Control 3, Courage 4

Road: Devil 7

Willpower: 6

VENTRUE

SIR NASTASIO THE GALICIAN, THE FREELANCE

Background: Born in 970 to a minor squire near Oviedo in Galicia, Nastasio showed great skill at arms from a young age and was sent to train in the service of Sancho the Fat of León. With the constant fighting against the Muslims, Nastasio had ample opportunity to show his martial talents and was made a Captain of Horse while only 26. But service to the King of León did not pay well, and Nastasio eventually moved north into France to sell his skills to lords with fatter purses. Fighting as a freelance, he continued to build a formidable reputation as a warrior and more importantly as a leader. His troops were known not to desert him at inappropriate moments, and he never threw away the lives of his men away unnecessarily.

In 1006, Nastasio accepted an offer from the Baron of Aire to assist him with an assault on the Bishop of St. Sever, who was disputing the baron's right to herd pigs in the forest that lay on the border between their two demesnes. While this appeared to Nastasio no more than another petty squabble between minor feudal lords, the fight masked a more subtle and ancient feud.

The Bishop was a pawn of the Lasombra prince of Dax, Clodauuiua, while the Baron of Aire was the unwitting dupe of the Ventrue prince of Pau, Henri Beaucaire. While both Cainites masked their fighting in the guise of the ongoing struggle between their two clans for influence in France, the simple fact was that the two had hated each other for decades and were merely pursuing yet another minor skirmish in their long-running feud.

Henri had sent a childe to accompany the assault but had miscalculated, and his childe discovered too late that Clodauuiua was staying with her thrall. In the battle that ensued when the Lasombra awoke to discover the Bishop overthrown, the unthinkable happened and Nastasio managed to stake the Cainite elder while she drank Henri's unfortunate childe dry. Not wanting to risk further problems with what he thought of as a demon, Nastasio had the staked Cainite burnt as quickly as his few surviving troops could light a bonfire. Henri was delighted and conspired to have the Galician freelance make his way to Pau. Henri worked assiduously to persuade Nastasio to accept the Embrace, eager to have such fighting skills at the service of the Ventrue.

His Embrace changed Nastasio's outlook relatively little. In many ways, he saw immortality as merely a payment by his new clan for his services as a warrior. He gave solid service in lands as far away as England and the Holy Land, his lords never once having cause to regret his Embrace or doubt his loyalty. Yet Nastasio remained something of a freelance. Once released, he pledged not to fight against his sire (and indeed has served him in



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several battles), but he otherwise fights for the highest bidder. He has never made any great claim of domain, preferring the mobility of the freelance.

In 1205, the Lasombra Archbishop Monçada offered him a princely fee to lead the fight against the Muslim Cainites for the Shadow *Reconquista*. Apart from Nastasio's undoubted prowess, his neutrality in disputes and intrigues between the *Amici Noctis* was his other great virtue. In the years since, Nastasio has worked to overthrow Moorish fiefdoms and displace Ashirra sultans. The archbishop has implied he would support him if he were to make a claim on the principedom of Oviedo in reward for his service. Nastasio is well aware that this has much to do with Monçada's dislike for Marbuena, the current prince, whom he considers a weakling. In order to keep his current patron happy, he has established a haven in the city, although he spends more time on the southern frontier.

Image: Nastasio is the very antithesis of the noble Christian knight. Short, dark, and wiry, he looks much like a Moor, and certain Cainite rumormongers have spread nasty tales about his mother's virtue. Yet his size hides great strength and endurance, and Nastasio has often made great use of the fact that in the plain smock and trousers that he prefers to wear, he looks more like an Andalusian peasant than a Galician warrior.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a warrior and a nobleman; you make sure that others think the intrigues and infighting of the Lasombra are beneath your notice. You never make the mistake of thinking of the Muslims as anything other than worthy foes. You keep your own council and trust only your own sword; you especially don't trust Archbishop Monçada, but you allow him the illusion of control.

Haven: While he spends most nights in the field, sleeping in a steel armorer's chest and guarded by loyal ghouls, Nastasio also has a modest haven hidden under Madrid's main barracks. This haven was a gift from Monçada and Nastasio rarely ever uses it. He merely appears to in order to lull his employer into thinking him a fool. He has also set up another haven in a small fortification outside Oviedo and has pledged to spend several months there, once the Moors are pushed back.

Secrets: If the *Amici Noctis* had any idea of how much knowledge Nastasio had managed to acquire, he would probably not make it through the next night. Similarly, if his Ventrue elders realized how much he was withholding from them, he'd receive even less mercy. In the midst of so much dangerous knowledge, Nastasio keeps his own council and fights the battles he was hired to fight, waiting for the next challenge.

Influence: Nastasio's role as the pre-eminent general in the Shadow *Reconquista* is widely known. As a result, few Cainites will not give his words some weight. His personal prowess and apparently close relationship with Monçada extend this respect to the point that

Nastasio is easily one of the most feared Cainites in the peninsula. That he seems to do little with such influence is considered a sign either of his stupidity or his cunning, depending on one's point of view.

Destiny: The Shadow *Reconquista* is a great success for Nastasio, and his star shines even brighter within his own clan. Oviedo is a prize he cannot resist, an important domain, but not one so great as to make him an easy target. He becomes a player of influence in the new kingdoms of Spain and Portugal. He survives the Anarch Revolt to become one of the first Justicars and serves his clan as such on and off until he is eventually destroyed by Jalan-Aajav in the 1930s.

Clan: Ventrue

Sire: Henri

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Defender

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1006

Apparent Age: 36

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

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

Skills: Archery 1, Etiquette 3, Melee 4, Music 1, Ride 4, Survival 3

Knowledge: Linguistics 3, Politics 2, Seneschal 2

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Dominate 3, Fortitude 4, Potence 2, Presence 1

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

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

Road: Chivalry 7

Willpower: 9

OTHERS

RODRIGUE DE NAVARRE, SWORD OF ST. JAMES

Background: In the days before his eyes were opened to the demons lurking in the shadows, Rodrigue (or Rodrigo in Spanish) was a minor noble from Navarre. Marrying well, he divided his time between Pamplona and his wife's holdings in Toulouse. Things changed when he began to sense an evil presence lurking just beyond his perception. The dualist heresies sweeping the land concerned him, but there was a darker evil out there. A few answers came when he uncovered a partial translation of a debased text called the *Book of the Shining Blood*, the central text of the Cainite Heresy. Some of his wife's vassals revealed themselves to be followers of that damnable faith and in their confessions he heard whispers of demons darker than any mere



heretics. Then he followed the clues to Venice and found vile blood-drinking things lurking among the forces of the Fourth Crusade. Upon his return to Iberia, he founded the Sword of St. James and has been gathering information on the creatures ever since.

Image: Rodrigue's frame is only just starting to surrender to his advancing years. He wears fine clothes and keeps his graying hair immaculately trimmed.

Roleplaying Hints: You have now spent more than a decade facing the darkness and you see it everywhere. You know you must strike at it soon if your life is to have meaning.

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Defender

Age: early 50s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4 Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Dodge 1, Empathy 3, Leadership 3

Skills: Etiquette 3, Herbalism 1, Melee 2, Ride 2

Knowledges: Academics 3, Investigation 4, Law 2, Linguistics 3, Occult 3, Politics 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Influence 3, Resources 3

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

True Faith: 2

Willpower: 7





Chapter Six: Legends of the Reconquista

*What good does it do to be
well born for those whose words
bring pleasure to none, nor their
characters either?*

- Philocylides of Wiletus

There is no place like Iberia anywhere else in the Dark Medieval world. Nowhere else do the tides of faith converge in quite the same way, and nowhere else do the deeds and beliefs of mortals exert such a pull on the Cainite population. As nowhere else, clans split along lines having nothing to do with blood or the overt politics of the War of Ages. Instead, the struggle between Muslim and Christian — with all its intricacies and twists — affects living and dead alike. Anything a Cainite has learned to rely on in his dealings in France, Germany or even Outremer — precious little of it applies once across the Pyrenees or Gibraltar. Iberia is a place unto itself for Cainites, and outsiders would do well to remember that once they cross the ever-changing borders.

That being said, Iberia is also an exciting and challenging setting for any Storyteller. It provides a truly unique combination of intrigues, factional hatreds and political maneuverings. With the confluence of religions, kingdoms and clans, Iberia offers both dazzling chronicle possibilities and a wealth of source material that can overwhelm an unready Storyteller. This chapter, then, is a guide to assist you in your role as a Storyteller.

BASIC QUESTIONS

With luck, all of the questions you need answered to start an Iberian chronicle are covered in this book. That doesn't mean, however, that it's all cut and dried for you. Before you plan your chronicle, there are a few things to keep in mind:

IBERIA IS BIG

Unlike a city-based chronicle, an Iberian game has a breadth of geographic scope. The peninsula offers a breath-taking variety of setting options, ranging from the *taifas* of the south to the water-blasted wreck of Las Medulas to the Pyrenees in the east, and that's just scratching the surface.

Furthermore, there are well established trade and pilgrimage routes that crisscross the peninsula and allow characters a surprising amount of mobility for the day and age.

What this boils down to is simple: Many Dark Ages chronicles end up hemmed in geographically, in part because travel is so difficult for Cainites in this period and in part because most of the available setting material focuses on individual cities. With Iberia, those restrictions don't exist, and in your role as a Storyteller you should at least examine all of the possibilities before focusing on one for a chronicle setting.

Furthermore, you should use this geographical diversity to your advantage. There are a lot of places for characters to run to, a wealth of types of city for vampires to inhabit. Settling on Cadiz (or Lisbon, or Zaragoza, or any of the other cities) before examining all of the other options that Iberia presents is shortchanging both yourself and your players. As long as the real estate is there, why not take advantage of it?

THERE IS NO ONE SETTING

Just as there's no single physical setting for an Iberian chronicle, there's no single social setting. Even the obvious divide — Christian or Muslim — breaks down further under scrutiny. If the chronicle has a Muslim theme, are the characters affiliated with the Umayyads, the Almohads, the Almoravids or even Tariq's original expedition? What about *muwallads*? Which *taifas* are the characters affiliated with, or are they bound to none?

The same multiplicity of options exists on the Christian side. Are the characters native or foreigners, seeking their fortunes in the confusion of the *Reconquista*? If native, which kingdom are they affiliated with — Navarre, Castile, Aragon? Which city will you use, and what sort of population mix of Christians, Muslims and Jews do you want to play with? There are literally dozens of divisions to examine.

BELIEVING THE HYPE

One of the most consistent problems with historical chronicles is not Storytellers who don't do their research, but rather players who are so wedded to a preconceived notion of history that when confronted with a more factual account, they rebel. "It wasn't really like that" are words no Storyteller likes to hear, particularly not after doing endless hours of diligent study in order to produce a historically accurate game.

While there's nothing that says that your chronicle has to be absolutely historically accurate — you are adding vampires, after all — it must be said that truth is not only stranger than fiction, it provides more plot hooks. Furthermore, a historically accurate game hangs together naturally because it all actually happened, and there are fewer seams for you to caulk. The further you depart from historicity, particularly in a setting as complicated as Iberia, the more things change by a domino effect.

That being said, not every player will believe all of the research you bring to the table, no matter how neat it is. While nothing can be done for the player who refuses to

allow any historicity into his carefully conceived fantasy of Iberia, there are steps that can be taken for those who are less obstinate. Detailing your research and showing your players your sources is always a good idea. This not only proves to them that you're doing more than pulling details out of thin air, it also encourages them to research on their own and hopefully come up with more creative character concepts. Tracing the myths so your players aren't as upset when you debunk them also helps, as does being up front with how closely you're going to hew to the real thing. A player who bases his entire concept on a pleasant historical myth is going to be very upset if he wakes up to a gritty chronicle in which his romantic character is useless. Above all, communicate. Odds are that a player who has strong feelings about historical accuracy — whether or not her own notions are accurate — is willing to do the research to put her money where her mouth is, and thus can be convinced and brought into the flow of the game by your preparation. When in doubt, co-opt historical nitpickers. Get them to prepare a bit of the setting or a bunch of characters for you to use.

IBERIA BY NIGHT



And what about the Basques, the Jews and the traders who flock to Iberia in thousands? All of these groups provide jumping-off points and backdrops for chronicles. Any one of them can serve as the basis for a story, so it doesn't make sense to make a broad-brush decision (i.e., "This game will be set in Christian Spain") without examining at least the possibility of using them. To draw an Iberian chronicle so generally is to limit the players' choices and to hamstring your own Storytelling by limiting the tools you have to work with.

THIS IS NOT SPAIN

Iberia is not the Spain modern readers might be familiar with. It is a collection of loosely allied Christian kingdoms, even more loosely allied Muslim *taifas*, pirate enclaves, independent holdings and so forth. The people do not see an Iberian national identity — they are Aragonese, Castilian, Portuguese or Almoravid. In other words, it's a fool's errand to view historical Iberia through a modern sensibility, because the modern political entities are distant descendants of the Iberia in this book.

FORGET THE FAIRY TALES

There is a cherished notion that Iberia under Muslim rule was a golden age of wisdom, learning and tolerance. Things were hardly so rosy, as incidents such as the forced conversion and extortion at Lucena demonstrate (see page 138 for more), but the legend is a pleasant and enduring one. There are other

historical legends that swirl around Iberia and the *Reconquista*, and most serve only to obscure precisely those historical points that make for the best chronicle material. As always, doing your own research can only benefit your chronicle.

LEAVE YOUR PREJUDICES AT THE DOOR

Much of the conflict available for an Iberian chronicle has its roots in religion. Admittedly, a great deal of the expression of that conflict is political, but even so, the religious conflict in Iberia is central to almost any story that can be told there. That being said, religion is a delicate matter for a great many people, including some roleplayers. Therefore, it is best to make sure that if you are using religious elements in your chronicle, you do so respectfully, and discuss the matter with any players who express concern.

Furthermore, *Vampire: The Dark Ages* is a game, not a soapbox. Using the political struggles of ancient Iberia to make a point about the world today is unfair to your chronicle and to your players. Equating the Almohads or the royal family of Navarre with modern regimes lowers your story to the level of clumsy allegory. Take Iberia and its inhabitants for what it was, and create your chronicle accordingly.

THE BASICS

With such a broad canvas to work upon, it's vital that you lay down the parameters of your game early. While it's

LEGENDS OF THE RECONQUISTA

important to examine all of the possibilities (as noted at length above), it is also important to make a choice. Iberia is simply too big in too many ways for an unfocused chronicle, so decisions on where and when the setting is located — and what elements to focus on — need to be made. This allows you to zero in your research and brainstorming on the material that's pertinent, and gives the players something on which they can hang more elaborate and detailed character concepts. After all, just telling your players that the game is set "in Iberia" means that you may well end up with one character based in Cadiz, another in Madrid, and two others scurrying south across the Straits of Gibraltar to rally support for another Berber invasion. While this may be an admirable scenario for halfway through a chronicle, it leaves something to be desired as a starting point.

Therefore, if you're going to tell an Iberian chronicle, it's a good idea to have answers for at least the basic questions below before you go too much further. Not every question has to be answered in infinite detail, but it always helps to at least have the broad strokes of your chronicle sketched out before you put in too much effort otherwise. The answers to these questions can serve as the framework on which the rest of your chronicle hangs.

WHEN?

To ensure internal consistency and to do its part to speed the evolution of the Dark Medieval setting, *Iberia by Night* is roughly focused on the year 1212. But there's no reason to restrict yourself to that date and none other. Take a look at the lay of the land in 1212 and decide if the political, cultural and military setups suits your chronicle needs. If the *Reconquista* is too far advanced for what you decide your chronicle requires, move backward in time. If you're more interested in something approaching a unified Iberia, move your chronicle start date toward 1492. It is important, however, to keep a close eye on the vampiric and historical timelines, if for no other reason than to ensure that you kick things off when there's something interesting going on.

WHERE?

As previously noted, Iberia covers a lot of territory. While it is highly recommended that you at least glance at the broader map before narrowing down your setting choice, eventually the process of winnowing must occur. Once you decide where you're setting the chronicle, you are also establishing a great many other details. Deciding that you're setting something in Tarragona means that you're also making decisions about what clans will be most eminent (Lasombra and Toreador, most likely, with some Ventrué), which will be out of the picture (Brujah, and probably Assamite and Setite) and so forth. Religious mix, language, surrounding countryside — all of these flow from the initial decision on where to set the chronicle.

Picking a singular location also allows you as a Storyteller to get down to the details you'll need to run your game well. Once you decide on a site, you can dig into the details that support your chronicle. Is the city walled (and if so, where are the secret ways in)? Where are the churches or mosques, and are they holy enough to be dangerous to

Cainites? What about previous residents — what did they leave behind? How is the town laid out, and where can the characters make their havens? How many Cainites can the area support? What parts of the city make the best feeding grounds, and where can characters flee if discovered? Where do the roads go, and who's likely to come marching down them? What does the city map look like?

All of these questions can be answered relatively simply once you've nailed down the place you should be asking about. Obtaining those answers can flesh out the bulk of your chronicle setting surprisingly quickly.

WHO?

In a chronicle, the combination of "where" and "when" often dictates the basics of "who." For example, if your game is set in Toledo, odds are you're running a Muslim-themed chronicle. It's as simple as that. But that doesn't mean that the progression is always automatic or brief. The way in which real estate changed hands over the centuries, the tides of conquerors — all of these provide plenty of material for you to work with in populating your chronicle. In addition to deciding who populates your setting at present (and that includes both mortals and Cainites), you also have the luxury of deciding who lived there previously — and if they're still around. Romans, Visigoths, Huns, Berbers — all of these groups hosted Cainites who may have remained long after their respective peoples faded from the scene. How they feel about the newer vampiric arrivals is certainly an important aspect of a chronicle; whether their vanished peers left anything of interest behind is another.

Your chronicle's present day should, of course, command the bulk of your attention. Exploring the makeup of the city you've chosen as setting is important. Is it predominantly Christian or Muslim? How are minorities tolerated? Is there a Jewish quarter, and how are its inhabitants treated by the rest of the city? What drives the city's economy, and which

BLOODY CONSTRAINT

While for many people wars are the most interesting aspect of history to read about, they can be surprisingly dull as settings for roleplaying. After all, most of medieval warfare consists of marching, counter-marching and lengthy sieges, punctuated only occasionally by brief battles that almost inevitably take place under the morning sun. In other words, while it may be fascinating to read about that sort of thing, there's relatively little for Cainites to do.

With that in mind, if you're interested in using armed conflict as the focal point of your chronicle, consider setting the game just before or, more daringly, just after the actual resolution of the fighting. "Before" lets the characters dive into intrigue and potentially affect the outcome. "After" puts them in the position of picking up the pieces — or plotting vengeance. The book's base date, in the aftermath of the Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa, lets you do just that.

Cainites have their hands in that? Not all of these questions need to be (or even can be) answered before the game begins, but they are important to bear in mind so that you can answer them when the appropriate moment arises.

SAMPLE CHRONICLES

Below are a few basic chronicle ideas that can serve as seeds for more elaborate games. Needless to say, this selection merely scratches the surface of the available possibilities. Any of these can be combined, torn down or thrown out to suit your needs.

- **Pilgrimage:** The characters are sent on pilgrimage by an elder Cainite along the road to Santiago. However, enemies both human and immortal wait along the way, determined to end the pilgrimage abruptly. Even worse, the coterie's so-called benefactor is secretly affiliated with the Iberian branch of the Cainite Heresy (or the Apostles of the Third Caine), and has placed a few surprises of his own in the path as he attempts to draw them into apostasy.

- **The Sleepers Awaken:** The characters are older vampires who went into torpor during the Visigoth occupation. They wake to find no one who speaks their language, strange kingdoms and a long-running, intermittent war. Worse, their domains have been claimed by others, with the sanction of clans that held no sway here when the characters first slumbered. What do they do? How do they reclaim their own?

- **On the Border:** The coterie is a mixed group of Muslim and Christian vampires trying to maintain the delicate balance of power along the borders between their respective realms. This particular chronicle is heavy on intrigue, as each side boasts plotters intent on upsetting the fragile peace for their own gain. How long can the characters maintain the status quo, and what do they gain if they are the ones to shatter it?

- **Against All Comers:** The coterie's city is about to change mortal hands. With the invaders come new Cainites intent on redistributing the domains among themselves and eliminating any Cainites in their way. Can the characters hold out? If so, what happens when they must integrate themselves with the new conquerors?

- **Left Behind:** The characters are Muslim Cainites, and they uncover evidence that their sires left extremely valuable manuscripts behind in territory now controlled by Christians — and more importantly, by the Lasombra. The characters must enter enemy territory, deal with the new residents and rescue these lost treasures. But there's the chance that they were encouraged to find the clues as to the manuscripts' existence, and that certain elders are taking a great interest in what they're bringing back with them....

- **Envoys:** As far as the powerful Cainite princes of France are concerned, the chaos of the *Reconquista* has a lot to recommend it. Among other things, it keeps their Iberian rivals occupied. Now that the mortal battles are entering their final stage, things are likely to get more complicated. The characters are the band of neonates selected to be their elders' eyes and ears by sojourning across the mountains to barbarous Iberia and reporting on what they find there. Of course, that's easier said than done, especially since each has also been entrusted with a second, secret agenda.

THE PICARESQUE

Most chronicles work well with a single base location. However, if you feel the urge to explore more of the region with your story line, there are certainly ways to accomplish this. A picaresque chronicle, with the characters constantly moving from city to city, is one method of doing so. This lets you as Storyteller try out a variety of more permanent settings and show off the entire peninsula to your advantage. Characters in such a chronicle can be envoys, couriers, mercenaries or even attached to a merchant caravan. Any of these serve to get the coterie on the road and keep them there, as well as offering logical plot reasons for them to settle down in a particular locale if they get tired of wandering hither and yon.

Another approach is the pilgrimage chronicle. The road to Santiago is a well established journey of faith for mortals, but there's no reason Cainites can't test themselves against it as well. Or perhaps there's a vampiric shrine, such as the tomb of El Cid, that serves as the focus of the pilgrimage. Either way, there's plenty of incentive to get the characters moving, and plenty of ways to throw new and exciting obstacles at them as they make their way across the map.

THE RECONQUISTA CHRONICLE

The history of the *Reconquista* starts with the Battle of Covadonga in 718 and runs clear through the final expulsion of the Moors in 1492, with the actions against the Moriscos and their resultant piracy providing a coda to the exercise. Technically, the term refers to the process of the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, but this is somewhat misleading. After all, the *Reconquista* was not a slow, steady tide of conquest that flowed from the Pyrenees to Gibraltar, advancing a few miles every year for seven and a half centuries. Instead it was a series of wars and truces, with constantly shifting alliances and wave upon wave of invasion. Furthermore, the notion of monolithic Christian and Muslim forces struggling titanically against one another is also false. The Muslim *taifas* and Christian kingdoms were as likely to war on one other as on anyone else. Indeed, the greatest hero of the *Reconquista*, El Cid, owes the name by which he is remembered to the time he spent as a mercenary in service to a Muslim ruler; "El Cid" is just a derivation of the Moorish Arabic term *el sayyid* (lord).

That being said, the *Reconquista* can serve as an excellent backdrop for a chronicle. Even if one limits the scope of the action to the Christian advance across al-Andalus, seven and a half centuries of warfare and intrigue provide a wealth of material for a *Dark Ages* chronicle. Furthermore, a *Reconquista* chronicle doesn't have to be located on the frontlines. The whole process of retaking the peninsula offers all sorts of options to an enterprising Storyteller, if that's the route you

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IT'S JUST A FANTASY...

Another question is that of how closely you intend to hew to history. While the basic conception of *Dark Ages* is to stay as close to authentic history as possible (with, of course, a few additions), there's nothing that says that you can't veer wildly off the beaten track of time in your game. If you want to have the *Reconquista* fail or the Almohad invasion never happen, feel free. It's your game. Just be sure to think out the consequences of each change you make and account for those consequences in your game. Having the *Reconquista* fail is one thing; figuring out what comes after and making a game setting out of it is quite another.

choose to take. The sheer scale of the *Reconquista* presents you an interesting choice: Is your chronicle grounded in a particular time (for example, the early thirteenth century), or do you expand it to cover the breadth of the *Reconquista*? Both options have their merits.

THE LONG VIEW

A long-term chronicle allows players to develop their characters from neonates to elders. It also allows you to set up long-term plot lines, with characters making decisions that echo a hundred years hence. There are precautions to take before embarking on a chronicle of this scope, though. After all, it's an extremely ambitious task. So make sure all of the necessary ingredients are in place.

First of all, work with the players to make sure that they develop character concepts that are viable for the duration of the chronicle, and that fit with the overall theme. While a surviving Visigoth Cainite might be an interesting character, he has less to offer a *Reconquista* campaign than, say a Frankish knight intent on proving himself to his sire.

Also important is the process of choosing appropriate points within the *Reconquista* to serve as bases for game play. A single evening in the characters' unives can stretch over several sessions of play, so there's obviously no way that a linear progression can produce anything reasonably like an advance through the decades. Instead, you need to pick and choose moments in history that serve as backdrops for a series of sessions, spacing them widely enough apart that the characters can develop from one sequence to the next, but not so far apart as to lose any sense of continuity.

On the other hand, spacing the session backdrops too closely together defeats the purpose of the broad-spanning chronicle. Ideally, the break points should be widely spaced and in rough conjunction with important historical events, vampiric or otherwise. After all, where's the fun in a Cainite waking up to a social and political landscape that's nearly identical to the one she left behind, decades earlier? Make sure there's enough change between episodes to justify the action. Even if you don't change the human map much, you still have the option of changing the Cainite map. Feel free to redraw the domain lines at your whim. After all, what can make for a more panic-inducing first session than characters

waking up and realizing that they're coming out of torpor in the middle of extremely unfriendly territory?

MOOD

The mood of a *Reconquista* chronicle is generally a straightforward one: hard-fought triumph. The Christian tide sweeps slowly down the peninsula, and the remaining Muslim states fall into discord and bickering. While there may be temporary setbacks ("temporary" for a vampire, of course, meaning decades or centuries) as the Almoravids and Almohads sweep north from Africa, in the end, the resolution is inevitable.

A chronicle paralleling the action of the *Reconquista*, then, should start from humble beginnings — for example, with the characters as freshly blooded neonates — and build to a war of elders even as the last battles of expulsion rage. Bear in mind, however, that it's not all battles for seven centuries. Treaties, negotiations and intrigue are as much a part of the *Reconquista* as open warfare.

Also, remember that the human events of the *Reconquista* do not necessarily map precisely to the vampiric ones. After all, it may be your characters' intrigues that set up the battles that take back Córdoba or Navarre. The deals struck by *Amici Noctis* may lay the groundwork for the alliances that sunder the *taifas*. Don't feel compelled to throw your characters into the midst of every important battle. After all, most of those battles were fought during the day. But centering your chronicle on the inevitable pressures that led to those conflicts, and allowing the characters' actions to set the stage for triumph or defeat allows for a much wider range of actions, and for much more character influence on the *Reconquista* as a whole.

THEME

Reconquista chronicles lend themselves to a fairly wide range of themes. Conquest is the obvious one, but there are other possibilities. As the *Reconquista* displaced a great many Islamic vampires, it opened up domains for younger Christian Cainites who were clever, lucky and in the right place at the right time. Therefore, it makes perfect sense to develop a chronicle based around a coterie of young Cainites making their mark by finding, seizing and building up their new domains in the face of relentless and entrenched opposition.

A third possibility is to use the theme of the new overtaking the old, as the established Muslim culture is washed away by the tide of history. Do the characters try to preserve what they see before them? Or are they the ones leading the charge to destroy everything they come across? Are they after the secrets that fleeing Muslim Cainites might have left behind? Conversely, are they original inhabitants of the peninsula — Romans, perhaps, or Celts or Visigoths — who were displaced by Tariq and the Umayyads, and who are wrathfully taking back their homes?

CHOOSING SIDES

In most cases, a *Reconquista* chronicle is run from the Christian side. After all, they're the ones doing so-called reconquering. However, there are two other options. It is entirely possible to run a *Reconquista* chronicle from the Muslim perspective. While the outcome of the war is certain,

there's nothing that says the characters can't win their share of victories along the way. Perhaps they're interested in salvaging valuable relics and knowledge before the barbaric *Franj* come riding in, or they're laying the groundwork for plans to come to fruition centuries later. Another possibility is a Jewish-themed chronicle. The Jewish community in Iberia was often precariously balanced between both sides in the *Reconquista*, and there is plenty of room for a chronicle centered on preserving the *juderías* as the lines of battle move back and forth across the peninsula.

THE SHORT VIEW

A chronicle focused on a particular moment in time during the *Reconquista* has its benefits as well. Notably, it allows for a much faster pace. After all, events are coming to a head, a decisive moment is at hand and there's little time for mucking about with plans for the centuries ahead. A short-term chronicle also saves on Storyteller effort in balancing long-term plots and antagonists.

The key to a time-specific chronicle in Iberia is picking your spot in history. There are innumerable moments that provide enough tension to serve as an excellent chronicle backdrop. While actual daylight battles are not necessarily the best setting for a *Vampire* chronicle, picking a confrontation of particular interest and setting the chronicle a year or two before the actual fighting begins often works well. This gives the characters time to affect the historical events without being overwhelmed by them.

CHOOSING SIDES

Another advantage of a time-specific *Reconquista* chronicle is that there's much less pressure to land the chronicle strictly on the conquerors' side of the fence. As the *Reconquista* see-sawed between Christian and Muslim victories, it's entirely logical to allow the players to land on either side of the conflict. Furthermore, vampiric goals aren't always parallel to human ones, so it's entirely possible for the characters to succeed in their goals even if the human "side" they are most closely affiliated with loses.

MOOD AND THEME

In a short-term chronicle, mood and theme are more immediate and less gradual than they are in the extended, historical chronicle. There is an urgency to the moment. The conflict is less elegant and more brutal, and the characters are more likely to have their hands dirty than to rely on mortal and immortal pawns carefully placed centuries before. As such, short-term chronicles tend to have an edge to them that larger scope games sometimes have worn away.

STORY IDEAS

- **Against the *Taifas*:** A renewed campaign against the Muslim states is in the offing. The characters are assigned to infiltrate the remaining *taifas* and sow dissent. They may run into some stiff Cainite opposition — ancient Muslim vampires who have their own ideas about how the battle should run. And what if one of the coterie members decides he prefers the *taifa* lifestyle, and blows the whistle?

- **Hour of Battle:** With a major conflict brewing, the characters decide to strike out into enemy territory to eliminate as much of the opposition's Cainite support as possible. There's strong opposition waiting for them, however, and suddenly what began as a raiding party becomes a flight for life across hostile territory. But the only open road leads deeper into al-Andalus....

- **Land Grab:** The characters are Frankish, English and Teutonic knights come west to make their fortunes in the newly opened peninsula. Christian Cainite lords are offering domains to those who flock to their banners and support their positions, while the territories' previous inhabitants are reluctant to give it up. Can the characters make the right allies, survive the field of battle and navigate the treacherous shoals of power politics, and still remain comrades in arms?

THE ISLAMIC CHRONICLE

Just as there is no single moment that can be pointed to as "the *Reconquista*," there's also no single, definitive snapshot of al-Andalus. Muslim Spain can mean the empty cities freshly conquered by Tariq, the panicked decadence of the late Umayyad period, the puritanical fervor of the Berber invasions or the squabbling, secularized intrigues of the isolated *taifas*. That being said, there is a definite flavor to a Muslim-themed Iberian chronicle, regardless of where and when it is set.

In certain ways, the Islamic chronicle is the mirror image of the *Reconquista* chronicle. It can be time-specific or drawn out through the centuries, and many of the same decisions need to be made. But certain elements of an Ashirra game are unique and need to be examined in their own particular context.

ORIGINS

First, you need to choose which al-Andalus you want to play in, and that means above all the time period. The default date of *Iberia by Night* is 1212, a time of defeat for the Muslims, when intrigue runs rampant between the *taifas* sultans. Some try to make the best of a bad situation and reach agreement with the ascendant Christian north while others dedicate themselves to continuing the fight. A group of ambitious neonates can accomplish a great deal in the midst of this transition. But as with a Christian chronicle, you can easily set your stories in another time period. Remember too that deciding on the present day of your chronicle is not the same thing as deciding which period the characters themselves knew in their mortal lives, or when the conflicts in the game started. It's entirely possible to set a story in the last nights of the Sevilla *taifa*, in which the main vampiric conflict is between elders who have been fighting since the dependent emirate period, while the coterie itself was Embraced during the Almoravid invasion. This heady mix of different historical baggage is one of the beauties of games involving immortals.

SCOPE

Just like a *Reconquista* chronicle, Moorish stories can center on one location or wander far afield. Indeed, because

of the strong Berber grounding of the invasions of Iberia, there's even the possibility of including North Africa (beyond just Ceuta) as part of your game's scope as well. However, it's up to you whether to focus on a single location or spread it out.

Keeping the chronicle in one place has the advantage of allowing for greater detail and focus. Furthermore, it allows you to layer the location's successive Muslim influences, from Tariq's invasion to the Nasrids, and thus create a much deeper and more subtle physical setting. Spreading the chronicle's base out, however, provides greater variety of both landscapes and Storyteller characters. This is particularly true in a land as diverse as Iberia, which, by the very nature of its fractured geography and politics, divides neatly into regions that can make for excellent chronicle chapters. Using this approach allows you to compartmentalize your efforts, not fleshing out Granada until you're done with Málaga and so forth.

JEWISH CHARACTERS

Players wishing to portray Jewish Cainites have a wide range of options. Because there is generally at least tolerance for Jews on both sides of the religious divide (incidents like the forced conversions at Lucena in 1100 and 1146 notwithstanding), a Jewish character can fit into either a Muslim or a Christian-based chronicle. The close-knit *judería* communities and extensive mercantile connections offer excellent storytelling hooks for getting characters from city to city unseen, and while a Jewish military chronicle is unlikely, diplomacy and intrigue chronicles have ample historical precedent.

Storytellers should be aware, however, that in many places there is extant legislation against Jews, and that if they choose to extend this to their Cainite populations as well, it may be a sensitive matter for some players. In-play manifestations of this legislation (such as the dictate of the Fourth Lateran Council that all Jews should wear identifying armbands) should be handled with the clear understanding that the character, not the player, is the one undergoing the indignity, and that the historical precedent is not simply a matter of Storyteller sadism.

USING QABBALAH

The cornerstone of Qabbalistic thought, the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, is composed in Iberia by a Spanish mystic named Moses de León. Its first fragments appear in 1280, too late to be of use for a canonical *Dark Ages* game, but that leaves open the possibility of characters participating in the debates that led to its creation. Much of the debate that was introduced in the Iberian academies related to the nature and origins of evil, which works very well with the notion of hovering Cainites getting perhaps a bit too close to those they are trying to influence. And the codifying of a new school of mysticism is surely very interesting to the Tremere, at the very least....

MOOD

There are a number of moods that suit an Andalusian chronicle, many of which complement each other nicely. In many ways, the chronicle's mood goes hand in hand with its temporal setting — or at least the age that spawned the characters. But there's no need to limit your game to a single feel. Instead, examine the grounding you want and let the mood flow from that.

For a *taifa* chronicle, using the default date of 1212, there are several possibilities. Sadness and decadence can reinforce each other well in this setting. After all, the sun is setting on the golden age of the city-states. But, if the end is inevitable, why not enjoy the last few hours of majesty? These intertwined moods can set the stage very well for a chronicle based out of a sultan's court. Another possibility for a *taifa* chronicle is an atmosphere of suspicion. With the enemy rapidly approaching and the various *taifas* (and their Ashirra courts) jockeying for position with one another, there's precious little room for trust and a great deal for paranoia. A game where every hand is raised against every other, as each vampiric sultan attempts to ensure his survival in the face of the tide of history, leads to much intrigue. Finally, the approaching doom of the *taifas* can serve as a springboard for great anger. Such chronicles are action-oriented, as the characters seek to bloody the outstretched hand of fate. Raiding parties, assaults on Christian Cainites and so forth can form the bedrock of this sort of story.

THEME

There are also numerous themes available to you for an Ashirra chronicle in al-Andalus. Interwoven with the narrative themes more traditional to *Vampire: The Dark Ages* are ones of devotion, submission to the will of Allah and piety that, by the very definition of a Muslim-oriented chronicle, are necessary. If you abandon these and simply cast your al-Andalus game as standard *Vampire: The Dark Ages* set south of the Tajo, you lose the unique flavor of your story. Instead, these themes should be carefully woven into the very fabric of the chronicle. After all, in a Muslim-themed game, the characters' shared faith is one of their defining characteristics. Bring up and play with the themes related to that bond at every opportunity. Test the characters' devotion when they are offered a choice of allies: a venal Ashirra or a more noble Christian Cainite. How is their decision made, and what consequences come of it?

CONFLICT

At the heart of any chronicle is conflict, and an Ashirra-based Iberian chronicle offers more vectors of conflict than most. With al-Andalus crumbling around them, the characters may find their opposition coming from any of a myriad of different directions, or several at once.

The most obvious source of conflict in a Moorish chronicle is the religious war of the *Reconquista*. Christian-Muslim conflict is an excellent basis for starting a chronicle, though you may wish to refine it. Is the conflict genuinely religious? Is it taking place only among Cainites, or is another phase of the mortal war serving as backdrop? Who is lined up on the other side, and can an accommodation be reached with

THE GAME AND THE METAGAME

One of the truisms of gaming is that as hard as some might try (and not everyone does), there is no way for a player to entirely divorce her own knowledge from her character's. In a long-term chronicle, this can lead to a certain carelessness about the consequences of character actions. After all, if the game's going to cover 550 more years, odds are that the characters are going to be around for at least a significant portion of that time. And with that perceived lack of risk to the character comes a slackening of tension within the chronicle.

There are a couple of ways around this. First of all, you can kill characters when it's justifiable. After all, saying the story will continue doesn't mean that every single character in it has to do so as well. If it's fate that eliminates a character, allowing the player to bring in a child or student of the original casualty in the next set of sessions works well. If the player made a foolish mistake (or got arrogant) and the character suffered for it, then forcing that player to have a character a few hitches behind everyone else on the power curve can be a fitting response.

Also, treating the connected sessions of your long-term chronicle as a series of short-term chronicles ratchets up the intensity that can sometimes get lost. Let your players know that even if the ultimate goal is centuries down the road, there is real and present danger here and now, and that the ultimate goal won't matter if they don't make it out of the situation they're currently in.

them? There certainly is a game to be found in active resistance to the southward expansion of the Christian kingdoms, but the conflict of the *Reconquista* was just as brutal in palaces, cloakrooms and embassies, and a chronicle can make use of these elements as well.

Religious conflict within the Muslim realms is also a possible starting point for a chronicle. The Almoravids and Almohads were disdainful of the soft, irreverent Umayyads they found in al-Andalus; there is a reason, after all, that the renowned poet-king al-Mu'tamid was turned out of his palace and set to driving his so-called allies' donkeys. And while the Berber empires may be gone or receding, the Ashirra they brought with them have certainly not vanished. Having the characters fighting to enforce stricter religious orthodoxy — or seeking to stave off fanaticism — in the face of the advancing Christians can serve as the basis for an enticing story.

Secular conflict between the *taifas* makes an excellent source of friction within a game. The city-states hardly present a unified front to the Christian armies. Some allied with Christian kings against neighboring *taifas*, others paid tribute to avoid invasion, and all were as much concerned with the preservation of local power as with the grand sweep of history. With that being said, a *taifa* chronicle offers multiple possibilities. The players could be agents of a particular city-state, seeking to destabilize the other *taifas* in the

region and win their home supremacy. Of course, all of the other *taifas* have sultans who have precisely the same idea. Conversely, the characters could be working to end the inter-city conflict in hopes of organizing a unified front. Such a story line could originate with the characters all representing a single *taifa*, or as representatives of several concerned sultans (or perhaps, concerned representatives of those who would be sultans).

Conflict within a single *taifa* is also an excellent possibility. With the grand political situation so unstable, sultans and their advisors are unstable as well. Perhaps the characters have struck a deal with the Christians offering the city up for power after the conquest, which offers opportunities for intrigue, betrayal and secret negotiations that can easily backfire. Conversely, perhaps the characters simply feel that the current sultan won't be able to hold off the encroaching enemies, and that they are better suited to the task. A third possibility is that the mortal invasion has left the Cainite authority in place, and the characters are attempting to pick up the pieces post-conquest. Adjusting to the new mortal authority — and the arrogant young Cainites who come with it — can be sufficient challenge for many sessions. Finally, there's the possibility of a recapture chronicle, in which the city has been taken but the characters refuse to abandon what they consider to be rightfully theirs.

SAMPLE CHRONICLES

The previous pages have hopefully shown you just how broad your options are for a Moorish chronicle. Here are few concrete starting points for a chronicle:

- **The Scourge:** The characters are Ashirra comfortably ensconced in a *taifa* that has unfortunately attracted the attentions of an older, religiously conservative vampire. In his quest to make sure that the *taifa* hews to proper orthodoxy, he targets those aspects he finds unworthy. Unfortunately, this includes some of the characters' favorite parts of the city, and perhaps the characters as well. Do they resist, flee, or submit? And with a Christian army approaching, do they dare attempt an alliance with the scourge — or against him?

BLOODY VENGEANCE

Vengeance is always a strong thematic possibility, as the characters are presented with a situation in which everything they hold dear is being stripped from them. It may be the land of al-Andalus being ruthlessly absorbed by the Christians, it may be the comforts of unliving existence being stripped away by a stern Berber Ashirra or it may just be the loss of innocence that comes inevitably with the Embrace. A vengeance-themed game tends to work very well for less-experienced players. It presents them with an easily identifiable enemy, a well-defined axis of advancement and a strong motivation. Once you see that the basics are working well, then you can start layering on the complexities, but for a first step, a chronicle centered around extracting justice and retribution can function very well indeed.



• **The Night Battle:** Christian Cainites have infiltrated the *taifa* the characters call home, intent on removing any potential Ashirra resistance before the mortal battle begins. Now the characters must defend their home in the streets, fighting a deadly running battle. As the pressure mounts, however, the characters may be forced to flee — or to seek a diplomatic solution. But are there any Cainites they can trust?

• **Across Gibraltar:** Slowly but surely, the Christians are pushing Andalus into the sea. The characters are Ashirra from North Africa, and they refuse to allow this indignity to occur. As they travel north into Iberia, it is their mission to single-handedly recreate the impact of the Almohads or Almoravids and reverse the tide of conquest.

• **Ancient of Years:** With Tariq's original invasion force came the first Ashirra to set foot in al-Andalus. Their presence was recorded, and then suddenly, they vanished. The characters are on the trail of this mystery, retracing Tariq's footsteps. But will they find the vanished ancients or suffer their fate?

ARROGANT YOUNG CAINITES

Many of the Christian vampires riding in the forefront of the *Reconquista* are young, dispossessed and ambitious. They view the process of conquest as one devoted to displacing the entrenched Ashirra and opening up new domains to those clever enough to seize them. To a certain extent they are right, but their open greed and sense of entitlement does not win them many friends on either side of the fence. Many of the displaced Ashirra have long memories.

• **The Subtle Serpent:** Someone is attempting to destroy the Sultan's court from within. Is it a Christian infiltrator? A Setite? Or perhaps even one of the characters? They are charged with finding out. The penalty for failure is the destruction of all they hold dear. The reward for success may be death...

Iberia by night

A LAND DIVIDED

This is a land of warring faiths and burning wills. Once the Moors ruled the peninsula, but now the Christian kingdoms push them ever further south. Great schools die and glorious kingdoms rise. Behind it all, in the deepest of shadows, we Cainites lurk. Blood calls to blood, and vengeance will be ours.

A CLASH OF WILLS

Iberia by Night is a complete sourcebook for medieval Spain, including both Christian and Moorish kingdoms. The history, cities and people are all covered in detail, as is the bloody *Reconquista* reshaping the land. Details on the vampiric princes and sultans of the land, the shadowy *Amici Noctis* manipulating Clan Lasombra and the other forces in the Iberian night give you enough material for many stories indeed.

IBERIA BY NIGHT INCLUDES:

- Many opportunities for player coterie to establish their own domains, either as hidden lords of Muslim *taifas* or as secret powers of the Christian reconquest.
- Details for running epic chronicles covering the whole *Reconquista*.
- Appearances by such luminaries as Archbishop Monçada and Lucita of Aragon.



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